

programmes to combat sexist prejudices and stereotyping, be revived as soon as possible; everything possible be done to meet the demand for contraceptives; special information programmes relating to sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, be strengthened for young girls, particularly those engaged in prostitution; every effort be made 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; an empirical study be undertaken 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; the government provide more information on women in the labour market and their income situation and the situation of women in trade unions; and, the participation of women at the highest levels of political power be expanded.

Referring to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the report recalls its favourable response to the progress made in the provision of services for and advancing the well-being of children, especially in health and education and notes the Committee's reference to the difficulties created by the dissolution of Cuba's traditional economic ties and the intensification of the trade embargo. The report notes the areas of concern identified by the Committee and some of the recommendations made to the government.

In the section dealing with conclusions and recommendations, the SR states that there were no significant changes in the human rights situation or the pattern of repression engaged in by the security forces, which have kept up an intensive campaign of harassment against all those whose attitude differs in any way from the official line. This harassment was noted as sometimes leading to trials and prison sentences although, in keeping with the trend first observed in 1996, sentences are not as harsh as in previous years. It is recalled that lengthy sentences are still being served by individuals convicted in 1995 and earlier for offences related to the exercise of rights recognized in international human rights instruments and that, generally speaking, these prisoners do not enjoy such benefits as conditional release, and their living conditions, like those of the rest of the prison population, remain deplorable. The report states that although the penalties now imposed are lighter than before, they relate to the same offences—such as contempt and enemy propaganda—as in the past, because no amendments to the relevant provisions of the Criminal Code have been adopted. The report states that no evidence has been found to suggest a trend towards greater tolerance for behaviour that does not fully conform to the existing system.

On the issue of the U.S. embargo against Cuba, the report states that the action contributes to the rigidity of the system and serves as a ready pretext for keeping the population under strict control and for punishing or suppressing in various ways those who work for political change or social space for the individual. It is also stated that the embargo is largely responsible for the tragic shortage of material goods which characterizes Cuba in the 1990s and has caused the population untold hardships.

Addressing the labour situation, the SR states that every society needs free trade unions to maintain a balance in the

labour market and that this general truth has become more obvious in recent years in Cuba as money became an essential requirement for the acquisition of goods and as the number of items available at very low prices through ration books decreased. Wage levels therefore assumed much more importance than in the past and recent phenomena, such as unemployment and working conditions in foreign companies, have made the establishment of free trade unions even more necessary. The report notes that self-employment, which is vital for many Cubans, continued to be subject to ideological considerations, including whether or not the individual seeking permission to be self-employed explicitly supports the government's policies and participates in political and mass organizations. The report reiterates the SR's recommendations to the CHR.

The Appendix to the SR's interim report contains excerpts from the report by the American Association for World Health (AAWH) entitled "Denial of Food and Medicine: The Impact of the United States Embargo on Health and Nutrition in Cuba" which stated, *inter alia*, that the embargo: has dramatically harmed the health and nutrition of large numbers of ordinary Cuban citizens; is one of the most stringent embargoes of its kind, prohibiting the sale of food and sharply restricting the sale of medicines and medical equipment; and, has wreaked havoc with Cuba's model primary health-care system. Citing the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act, the AAWH report noted: the ban on subsidiary trade which constrains Cuba's ability to import medicines and medical supplies from third-country sources; and, the fact that licensing provisions for individual sales of medicines and medical supplies, for humanitarian reasons to mitigate the embargo's impact on health-care delivery, are so arduous as to have had the opposite effect and actively discouraged any medical commerce. The AAWH report also referred to the prohibition on shipping, related to loading or unloading cargo in US ports for 180 days after delivering cargo to Cuba, which has strongly discouraged shippers from delivering medical equipment and led to sharp increases in shipping costs and constrictions to the flow of food, medicines, medical supplies and even gasoline for ambulances. The report referred to humanitarian aid, stating that charity is an inadequate alternative to free trade in medicines, medical supplies and food and, further, that donations from U.S. NGOs and international agencies do not begin to compensate for the hardships inflicted by the embargo on the Cuban public health system. The health problems affected by the embargo identified in the AAWH report included: malnutrition, related to serious nutritional deficits, particularly among pregnant women, and an increase in low-birth-weight babies; a devastating outbreak of neuropathy numbering in the tens of thousands; a rising incidence of morbidity and mortality rates from waterborne diseases; access to less than 50 per cent of the new drugs available on the world market and shortages or an absence of the most routine medical supplies in clinics; limited access to medical information materials because of travel restrictions, currency regulations and shipping difficulties, including transfer of information from Cuba related to research and development in Cuba of such products as meningitis B vaccine, cheaply produced interferon and streptokinase, and an AIDS vaccine undergoing clinical trials in Cuba with human volunteers; a pronounced decrease in surgeries because of