

Convention; and, the emergence of non-governmental organizations and the gradual steps taken to enhance cooperation between them and the government.

Among the factors and difficulties hindering implementation of the Convention, the Committee acknowledged the serious difficulties faced by Azerbaijan, citing the fact that the transition to a market-oriented economy has had a serious impact on the population, in particular on all vulnerable groups, including children. The Committee also cited the major problems experienced as a consequence of the armed conflict, including heavy casualties, long-lasting physical, emotional and psychological effects, and the disruption of some basic services. The Committee took note of the unknown number of children who have suffered the most fundamental violations of their right to life, and of the existence of a large population of refugees and displaced persons, who are being assisted through international aid.

The principal subjects of concern identified by the Committee were: the absence of comprehensive legislation that promotes and protects the rights of the child; the failure to adopt a comprehensive policy to promote and protect the rights of the child and the absence of a National Plan of Action; the absence of a coordinating body for issues relating to children; the fact that insufficient attention has been paid by the authorities to the collection of systematic and comprehensive data and the identification of appropriate indicators and monitoring mechanisms to assess the situation of children; the inadequacy of measures to ensure the full implementation of children's economic, social and cultural rights to the maximum extent of available resources; the fact that the government officials and the general public have not yet been sensitized to the rights of the child; the fact that the child is still often perceived as a person not fully entitled to rights; the failure of the government to take fully taken into account the provisions of the Convention in its legislation, and administrative and judicial decisions, and policies and programmes relevant to children; legislative provisions relating to the definition of the child which are not in conformity with the Convention; the disparities in the marriage ages for girls and boys and disparities between the age for the end of compulsory schooling and the minimum age for employment; the lack of legislative and other types of measures to protect children from harmful information; the inadequate support given to families living below the poverty line as well as to single-parent families; the lack of comprehensive legislation on adoption and at the fact that inter-country adoption seems not to be a measure of last resort; the emergence of a population of unaccompanied children, orphans and abandoned children as a result of the armed conflict; the lack of information about ill-treatment and abuse of children within the family; the lack of information on youth suicides and accidents; the increase in the number of child prostitutes, and the absence of a clear strategy to combat the abuse and sexual exploitation of children; the general health situation of children; the impact of armed conflict on education, and the lack of measures to implement programmes to reduce the drop-out rate; the inadequate measures for the physical, psychological and social rehabilitation of children affected and traumatized by armed conflict; and, the administration of juvenile justice, particularly with regard to the lack of respect for the rights of the child in "corrective labour institutions", the lack of an

appropriate monitoring system for all types of detention centres and the inadequacy of alternative measures to imprisonment.

The Committee recommended that the government:

- ▶ harmonize its legislation relating to children with the principles and provisions of the Convention by adopting its draft Act on the Rights of the Child;
- ▶ adopt a comprehensive national policy on children as well as a National Plan of Action;
- ▶ strengthen coordination among the various governmental bodies and mechanisms involved in children's rights, at both the national and local levels and give priority to the development of a system of data collection and to the identification of appropriate disaggregated indicators with a view to addressing all groups of children;
- ▶ establish an independent monitoring body, such as an ombudsperson or a children's rights commissioner, to address children's rights violations adequately;
- ▶ give priority in budget allocations to the realization of the economic, social and cultural rights of children, with particular emphasis on health and education, and on the enjoyment of these rights by the most disadvantaged children;
- ▶ take all appropriate measures to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream education;
- ▶ launch an information campaign on the Convention, for both children and adults, to enable children to fully exercise their rights; consider incorporating the Convention into the curricula of educational institutions; and take appropriate measures to facilitate access by children to information on their rights;
- ▶ direct further efforts towards development of comprehensive training programmes for professional groups working with and for children;
- ▶ establish the same minimum age for marriage for girls and boys and ensure that the age of end of compulsory education is the same as the minimum age for employment;
- ▶ take all appropriate legal, administrative and other measures to protect children from harmful information, including in the audio-visual media and in media using new technologies;
- ▶ develop alternative measures to institutionalization, such as foster care, and systematically enforce the right of the child to periodic review of placement;
- ▶ consider new and creative policies and programmes adequately to support vulnerable families, particularly those living in poverty or single-parent families and regularize the status of families accommodating refugee or displaced children;
- ▶ bring into conformity with the Convention legislation on adoption and consider ratifying the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption;
- ▶ with the view to facilitating family reunification, set up a central agency to trace unaccompanied children and take appropriate measures to protect the rights of orphans and abandoned children;