



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
28 February 2025

Original: English

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Seventy-seventh session

Summary record of the 14th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 18 February 2025, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports *(continued)*

(a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant
(continued)

Seventh periodic report of the Philippines ([E/C.12/PHL/7](#); [E/C.12/PHL/Q/7](#);
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1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Philippines joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of the Philippines**, introducing her country's seventh periodic report ([E/C.12/PHL/7](#)), said that economic, social and cultural rights were enshrined in the country's Constitution, which provided a firm foundation for their promotion and protection. The Constitution was reinforced by laws and policies that supported workers, promoted equitable economic participation and provided social protection. The Government remained committed to upholding human rights as the Philippines recovered from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In that context, it had adopted the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028, which was designed to accelerate the transition to a prosperous, inclusive and resilient society. The Plan was the Government's blueprint for achieving development priorities and fulfilling Filipinos' long-term aspirations. It incorporated strategies that mainstreamed human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals; hence, by achieving the targets set out in the Plan, the Government would progress towards the realization of both the Goals and the country's human rights commitments simultaneously.
3. Economic development, resilience-building and poverty reduction were central to the Government's human rights agenda. The poverty rate had declined from 23.5 per cent in 2015 to 15.5 per cent in 2023, thanks to a poverty reduction strategy that aimed to expand the economy, improve access for the poor to drivers of economic growth and provide social protection to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Broad-based social programmes provided benefits to millions of households and ensured that the next generation received education and healthcare. Although the labour market had recovered strongly from the pandemic, volatility and uncertainty remained, and Congress had therefore passed legislation that mandated the crafting of a 10-year labour market development plan with the objective of promoting a dynamic, efficient and inclusive labour market environment.
4. Legislation had been enacted to institutionalize and expand social protection. In the sphere of healthcare, the Universal Health Care Act ensured the automatic enrolment of all Filipinos in the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation. Family planning initiatives had reached 8 million women, preventing an estimated 774,000 unsafe abortions and 1,400 maternal deaths annually. The Mental Health Act provided for expanded services, including culturally sensitive care, for persons with psychosocial disabilities, on the basis of informed consent to treatment. The Department of Education had issued an order that prioritized the provision of alternative learning systems for persons with disabilities, including those who had dropped out of school.
5. Free, prior and informed consent formed an integral part of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act. Although challenges remained in effectively enforcing the Act, the Government continued to promote sustainable development initiatives and to cooperate with key stakeholders to ensure that Indigenous rights were effectively upheld.
6. Furthermore, the Government, in cooperation with civil society, had launched the fourth Philippine Human Rights Plan as a comprehensive road map for the promotion and protection of human rights. Its second thematic chapter focused on economic, social and cultural rights and the integration of human rights into national development efforts. The Plan was aligned with the Philippine Development Plan, the Sustainable Development Goals and the long-term vision for the country, known as AmBisyon Natin 2040.
7. **Mr. Caunhye** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would be interested to know what measures the State party had taken to incorporate the provisions of the Covenant into its legal system and to ensure the primacy of the Covenant over domestic legislation. He would appreciate information on recent cases in which Filipino citizens had asserted their economic,

social and cultural rights before the courts. He wondered whether the Philippines might strengthen its commitment to economic, social and cultural rights by ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

8. Regarding the independence of the judiciary, he wished to know what kind of system was in place for appointing judges and whether they enjoyed security of tenure, which would help to ensure that the judiciary was free from political influence and other forms of pressure and interference.

9. The Committee was concerned that there had been 305 documented killings of human rights defenders in the Philippines since the review of the State party's previous report in 2016, and that the authorities seemed unable to prevent the intimidation, harassment, red-tagging, enforced disappearance and killing of human rights defenders, political opponents, aid workers, journalists and others. It would therefore welcome information on any action taken to establish an independent law enforcement mechanism to investigate, prosecute and punish the perpetrators of such acts. The Committee would also like to know what safeguards had been put in place to prevent the abuse of the Anti-Terrorism Act and all acts of harassment, oppression and violence against human rights defenders in the exercise of their legitimate activities, and why the bill on the protection of human rights defenders was still pending before the House of Representatives. It would be useful to know what progress had been made towards adopting the bill on a charter for the Commission on Human Rights, which had also been pending before the legislature for some time, and whether that bill would empower the Commission and allow it to function independently, in full compliance with the Paris Principles.

10. It was reported that, despite constitutional safeguards, Indigenous Peoples continued to face violations of their economic, social and cultural rights, in particular encroachment upon and destruction of their ancestral lands, while their identities, traditional land management practices, livelihoods and food systems were all under threat. He therefore wished to know how the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act could be more effectively implemented so as to prevent rights violations, especially in respect of ancestral lands. He would like to know what steps had been taken to adopt the bills on land use and Indigenous community conservation areas, which were pending before the legislature, and to expedite the issuance of certificates of ancestral domain title and ancestral land title. He would appreciate an explanation of how the State party ensured that the guidelines on the exercise of free, prior and informed consent were followed in mining, tourism and other large-scale projects.

11. The delegation might also indicate what progress had been made towards the development of the national action plan on business and human rights and the adoption of a comprehensive law requiring all business entities, including foreign ones, to exercise human rights due diligence in the course of their activities. It would be useful to learn about any measures to tackle the harmful effects of extractive activities on the environment and the health and living conditions of vulnerable communities.

12. He would be interested to know what measures had been taken in keeping with the country's commitment under the Paris Agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 75 per cent by 2030, and why the national adaptation plan to address the effects of climate change had not yet been finalized. Information on measures to address illegal logging, environmental degradation and pollution caused by extractive, agricultural, industrial, maritime and power generation activities, which had a disproportionate impact on the livelihoods of vulnerable groups, would also be welcome.

13. Notwithstanding the reduction in the overall poverty rate, rural poverty remained severe, with more than 3 million Filipino families reportedly unable to meet their basic food and non-food needs. Income and wealth inequalities remained stark, and the tax system was largely regressive. In that context, he would appreciate information on measures taken to eradicate poverty, including through the provision of targeted financial assistance to the most vulnerable families and individuals. He would like to know whether measures, such as the introduction of a progressive tax system or a targeted wealth tax, had been taken to address the unequal distribution of wealth and widening income disparities and enable the State party to increase support for the poorest segments of the population.

14. The Committee had received reports of corruption risks in various sectors. Of particular concern was the *padrino* or patronage system, whereby promotions or political appointments were obtained through nepotism or cronyism. He wished to know what steps had been taken to combat the various forms of corruption, including in the civil service, the police, the military and the judiciary. He would appreciate information on recent cases in which public officials and politicians had been convicted of corruption offences. It would be interesting to know what protection mechanisms were in place for whistle-blowers and anti-corruption activists, whether citizens could obtain access to official information held by the authorities and if the State party planned to adopt a comprehensive anti-corruption law and set up independent anti-corruption bodies.

15. In addition, he wished to know what progress had been made towards enacting the comprehensive anti-discrimination bill, the sexual orientation and gender identity expression equality bill and the anti-elder abuse bill, and what legal and institutional mechanisms were in place to protect women, LGBTQI persons, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and religious minorities from all forms of discrimination. He would like to hear about any measures that had been taken to increase the participation of women in the labour market, to reduce their overrepresentation in low-paid jobs and the informal sector of the economy, and to combat stereotypes that perpetuated gender inequality. Lastly, he would be grateful for information on measures to strengthen and enforce gender parity; to increase women's representation in government, public bodies and high income sectors; and to provide State support, childcare services and extended parental leave in order to empower women and enable them to work.

The meeting was suspended at 3.30 p.m. and resumed at 3.35 p.m.

16. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, in her country, all three branches of government were equal. The executive branch respected the legislative process and participated in it by attending hearings, preparing technical inputs and drafting provisions for the consideration of the legislature. Regarding the independence of the judiciary, it should be noted that judges were appointed by the Judicial and Bar Council on the basis of a list of nominees and that judges – particularly higher court judges – served terms that exceeded those of other public offices.

17. The Government implemented several programmes to ensure that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in society could achieve their full potential. Under the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, the State provided cash transfers to 4.4 million of the poorest households on the condition that children attended school and health check-ups. All such programmes were implemented through a rights-based approach and included complaint mechanisms.

18. Poverty had continued to fall, despite the negative impact of prolonged mobility restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Separate figures for rural poverty were not available, as rural areas had not been used as a sampling domain in the Family Income and Expenditure Survey. However, poverty statistics were available at regional, provincial and city levels, which meant that local authorities could be held accountable for their record in combating poverty. As part of the poverty reduction strategy, the Government was investing in health, nutrition, education and training, and was working to improve the digital connectivity of remote and island provinces, including through cooperation with satellite Internet providers.

19. As the Philippines was highly vulnerable to climate-related and geological hazards, the Government had developed a sound disaster risk reduction and management framework. Under its first nationally determined contribution to the global response to climate change, the Philippines had indeed committed to an emissions reduction of 75 per cent by 2030, although most of that commitment was conditional on the receipt of technical assistance. The Philippines was not a major greenhouse gas emitter, contributing only 0.32 per cent of global emissions, while accounting for 1.5 per cent of the world's population. Nevertheless, the Government played its part in reducing emissions, notably in the agriculture, energy, industry and transport sectors. Under the Philippine Energy Plan 2023–2050, it was working to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and increase the share of renewable energies in the power generation mix. Moreover, in order to increase the number of vehicles using clean fuels, it

had launched an ambitious public transport modernization programme, had introduced a zero-tariff rate on imports of electric vehicles, was expanding the country's charging infrastructure and planned to scale up the local manufacture of electric vehicle batteries.

20. Several national laws addressed non-discrimination in different domains. The bill on sexual orientation and gender identity expression equality had not yet been adopted, but an executive order upholding the rights it addressed and discouraging discrimination on the basis of gender had been issued.

21. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the country's justice system already offered adequate provision for complaints to be addressed: the independent national human rights institution received and investigated complaints related to Covenant rights, the National Prosecution Service conducted its work effectively, both the military and the police had their own human rights affairs offices that were competent to consider cases of violations and the Supreme Court invoked Covenant provisions in its judgments. The State party thus did not consider there was any need to ratify the Optional Protocol.

22. The human rights defenders protection bill had not yet been enacted into law because of its perceived bias towards only a few actors. The 485 non-governmental and civil society organizations that had engaged with the State in the context of the third Human Rights Plan had called for the Special Committee on Human Rights Coordination to include organizations that engaged actively with the Government, not those seen as advocating its violent overthrow. The Government had long been in favour of adopting a charter for the Commission on Human Rights, and for the Commission's mandate to cover economic and social rights, as well as civil and political rights.

23. The Philippines had ratified all but one of the international human rights treaties. On business and human rights, discussions were ongoing with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on human rights and business in their respective areas of concern; the area of ancestral domains was also being explored.

24. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, in general, the long-term aspiration of most Filipinos to enjoy a strong family and community life, a comfortable lifestyle and a secure future meant that families needed two incomes to rely on, which required women to participate in the labour force. The Government therefore promoted policies and legislation allowing night-time work for women, which was particularly relevant for the growing Information Technology and Business Process Management sector; the parliament had also adopted the Safe Spaces Act and the Expanded Maternity Leave Law, under which some maternity leave could be transferred to the male partner. However, such changes needed to be supported in the education system by addressing cultural stereotypes.

25. The Telecommuting Act had been adopted shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic and its outcome was now being assessed in terms of its effectiveness in encouraging persons to join the labour force. Studies were also being conducted in view of legislation or a policy framework on inclusive work arrangements.

26. As concerned unpaid care work, the Government of the Philippines was of the opinion that "employment" meant working for others or for profit; care work for a family member could thus not be considered as employment.

27. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the 2020 Anti-Terrorism Act formed a strong framework supporting the criminal justice response to terrorism through law enforcement, while also safeguarding the rights of persons accused of such crimes. On its adoption, 37 petitions had been filed against it with the Supreme Court, which had declared some of its provisions unconstitutional; however, the remainder of the Act remained intact. It was thus clear that the State could not suppress dissent or trample on the people's fundamental rights. The Court had also issued rules on its use to address concerns regarding detentions, surveillance orders, designations and proscriptions, to avoid any violation of constitutional rights. As a result, the Philippines was going down the ranking of countries impacted by terrorism in the world, and currently stood at nineteenth. The Act was not being used to target humanitarian or development work, as the Government did not suppress legitimate efforts to serve marginalized or poor communities. Warrants of arrest were ordered

only after the courts had conducted a judicial review of probable cause and concurred with the findings of the preliminary investigations by the Department of Justice prosecutors. During trials, accused persons were represented by a lawyer of their own choice and were given every opportunity to refute and present evidence to challenge the charges. Their rights were respected at every step of the process.

28. **A representative of the Philippines** said that his country was a State party to the United Nations Convention against Corruption. Nineteen national agencies had so far implemented the 2014 Integrity Management Program and the country had recently hosted the Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting of the Open Government Partnership, which promoted citizens' participation in Government. The 2024 Government Procurement Act addressed previous loopholes in legislation and the Philippine Government Electronic Procurement Service increased transparency by overcoming the need for personal meetings during the procurement process. The Philippine Competition Commission was competent to determine whether there had been any bid rigging.

29. The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act included guidelines emphasizing the protection of designated sacred sites, ancestral domains and cultural heritage as zones that might not be touched and ensuring that no major agreements were approved without engagement in the free prior informed consent process with Indigenous Peoples. There was a campaign to encourage cultural mapping; the Philippine Creative Industries Development Act was also aimed at mapping and registering cultural assets as intellectual property, to ensure that the benefits were enjoyed by the Indigenous Peoples concerned.

30. The taxation system focused on indirect taxes, such as those on smoking products or alcohol, primarily because the direct tax base was not broad. Furthermore, many families relied on overseas remittances, which were not taxed, and consideration was being given to ensuring that the benefit of such remittances was shared more equally in society. Specific parts of the revenue collected was earmarked for the healthcare system and for work on the sustainable development goals.

31. **Ms. Lee** said that, in view of the large numbers of internally displaced persons in the country, she would be interested to learn what measures had been taken to guarantee access for such persons to adequate food, housing and healthcare and durable living solutions, particularly for the victims of the 2017 siege of Marawi, and whether they had been able to return, with dignity, to their homes or their region. She would also like to know the status of the bill protecting the human rights of internally displaced persons at national level.

32. **Mr. Caunhye** said that he would like to hear what had been achieved in respect of protection for Indigenous Peoples since the adoption, in 2008, of Joint Administrative Order No. 1. The Committee acknowledged the existence of legislation and guidelines regarding Indigenous Peoples, but had received reports about their inadequate implementation, for example in the matter of free and informed consent in respect of agricultural, mining or large-scale projects.

33. It had also received information concerning the alleged abusive use of the Anti-Terrorism Act against persons such as journalists and workers. Although the State party viewed as adequate its system for addressing such issues, ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Covenant would have provided a system for assessing the veracity of such complaints beyond reasonable doubt. He therefore wished to learn what was being done or contemplated to strengthen implementation of the complaints system to enable it to be perceived as fair and impartial.

34. On the tax system, he would like to hear what was being done to reduce the reportedly large disparities in wealth and income in the country.

35. Noting, in respect of women's representation, that there was provision for 50 per cent of third-level government positions to be allocated to women and at least 30 per cent of the names on electoral lists to be women, he said he would welcome further information on how gender parity in the composition of the Government would be achieved.

36. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** asked whether the State had a national mechanism for oversight of and reporting on implementation of the recommendations of the international human rights

protection bodies, at what level it functioned, what its mandate, composition and impact were and how it was involved in creating public policy.

37. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he was concerned that, despite the State party's work to prepare for the effects of climate change in the form of the National Disaster Preparedness Plan and related measures, the shortcomings in registration of land rights would make it difficult to provide adequate compensation for victims of storms or other disasters. Although the delegation had mentioned the State party's focus on developing renewable energy sources, he had been made aware that new gas power plants and natural gas terminals had been built, notably in the south of Luzon, opposite the biodiversity-rich island of Mindoro. He wished to know how the State party was dealing with the impact of those developments on fisheries in the area and people's livelihoods.

38. He would also be interested to learn how the State party intended to explore the financial possibilities of holding to account the main energy companies – the “carbon majors” – whether present in the country or investing in Philippine companies, for the effects of their activities; might the issue be included in a national action plan on business and human rights?

39. **Mr. Hennebel** (Country Task Force) said that, despite the delegation's argument that there was already adequate provision for addressing complaints regarding violations of Covenant rights, ratification of the Optional Protocol would only go to strengthen the mechanisms concerned. On climate change, he noted that the State party had made many conditional commitments, but he would be interested to hear whether it had also made firm unconditional commitments. He would like to learn whether its undertaking not to introduce any additional taxes had any knock-on effects. Lastly, did the Government have any plans to transform Verde Island into a protected zone?

40. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Country Task Force, said that she would like to learn whether members of the judicial services followed mandatory training, including training on international law, particularly on the provisions of the Covenant. She would also be interested to hear when the national action plan on business and human rights would be adopted and whether the climate change policy would be based on a sectoral approach, for example in respect of the construction or energy sectors.

41. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples was reviewing the revised guidelines on free, prior and informed consent to strengthen them without compromising the right to self-determination of Indigenous cultural communities and Indigenous Peoples. As of November 2024, 272 certificates of ancestral domain titles, covering a total of 6.2 million hectares and 1.5 million Indigenous rights holders, had been approved.

42. The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan contained measures spanning all phases, from preparedness, through rescue and response, to recovery and rehabilitation. The post-disaster phase involved a needs assessment and possible compensation, but the issue of the impact of the lack of land titles had yet to be resolved. The planned introduction of a so-called “digital locker” where all citizens could store various types of information, including land titles and academic diplomas, might offer a solution.

43. The reluctance to take part in political life was an issue not only for women but also for young people. Efforts were needed to improve civics education and regain the trust of the population in government and leadership. In the executive branch, however, there was good representation of women in managerial positions, though gender parity had yet to be achieved.

44. The Philippines was an active participant in the voluntary national review process in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals and would be reporting on its commitments and accomplishments for the fourth time in July 2025. It had already surpassed its nationally determined contribution and would continue to work to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. Private sector compliance with regulations in that domain was better than expected. The Subcommittee on the Sustainable Development Goals had formed stakeholder chambers composed of businesses and non-governmental organizations, among others, that were involved in planning and implementing strategies, including with regard to climate change. Thanks to the Philippine Ecosystem and Natural Capital Accounting System, the authorities

would be able to quantify the damage caused by big polluters and thus penalize them more effectively. The Philippines would be able to exchange best practices with other countries at the forthcoming conference of the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage. Furthermore, the Philippine Development Plan included a strategy for making the country attractive for environmental, social and governance investment.

45. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Philippines had been recognized by the United Nations for its national mechanism for monitoring and following up on implementation of international recommendations, at the core of which was the National Recommendations Tracking Database. In fact, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had requested the country's involvement in capacity-building workshops for Timor-Leste, Cambodia, Maldives and Canada.

46. Before designing a comprehensive national action plan on business and human rights, the Government was working on targeted action plans in the areas of migration, child labour and the protection of ancestral domains.

47. For action to be taken, cases of alleged misapplication of the Anti-Terrorism Act should be reported to the appropriate authorities. If individuals, non-governmental or civil society organizations did not feel safe in reporting such cases, they could appeal to the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines.

48. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, although the political landscape in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao was dominated by men, women members of parliament contributed actively to policy- and lawmaking and had had a positive impact on peacebuilding efforts by advocating policies that protected women's rights and promoted inclusive governance. However, they continued to face significant barriers, including societal norms, cultural practices and institutional biases, that marginalized their voices. Strategies to address those barriers included community consultations, legal and religious advocacy and empowerment through training and mentorship.

49. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, while amendments to the taxation of passive income had been proposed, the relevant bill would probably have to be resubmitted to Congress after the elections in May 2025. One measure to address disparities had been the establishment of a three-tier tax incentive scheme designed to encourage companies to locate outside the capital, with a focus on upstream businesses and businesses in strategic industries that would have a positive multiplier effect for the rest of the economy.

50. **Mr. Nonthasoot** (Country Task Force) said that the Committee would welcome recent data on employment, a status update on the adoption of legislation to regularize the informal sector or provide informal workers with a safety net, in particular Senate Bill No. 1746 and House Bill No. 29, as well as information on the employment rate among persons with disabilities and the nature of the jobs they were offered. Information would also be welcome about the impact of Republic Act No. 11058 on sweatshops and about the number of labour inspectors, the regularity of their inspections and the number of violations of occupational health and safety laws that had been observed.

51. The Committee wished to know whether the State party had assessed how the divergent minimum wages had led to entrenched disparity between the development of the capital and that of other regions and the extent to which the wages outside the capital afforded workers an adequate standard of living. It also wished to know how and on what basis wages were adjusted, how many compliance orders labour inspectors had issued to employers who did not pay minimum wages or respect occupational health and safety regulations and what other remedies were available to workers in such situations.

52. The delegation was invited to describe any policies to reduce child labour and eliminate the commercial sexual exploitation of children and their use in drug trafficking and domestic work, as well as the additional protections against discrimination in the workplace envisaged in the bill on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

53. The Committee was eager to learn about the investigations into cases of persecution, harassment, red-tagging and killing of trade union members, including whether they had been conducted in accordance with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and what

their outcomes had been. It would also welcome details of the domestic framework on trade union activities and strike action, for instance the role of the competent agencies in monitoring and protecting trade union rights and the right to strike.

54. In the light of reports that women faced job segregation, harassment, gender-based violence and poor hygiene facilities in the workplace, the Committee was interested in hearing what policy and legal framework was in place to address those issues, whether the relevant authority had a dedicated unit and, if so, how effective it was.

55. The Committee was also interested to know whether the State party was considering ratifying the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), how many claims had been made under the unemployment insurance benefits programme since 2021 and who could be excluded from the programme. Lastly, it wished to know to what extent marginalized and vulnerable groups were covered under the social protection floor and whether a review would be conducted to assess the initiative's effectiveness and expand its coverage.

56. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the unemployment rate was 4.3 per cent and falling. Employment data were disaggregated by age and sex, and data were collected on persons with disabilities who were employed. Less than 40 per cent of workers were employed in the informal sector. The results of a rapid assessment of the informal sector in two cities in southern Philippines indicated that different interventions would be required because some workers ended up in that sector for lack of other options while others deliberately chose it for some of its benefits. It was hoped that the study could also be carried out in other locations to produce information that could feed into policy recommendations on worker protections.

57. While compliance with occupational health and safety regulations was good, the COVID-19 pandemic had prompted their review; the Department of Health was developing a healthy settings framework.

58. The geographical context of the Philippines meant that each region had different economic conditions and widely varying costs of living; that explained the range of minimum wages. A single national minimum wage would ultimately hurt people outside the capital by discouraging businesses from setting up there. Nevertheless, the Wage Rationalization Act enumerated 10 factors to be taken into consideration in setting the minimum wage, a process that involved public consultations, followed by negotiations among, at a minimum, the competent authorities, employers and workers.

59. **A representative of the Philippines** said that it was not State policy to attack, harass or intimidate human and environmental rights defenders, legal professionals or media workers, and judicial remedies were available in the event of such cases. The Government disputed claims that individuals and organizations were being red-tagged as terrorists or supporters of the Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People's Army or the National Democratic Front of the Philippines. Reports of suspicious individuals or organizations were assessed with the assistance of former or current members of those entities cooperating with the authorities. The mandate of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict was to safeguard the human rights of all, especially those living in vulnerable communities. It provided accurate information about individuals involved in terror grooming so that people could make informed choices about protecting themselves and their communities. The Government respected all ideologies as long as they did not espouse extremism aimed at the violent overthrow of a duly constituted authority, and remained committed to the principles of the Covenant. It strived to build a just, peaceful and equitable society through inclusive governance and sustainable development programmes and looked forward to addressing the root causes of insurgency and promoting civic space through the National Action Plan for Unity, Peace and Development 2025–2028.

60. **A representative of the Philippines** said the board that had developed the social protection floor had based the minimum protection level on a determination of who was most vulnerable at each stage of the life cycle. The scheme would be rolled out progressively, subject, however, to available resources. For example, over the past year, the Government had been able to expand the duration of the basic education supplementary feeding programme.

61. A programme was in place to reach out to children and families in street situations. The 2,643 persons who had benefited from the programme in 2024 had been provided with temporary shelter or long-term accommodation, while fostering or adoption arrangements had been made for abandoned children. Efforts had focused particularly on identifying and registering children in street situations.

62. The Department of Labor and Employment had visited 10,814 workplaces in 2020 and removed six children from four establishments found to be in violation of child labour regulations. Between 2018 and 2020, 21,930 working children had been provided with, inter alia, educational and medical assistance, food packs and hygiene kits. One of the prerequisites of the Conditional Cash Transfer Program was that parents should attend information sessions on child labour and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Parents found to be engaging their children in labour risked being removed from the Program. The National Council against Child Labor, established under the previous administration, continued to operate.

63. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, although a quota of 1 per cent was envisaged under Act No. 10524, persons with disabilities currently accounted for just 0.4 per cent of staff in State institutions. The National Commission on Disability Affairs provided training to help more persons with disabilities pass the civil service examinations, which would qualify them to work in the public sector. The Commission also worked with the private sector to find suitable openings for persons with disabilities.

64. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, in addition to the Safe Spaces Act and Republic Act No. 9710, the Magna Carta of Women, a gender-responsive education policy had been rolled out in 2017 and the Department of Education had issued an order to protect children against gender-related violence and bullying. Women also enjoyed protection under the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act, and training on sexual harassment and associated laws was ongoing, particularly in government offices. A special committee had been set up to ensure that the interests and well-being of LGBTQIA+ persons were duly reflected in government programmes. The bill on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression had not yet been enacted, but she hoped it would complete its legislative itinerary following the forthcoming general elections, due to be held in May. The rights of workers and employers in the gig economy were partly regulated under the Telecommuting Act. The Government had also taken action to ensure that such workers had social protection and were not exposed to occupational hazards.

65. **Mr. Nonthasoot** said that the Committee was concerned, not so much that the minimum wage varied from region to region, but that it should be set at a level that provided an adequate standard of living for workers, wherever they were in the country. He wished to know what action the Government took to protect its migrant workers overseas. It would also be helpful to know how many labour inspectors there were in the Department of Labor and Employment and how many inspections they conducted each year. He wondered what remedies were available to victims of workplace abuses and, in particular, whether the Commission on Human Rights served as a non-judicial avenue for remedial measures. The Committee would be interested to hear about any plans to adopt diversity, equity and inclusion policies in the workplace. Such plans aligned naturally with the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights and with the State party's desire to be an attractive destination for environmental, social and governance investments.

66. **Mr. Hennebel** said that he wished to know whether the State party had any plans to revise articles 240 (c), 244 (a) and 278 (g) of the Labor Code, which seemed to place restrictions on the right to form or join trade unions.

67. **Ms. Pérez** said that she had been unable to locate information about young persons aged between 15 and 24 who were not in employment, education or training. Such persons were particularly vulnerable as they were not covered by either education or employment policies. She hoped that the delegation could provide that information, disaggregated by sex because reports indicated that young women were often undertaking unpaid work as carers.

68. **A representative of the Philippines** said that official poverty thresholds varied from province to province, and one of the factors taken into account when setting the minimum

wage in a particular province was the poverty threshold there. Minimum wage was intended as a starting point from which people would progress as they advanced in their career.

69. The Department of Migrant Workers sought to protect Filipino workers overseas from the moment of recruitment until their return and reintegration in the Philippines. Notably, it engaged with labour ministries in destination countries and sought to establish bilateral agreements to ensure that workers' entitlements were adequately protected. The Department was also responsible for repatriating Filipino workers from countries affected by political instability or insecurity. Nearly 1 million workers had been repatriated during the COVID-19 pandemic and, in many cases, their children had been given educational assistance in the form of scholarships.

70. The Philippine Development Plan 2017–2022 included provision only for young persons who were not in employment or education. No provision had been made for those not in training, but that shortcoming was being remedied with assistance from the Philippine Statistics Authority. In any case, young people had access to a variety of options, including the Government Internship Program and the Alternative Learning System.

71. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Tripartite Industrial Peace Council was constantly reviewing and considering improvements to existing legislation, including the Labor Code. The Department of Labor and Employment ran programmes to combat child labour, in accordance with the law and the relevant ILO conventions. A total of 35,832 children had been removed from situations of child labour. A total of 137,368 labour organizations and 116,804 workers' associations were registered in the Philippines with a combined membership of nearly 4 million men and more than 3.5 million women. Executive Order No. 23 of 2023 included provision for the creation of the Inter-Agency Committee for the Protection of the Freedom of Association and Right to Organize of Workers.

72. The Government was in dialogue with ILO with respect to cases of workers who had either disappeared or been killed in the course of conducting union-related work, and the Tripartite Monitoring Bodies followed up on investigations into those cases. The Bodies had issued a number of resolutions requesting that certain cases should be removed from ILO lists, either because they had been comprehensively investigated or because the parties had reached an amicable settlement.

73. In order to promote diversity, equity and inclusion, the Department of Labor and Employment had a gender and development agenda 2024–2028, which had been developed in the wake of studies showing that women's participation in the workforce had declined. More labour inspectors would always be welcome but the Department currently had enough to ensure general compliance with health and safety standards. In 2023, inspections had been conducted in around 400,000 establishments.

74. **Mr. Hennebel** said that he wished to hear the delegation's views on the issue of polygamy, including in the light of questions on that subject that had been raised by other treaty bodies. He also hoped to learn more about how divorce proceedings were conducted and how family law had evolved in that regard. The Committee would be interested to hear about any complaints that might have been received concerning grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict, including the recruitment of children into armed forces, and about any related convictions and penalties.

75. He wished to know what concrete action was undertaken to prevent the exploitation of children, particularly in disaster areas. The delegation should also explain what steps were taken to ensure that private-sector stakeholders applied Act No. 11930 concerning online sexual abuse or exploitation of children, notably with regard to public awareness-raising and to blocking financial transactions suspected to be linked to sexual exploitation. Had any action been taken to identify dangerous jobs in which children were not to be employed?

76. It would be helpful to know what procedures were in place to facilitate the registration of children born into Indigenous or Muslim communities. He wondered what was being done to enhance protection for victims of rape and to ensure that aggressors could not use legal channels to avoid prosecution, for example by marrying the victim. He hoped to hear details about actions to prevent cyberbullying against women and children and about their outcome. He would appreciate it if the delegation could explain what was being done to guarantee

access to gender-affirmative care for LGBTQIA+ persons, under both State-run and private healthcare insurance. Were there any plans to amend the law in order to permit same-sex marriages or civil unions? He also wished to know how the State-party intended to simplify legal gender recognition for transgender and intersex persons, while respecting their dignity and autonomy.

77. He wondered how food security had been affected by the National Food Policy and by Act No. 11203, which liberalized commerce in rice. What steps were taken to ensure that persons in situations of precarity had access to affordable food? He looked forward to receiving updated statistics on homelessness and to hearing what measures were in place to prevent forced expulsions, find alternative accommodation and ensure that informal workers and other marginalized groups had access to housing.

78. It would be helpful to know what steps were being taken to ensure that healthcare, including vaccines and mental health services, was available to Indigenous communities, rural populations, disadvantaged groups and persons with disabilities, in particular those who were isolated in the home. The Committee wished to know what had been done to lift restrictions on access to emergency contraception and to amend the law criminalizing abortion. In that connection, he wondered if women could access post-abortion care without fear of criminal prosecution. What actions were envisaged to deal with cases of forced pregnancy? He hoped to hear about measures to raise awareness about reproductive health among young women in rural areas.

79. Lastly, he wondered if there were any plans to decriminalize the personal use of drugs and to apply non-custodial penalties to offenders. He wished to know what was done to improve access to drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes, to evaluate their impact and to prevent stigmatization of persons seeking treatment for addiction. He would be interested to know what reparations were available for victims of the war against drugs.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.