

made when the journalists were questioned by the police, during public criticism sessions, or when they received warnings from members of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution.

The report states that the situation in the prisons had not improved and referred to such problems as: extensive building disrepair; countless rats living in areas where food is stored and prepared; a huge quantity of flies in the cafeteria during mealtimes; overcrowding reaching as much as twice the capacity of a facility; inadequate supplies of food and vitamins and protein deficiencies in the meals served; a shortage of medicines and systematic denial of medical assistance; the spread of infections and epidemics of illnesses like scabies and amoebic dysentery; cruel and degrading treatment, in the form of beatings and a lack of respect shown in the use of obscene words, shouts, shoves and kicks; and the fact that inmates are subject to constant searches and their mail is opened as a matter of course.

The report notes that the decision to refer to comments from UN bodies was based on the fact that, unlike the SR, these bodies enjoy the cooperation of the government and because they deal with issues related to the main themes of concern and give an expert assessment of them.

With regard to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and consideration of Cuba's report at its January/February 1996 session (CEDAW/C/CUB/2-3), the report notes that CEDAW viewed positively, *inter alia*: the fact that legislation affirms gender equality and makes discrimination punishable under the law; the government's support for the Cuban Women's Federation which represented 90 per cent of the women in Cuba; the significant increase in the number of women in all fields and levels of education; the steady decline in maternal mortality; the fact that decisions on the number and spacing of children had been proclaimed a fundamental right; the decline in school drop-out rates for girls and the development of adult education programmes for women; and efforts by the government to ensure that the effects of the drop in economic growth were not felt especially or solely by women.

The report notes CEDAW's principal concerns as including: the elimination of certain areas of progress for women owing to the embargo and the subsequent economic constraints; the persistence of gender stereotypes and the fact that domestic work and child care continued to be the responsibility of women; the need to expand the participation of women at the highest levels of political power; indirect discrimination in women's wages; and the lack of information on women in trade unions. The Committee also: viewed with some scepticism the government's report that domestic violence was infrequent and that it was not considered to be a social problem; noted that the economic situation in Cuba resulting from the economic embargo had produced a serious shortage of essential products like medicines and contraceptive devices; and expressed concern about the re-emergence of prostitution, which was linked to the growth in

tourism and to the economic problems facing women.

The SR recalled that CEDAW had recommended, *inter alia*, that: disaggregated data be collected concerning the number of complaints regarding discrimination; surveys and studies be undertaken to determine the extent and impact of violence against women, in particular domestic violence; and successful programmes to combat sexist prejudices and stereotyping, such as "Mujeres", "Muchachas" and "Perfil F", be reinstated as soon as possible, as they helped to address the attitudes of both men and women, particularly with regard to the need to share in the care and education of children. CEDAW also recommended that the government: do everything possible to meet the demand for contraceptives and strengthen special information programmes related to sexually transmitted diseases — especially HIV/AIDS — for young girls, particularly those engaged in prostitution; make every effort to check further the re-emergence of prostitution, to offer more and better job opportunities to women who engaged in prostitution, and not to place the sole responsibility for prostitution on the women themselves; adopt stronger measures to prosecute procurers and clients who violated those women's rights; conduct an empirical study to determine whether women were paid the same wages as men for work of equal value and to document occupational segregation and its relationship to income; and, include more information in Cuba's next report to the Committee on women in the labour market and their income situation as well as women in trade unions.

Referring to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the report notes that Cuba's report was considered at the Committee's May 1997 session (CRC/C/15/Add.72) and the CRC viewed positively the progress made in providing services for, and advancing the well-being of, children, especially with regard to health and education.

The CRC acknowledged the dissolution of Cuba's traditional economic ties and the intensification of the trade embargo as factors hindering implementation of the Convention. The principal subjects of concern identified by the Committee were, *inter alia*: the lack of an independent mechanism (e.g., Ombudsperson) which is accessible to children and mandated to deal with violations of their rights; the inadequacy of measures to incorporate education about the principles and provisions of the Convention fully into the training given to professionals working with and for children; the failure to provide for a minimum age for sexual consent and the absence of harmonization between the age for the completion of compulsory schooling and the minimum age for employment; the insufficiency of information provided on the implementation of the civil rights and freedoms of children; the apparent absence of independent mechanisms for monitoring the situation of children in institutions; the insufficiency of measures taken to protect children from abuse, notwithstanding the establishment of an early warning system for violence against children; and, the insufficiency of measures taken to ensure