

vulnerable ones, in urban and rural areas; the lack of participation of civil society in designing and implementing policies and programmes for children; the insufficiency of measures taken to disseminate the Convention and to train professionals working for, and with, children on the provisions and principles of the Convention, as well as the translation of the Convention into the Maldivian language (Dhivehi); the lack of clarity on the status of children aged between 16 and 18 years; the low minimum ages for marriage and criminal responsibility; the insufficient measures adopted to ensure the full enjoyment by girls and children with disabilities of the rights recognized in the Convention; the situation of children born out of wedlock, especially with regard to their right to inheritance; and the existing disparities between children living on the capital island and those living on remote islands.

The Committee expressed concern over: the insufficient awareness of, and lack of information on, ill treatment and abuse, including sexual abuse both within and outside the family, insufficient legal protection measures, inappropriate resources, both financial and human, and the lack of adequately trained personnel to prevent and combat such abuse; and the insufficiency of rehabilitation measures for such children and their limited access to justice. Concern was expressed as well about: the high rate of divorce and its possible negative impact on children; the lack of research and studies on the harmful consequences on children of divorces and early marriages, as well as the insufficient measures to create public awareness on the detrimental effects of divorce; the insufficient alternative care measures for children deprived of a family environment; the prevalence of malnutrition (stunting and iron deficiency), high maternal mortality rate, and the limited access to safe water and adequate sanitation; problems of adolescent health, in particular the high and increasing rate of early pregnancies, the lack of access by teenagers to reproductive-health education and services, the insufficient preventive measures against HIV/AIDS; and the insufficient measures to promote breast-feeding of children, especially in health facilities.

With regard to the situation of children with disabilities, the Committee expressed concern at the insufficient measures taken to ensure effective access of these children to health, education and social services, and to facilitate their full inclusion into society, as well as the small number of well-trained professionals working with, and for, children with disabilities.

Further areas of concern identified by the Committee included: the fact that education is not compulsory by law, the high drop-out rate between primary and secondary school, the shortage of trained teachers, the existing gender disparities in secondary school enrolments and disparities in the access to education between the capital and the atolls; the insufficient measures undertaken to address issues related to drug abuse; the insufficient preventive measures, including legal ones, to avoid the emergence of child labour and economic exploitation, including sexual exploitation; the lack of

preventive measures, including legal ones, concerning child prostitution, child pornography, trafficking and sale of children; and the fact that juvenile offenders between 16 and 18 years are considered as adults.

The Committee recommended that the government, *inter alia*:

- ♦ consider reviewing its reservations to the Convention with a view to withdrawing them; engage in a comprehensive reform of legislation in order to ensure its full conformity with the principles and provisions of the Convention; accede to other major international human rights treaties — including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention against Torture — which all have an impact on the rights of the child;
- ♦ strengthen and extend the activities of the Coordinating Committee on Children; develop a comprehensive system of collecting disaggregated data, in order to gather all necessary information on the situation of children in the various areas covered by the Convention;
- ♦ consider the establishment of an independent mechanism to fully monitor the implementation of the Convention, especially for the most vulnerable groups of society;
- ♦ facilitate the establishment of NGOs working with and for children, and cooperate with them;
- ♦ pursue its efforts for the dissemination of the principles and provisions of the Convention and provision of training to all professional groups working with and for children;
- ♦ raise the legal age of definition of the child and review the legal minimum ages for marriage and criminal responsibility;
- ♦ take a more pro-active approach to eliminate discrimination against girls, children with disabilities, children living on remote islands, and children born out of wedlock; enact and implement its National Policy on Women, which may bear a positive impact on the status of girls;
- ♦ take all appropriate measures to prevent and combat ill treatment within the family and sexual abuse of children; set up social programmes to prevent all types of child abuse as well as to rehabilitate child victims; strengthen law enforcement with respect to such crimes; and develop adequate procedures and mechanisms to deal with complaints of child abuse, such as special rules of evidence, and special investigators or community focal points;
- ♦ accelerate the enactment of its Family Law; undertake research and studies on the negative impact of family disruption on children; continue with its awareness-raising campaign on this issue; improve counselling services for parents;