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Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Committee on the Rights of the Child
Ninety-eighth session

Summary record of the 2850th meeting
Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 14 January 2025, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Skelton

Contents

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

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Eritrea (CRC/C/ERI/5-6; CRC/C/ERI/Q/5-6; CRC/C/ERI/RQ/5-6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Eritrea joined the meeting*.

2. **A representative of Eritrea**, introducing his country's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports (CRC/C/ERI/5-6), said that the commitment of Eritrea to upholding children's rights was evident in its robust legal framework for the prohibition of all forms of discrimination and violence against children. Corporal punishment and sexual offences were expressly forbidden, and the justice system emphasized the use of rehabilitation and non-custodial measures for young offenders.

3. The fight against harmful practices was a priority. Significant progress had been made towards eliminating one such practice, female genital mutilation. A 2024 community mapping exercise conducted in 20 subregions, for instance, had revealed that 8 were free of the practice. The rate of prevalence among girls stood at 2.3 per cent for those aged 5 and under and at 4.4 per cent for those aged 15 and under.

4. Community-based reunification programmes ensured that orphans and other vulnerable children were reintegrated into society.

5. Eritrea had recently acceded to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Comprehensive National Policy on Persons with Disabilities had been translated into Tigrigna to ensure broader public understanding of the Policy. Efforts were under way to address gaps in housing and draw up mobility plans for persons with severe disabilities.

6. Remarkable milestones had been reached in the area of health, notably the introduction of the meningitis A and human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines. As a result of community-led sanitation initiatives, the majority of villages were now free from open defecation. The integrated management programme for newborn and childhood illnesses had led to a significant reduction in infant and child mortality rates, and the proportion of births with assistance from a skilled attendant had risen from 62 per cent in 2017 to 83.5 per cent in 2023. HIV/AIDS infection rates among pregnant women now stood at just 0.13 per cent, and mother-to-child transmission rates had dropped. The prevalence of hepatitis B and malaria had also been reduced.

7. The net enrolment rate at the elementary education level was now nearly 82 per cent, and literacy rates had risen from 30 to 70 per cent since 1993. Particular efforts were made to prioritize the education of nomadic children in lowland regions and children with learning difficulties. Recreational and cultural opportunities for children had been enhanced.

8. An extensive dam construction project, underscoring the country's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, had improved access to safe water for 79 per cent of rural and 95 per cent of urban populations and provided economic opportunities for freshwater fishing, particularly for women. The National Union of Eritrean Women had trained 850 women as change agents in the area of child health and nutrition.

9. Despite the progress that had been made, the Government recognized that challenges remained. It was determined to address them through innovative and inclusive approaches to create a better future in which children could thrive.

10. **Ms. Otani** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that she wondered whether the Transitional Penal Code and the Transitional Civil Code were still in force and when the legal codes adopted in 2015 – fundamental laws on civil and criminal courts in particular – would enter into force. It would be helpful to receive detailed information about the process and timeline for the drafting of the new Constitution and for the evaluation and review of the Comprehensive National Policy for Children. She wished to learn about any plans to conduct a comprehensive legislative review to ensure harmonization with the Convention and the Optional Protocols and to identify any gaps requiring additional legislative measures, including the preparation of a comprehensive law on children's rights.

11. She would be interested to know, too, whether the coordination bodies were effective and whether they received sufficient financial and human resources. It was unclear whether there was a specific budget allocation for child protection activities. She would welcome updated information on corruption cases. An update on the planned establishment of the Child and Social Protection Information Management System, as well as specific information on any areas that the Government planned to prioritize for data collection, would also be useful.

12. She wished to know whether the Women's Rights and Child Rights Committees had the financial and human resources they needed to investigate the complaints they received through their complaints mechanisms, about which she also wished to know more, and whether additional training on child participation had been delivered following the first round in 2019. It would be interesting to hear how the authorities ensured that the new justice services described in the State party's replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/ERI/RQ/5-6, paras 104 and 105) were child-friendly and accessible to children.

13. She wondered exactly what it was about the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) that caused concern for the Government. As the Committee had received reports that Proclamation No. 145/2005, on the administration of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), imposed limitations on the scope and funding of NGO activities, set out reporting obligations and granted the Government the authority to terminate the activities of such organizations, the delegation might clarify whether those reports were accurate.

14. She wished to know whether any measures had been taken to address reports that the children of men who had been subjected to enforced disappearance faced discrimination at school, as well as to tackle the discrimination reportedly faced by children from certain ethnic groups, including the Kunama and Afar peoples, particularly with regard to exclusion from social welfare programmes.

15. She also wished to know whether lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children did in fact exist in the State party, despite the assertion to the contrary made in its periodic report, but that they did not make themselves known because homosexuality was criminalized.

16. It would be helpful to learn how the principle of the best interests of the child was applied and whether judges and lawyers were provided with training on its application. The delegation might comment on the veracity of reports that children were attempting to flee the State party and on the reasons why they might wish to do so. It would be helpful to know how border officials dealt with any such children.

17. She would be interested to know whether the outcomes of the biannual surveys conducted by the Ministry of Information were made publicly available. Were children's views heard in judicial and administrative proceedings concerning them and in the context of the development of national and regional legislation and policies on issues affecting them?

18. **Ms. Aho** (Country Task Force) said that she would welcome a detailed description of how the authorities disseminated information on the birth registration procedure. In particular, she wished to know what channels were available to people who missed the 90-day deadline for registration, to children who had been born in wartime and not been registered and to children whose birth had been registered but who had not received a birth certificate. She would also be grateful for information on any measures that were in place to facilitate birth registration in rural and isolated areas and to ensure that children who were born in non-hospital settings could obtain a birth certificate in the absence of an attestation from a midwife. She wondered how much a birth certificate cost and how and why the cost was related to the cost of rent. It would also be useful to hear about any measures that were in place to ensure that all eligible persons had access to Eritrean nationality even in the absence of required documentation such as a birth certificate.

19. **Mr. Chophel** (Country Task Force) said that some young offenders were reportedly still sentenced to corporal punishment despite its having been abolished. He would welcome information on the legal status of such punishment and on the measures being taken to eradicate it in all settings, including juvenile detention facilities, as well as an account of the steps taken to raise awareness of alternative forms of discipline.. He wished to know what

steps the authorities were taking to prevent the reportedly widespread use of violence, including sexual violence, against children in the context of national service and military training and to ensure that the perpetrators of such violence were duly prosecuted. The delegation might comment on reports that children in detention, particularly those who had been accused of attempting to avoid military service or flee the country, routinely faced torture and other ill-treatment. He would be grateful for further information on any laws, policies and plans that specifically addressed the eradication of all forms of violence against children, including child abuse, neglect and domestic and sexual violence, as well as for recent data on violence against children and the services in place to prevent such violence and protect children. He would like to know whether there were any confidential, child-friendly and gender-sensitive mechanisms in place for the reporting of violence against children and whether provision was made for compensation for children who had experienced or witnessed violence and for their recovery and social reintegration. Information on any measures in place to protect children in the digital environment would also be welcome.

20. Despite the criminalization, pursuant to Proclamation No. 158/2007, of female genital mutilation, the practice apparently remained widespread, particularly in rural areas. He would therefore welcome an account of the steps being taken to enforce the Proclamation, to prosecute and punish the perpetrators of female genital mutilation and to compensate the victims. He wished to know what measures were in place to enforce the minimum age for marriage, which was 18, and to address the root causes of child marriage, as well as to enforce the prohibition on polygamy.

21. He would appreciate a detailed description of the measures being taken to strengthen efforts to ensure the full realization of the rights of children with disabilities and integrate a human rights-based approach to disability in all laws, policies and programmes. What was being done to guarantee inclusive education for all children and to avoid the routine placement in special schools of children with disabilities, particularly those with visual, hearing, developmental or intellectual impairments?

22. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that she would be interested to learn how parental obligations were shared in the event of divorce, including in respect of child maintenance, legal representation and guardianship. She wondered what steps – for example, helping parents provide appropriate direction and guidance for their children in the exercise of their rights – had been taken to give effect to article 5 of the Convention and what difficulties the State party had encountered in that regard.

23. Although the State party took a deinstitutionalization approach to the issue of children deprived of a family environment, some children, according to its periodic report, lived in group homes. She therefore wished to know what standards of care were applied in such homes and whether they guaranteed the rights of the resident children. Regarding the establishment of a complaints mechanism for the protection of children in alternative care and institutions, she would appreciate information on the number of complaints that had been received, their nature and the authorities' response to them. She wondered whether there were any differences in the care provided by Asmara Childcare Centre and the community-based group homes managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. It would be interesting to know what proportion of children in alternative or institutional care had disabilities.

24. She would be grateful for an explanation of the term "volunteer adoptive parents", which appeared in paragraph 97 of the periodic report. She would also like to know whether the State party had a national legal framework on adoption, whether intercountry adoption was permitted and, if so, under what laws. It would be useful to know, too, whether Eritrea planned to ratify the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption, the Hague Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Cooperation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children and the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. It would also be interesting to know what legal provisions the State party applied in the event of the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad. Furthermore, she wished to know how many children in the State party were living in prison with their mothers and whether the Government had considered alternatives to prison for pregnant women and women with children, such as house arrest or police supervision.

The meeting was suspended at 3.45 p.m. and resumed at 4.10 p.m.

25. **A representative of Eritrea**, noting that his country's mechanism for coordinating efforts to ensure that the rights of children and women were promoted and protected had been strengthened in recent years, said that the central Government had a steering committee – formed of representatives of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the National Union of Eritrean Women – and a technical committee of experts. Those committees worked with numerous stakeholders at the regional and subregional levels, including administrative authorities, the judiciary, law enforcement, religious leaders and civil society organizations. Children had been invited to participate in subregional administrations in order to ensure the protection of their rights. In view of the State's meagre resources, the Government did not set aside a budget for coordination bodies.

26. The Transitional Civil Code and the Transitional Penal Code, which remained in force, were in conformity with the Convention. The legal codes adopted in 2015 had not yet entered into force, as the Government was of the opinion that further awareness-raising was necessary. No timeline had been established for implementing the new codes, but the Government recognized that doing so would be beneficial when the time was ripe. A new constitution was currently not seen as a priority, as the Government was focused on national security and resolving external security issues in the Horn of Africa.

27. The Comprehensive National Policy for Children, which had been prepared with the participation of governmental institutions, civil society organizations, families and children themselves, had been discussed in workshops and accepted by stakeholders; the public had been sensitized to the rights and obligations of children set forth therein. It was hoped that the Policy would be reviewed within the next three to five years. The Government currently had no plans to formulate a new policy for children.

28. His country's periodic reports were made available to communities, civil society organizations, State bodies and United Nations agencies operating in the country. The Convention had been translated into five local languages and publicized in the media and through workshops and seminars.

29. Eritrea had a budget for child protection, which had been essential to its success in ensuring the rights of women and children – for example, in the area of combating female genital mutilation. Child protection efforts also owed much to the financial support and expertise provided by partners, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organization. State spending in areas such as education, health and social services, in line with the Government's focus on social justice, was particularly beneficial to children. For example, the State provided free education for all, from the primary to the tertiary levels. People who could not afford the minimum payment for health services could still receive treatment if they proved that they did not have the means to pay.

30. Both Asmara Childcare Centre and the community-based group homes were managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. In the event that a member of the public reported an abandoned infant, the police would gather all relevant information and take the infant to a nearby health clinic. The infant would then be taken to Asmara Childcare Centre, where he or she would be looked after. If the police were unable to trace the child's family, he or she might be adopted or placed in foster care. Families that applied to adopt a child or take a child into foster care were required to undergo assessment and meet criteria relating to their age, health and economic status. The child would remain in the care of the State until the adoption was legally confirmed and approved by the competent court.

31. The Government was aware of its capacity to implement international conventions and was satisfied with the number of African and international instruments that Eritrea had ratified. In addition to the Convention, Eritrea had ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

32. Children living in prison with their mothers were not incarcerated. Children whose mothers had been detained were supposed to remain with their relatives; however, some mothers were unwilling to leave their children with members of their extended family. In such circumstances, children were able to attend a school close to the prison or rehabilitation

centre. In fact, such schools provided academic and vocational opportunities for all persons in prison, including adults.

33. As the Committee had correctly surmised, the Government favoured a community-based approach over institutionalization when dealing with children deprived of a family environment. Such an approach recognized both the importance of the extended family in Eritrean culture and the need for the psychosocial healing of the child, which outweighed economic considerations.

34. The Government continued to strive to improve data collection. The Ministry of Local Government had established a department for statistical and geographic data collection, which was expected to strengthen unified statistical data across the social and economic spectrum. At the same time, ministries and civil society organizations had been making efforts to introduce information management systems. In particular, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, with the technical support of UNICEF, was working to establish a child and social protection information management system. By thus upgrading its systems, Eritrea would be in a position to provide the Committee with data beyond those that were currently available.

35. **A representative of Eritrea** said that Eritrea prioritized a balanced approach to the freedoms of expression, participation and information that aligned with its national policies and cultural values. Children were able to exercise their right to freedom of expression through the media. Public media outlets were designed to serve the greater good, providing educational content for children and families. Eritrean Television, the State-owned television channel, broadcast globally and offered three weekly children's programmes. Radio programmes broadcast in multiple languages provided academic, cultural and ethical content for children during accessible weekend hours. The Tigrigna print daily *Haddas Eritrea* featured a regular weekly column dedicated to children, which covered fables, ethical issues and educational topics. The Ministry of Information did not censor content unless it promoted discrimination or violence or was defamatory.

36. Private initiatives to expand broadband Internet access for education and communication were currently under way. At the moment, Internet access was provided mostly by Internet cafés, which were regulated to prevent access to exploitative or inappropriate content and thus ensure the protection of children and the community. Violations of the regulations resulted in severe penalties, such as the withdrawal of licences. Under the Government's policy on information and communications technology in education, measures had been adopted to safeguard children's rights and privacy online, and teacher training courses on the use of information and communications technology had been provided. A digital library had been set up at the national level to provide educational institutions of all levels with access to the resources needed by students and teachers.

37. Freedom of religion and protection against faith-based discrimination were enshrined in law, including Eritrean Nationality Proclamation No. 21/1992. As had been stated many times previously, the issues faced by Jehovah's Witnesses stemmed from their failure to fulfil their civic obligations, not from their religion.

38. Polygamy was a criminal offence, and the Government ran regular educational and awareness-raising campaigns to promote gender equality and shared family responsibilities. Education was considered a key strategy for addressing polygamy and related traditional practices such as early and arranged marriage.

39. Robust measures were in place to control border flows and combat trafficking in persons. Allegations of State involvement in such practices were baseless and offensive. The country had engaged in various national, regional and international initiatives and adhered to United Nations and European Union frameworks including the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Trafficking Protocol.

40. Sexual harassment, violence and exploitation were not tolerated under customary law, and the codified prohibitions of such behaviour had been reinforced. Any incidents that did occur were appropriately addressed through established reporting, protection and accountability mechanisms, including the courts. Reporting and monitoring mechanisms were also in place to protect the dignity of women engaged in military service.

41. Birth, death and marriage registration was compulsory under the Transitional Civil Code, and failure to make a declaration within established time limits was an offence. Registration systems were managed by the local administration, and every child was assigned a registration number in his or her village or town of birth. Registration fees, which were less than US$ 10, were not in any way linked to the cost of rent; more precise details could be provided subsequently in writing. Over 90 per cent of births in the country's Central Region were currently registered, and registration rates were rising steadily in most areas. To harmonize and consolidate the systems, a three-day review involving the six regional administrations, the National Statistics Office, ministerial representatives and other stakeholders had recently been conducted during which practical challenges and gaps to be addressed had been identified. The Government was now working to implement the resulting recommendations.

42. **A representative of Eritrea**, reiterating her Government's long-established position regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, which, as noted in the periodic report (CRC/C/ERI/5-6, para. 45), was rooted in cultural and societal values that had historically emphasized heterosexuality, said that the country had not been widely exposed to the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. Concerns raised about stigmatization and discrimination were thus speculative and disconnected from the reality on the ground. While respecting international dialogue, the Government was committed to upholding traditional values and societal norms, and any discussion regarding cultural change must take account of the importance of those values for Eritrean society.

43. Allegations that the traditional livelihoods of minority ethnic groups, including the Afar and the Kunama peoples, were being eroded were misleading and inaccurate. The Government worked consistently to safeguard the rights of ethnic groups and preserve traditional ways of life, striving to protect the well-being of all communities equally. If not all communities developed at the same pace, the disparity was primarily due to such factors as geographical remoteness and access to resources, not ethnic discrimination. Those factors were being addressed through affirmative action and educational programmes tailored to the needs of nomadic and hard-to-reach communities. In a region often marked by division, Eritrea was a prime example of religious and ethnic unity and harmony.

44. **A representative of Eritrea** said that the traditional adage that it took a village to raise a child still had resonance in Eritrea, where children, who were revered, were still able to play outdoors without fear of abduction or violence. Laws and regulations had simply codified an existing child-friendly culture, while prohibiting any harmful practices.

45. As the country moved towards a more inclusive system of social justice, there was a clear need to protect the rights of communities that might historically have been marginalized because they were hard to reach. For that reason, the Government's development strategy placed rural needs above urban needs, giving priority to those who lived in remote areas and striving to leave no one behind. It was in part as a result of that strategy that Eritrea, in what was an otherwise volatile region, enjoyed internal stability and peace.

46. Poverty eradication and inclusive sustainable development were of the utmost priority in all government policies, and a participatory, people-centred approach was favoured, creating a sense of community ownership in all processes of change. That approach had led to many achievements, including in respect of nearly all the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite facing formidable existential threats, including unwarranted, illegal sanctions intended to destabilize and isolate it, Eritrea remained resilient, committed to self-reliance yet open to equal partnerships, dignified engagement and dialogue.

47. As stipulated in Proclamation No. 82/1995, the requirement to complete national service applied only to persons over 18 years old. Accordingly, military service could never be a reason for children to flee the country.

48. **A representative of Eritrea** said that all administrative fees levied in Eritrea, including fees to obtain identification documents or health and education certificates, were nominal. To obtain a national identity card on reaching the age of 18, for example, the fee was less than 150 nakfa, equal to around US$ 10. Based on the findings of the registration system review mentioned earlier, the Ministry of Local Government had joined forces with relevant stakeholders to develop a strategic plan aimed at guaranteeing an effective and

efficient system in both urban and rural areas, reliable statistics and greater public awareness of registration procedures. The plan set an ambitious 90 per cent national target for registration in 2028 and, to achieve that goal, envisaged the engagement of healthcare professionals, religious leaders and justice and local government officials. The establishment of a central agency to oversee the system was under consideration.

49. **A representative of Eritrea** said that there were many national NGOs operating cost effectively in Eritrea, including the National Union of Eritrean Women, the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers and National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students. Aside from United Nations agencies and programmes such as UNDP and UNICEF, international NGOs were not represented. Their programmes were not considered cost effective, and they were not perceived to add value to what national NGOs already offered. The Government remained open to contacts with international NGOs nonetheless, and it would review its position should the need arise.

50. **A representative of Eritrea**, recalling her childhood during the occupation and conflict, said that, even at that time, despite very limited resources, respect for the rights of the child had been a priority. Since liberation, the importance of those rights and the principle of the best interests of the child, which had always been paramount, had been formally recognized through the ratification of the Convention without reservations. All children could attend school free from the security threats that prevented attendance in some other countries. Challenges certainly remained, but the Government would continue making efforts to guarantee unity in diversity, peace and security and self-reliant development.

51. **Mr. Chophel**, acknowledging the Government's efforts, said that there were nonetheless persistent concerns about two issues in respect of which the Committee had insufficient information to convince it that substantive progress had been made. Through Proclamations No. 2/1991 and No. 158/2007, respectively, the State party had acknowledged the continued practice of child marriage and female genital mutilation, but it was unclear whether the Proclamations had led to improvement. A detailed description of the State party's efforts to ensure that their provisions were respected was thus needed. Information on measures taken to promote online safety for children and mitigate digital risks would also be welcome.

52. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that she wished to know how the coexistence of traditional, customary and civil legal systems in Eritrea affected the establishment of proper child support arrangements in cases of parental divorce. Specifically, she wondered whether there were mechanisms to guarantee child support if a parent failed to pay. She wondered, too, how traditional marriages were registered and how the corresponding obligations towards children were shared. Moreover, since adoption was not generally recognized in Islamic family law, she wished to know how the adoption of Muslim children was handled in Eritrea and whether the Government authorized the Islamic practice of *kafalah*. What legal guarantees were in place to ensure that adoption decisions were made in the child's best interests and in compliance with the law, whether traditional, customary or civil?

53. **Ms. Aho** said that she wished to know what tangible measures had been taken to prevent discrimination against children of Jehovah's Witnesses in schools, in application of existing anti-discrimination laws. She would welcome information on mechanisms in place to ensure that children whose births were not registered immediately were able to obtain birth certificates. She also wished to know whether all children whose births were registered had access to nationality documents.

54. **Ms. Otani** said that, while she understood that the Government invested in children, understanding which parts of the budget contributed to child welfare and upholding children's rights under the Convention was crucial. Her previous questions about the root causes of youth emigration had not been about national service per se; she had been seeking instead to understand the factors driving children and young people to leave the country, including potential coercion and trafficking. She wondered whether the troubling delay in implementing fundamental laws on civil and criminal courts adopted in 2015, which had led to a continued reliance on traditional courts, created confusion or challenges.

55. **Mr. Jaffé** said that, as birth registration was compulsory and failure to comply could trigger criminal charges against doctors, civil servants or parents, he would welcome data on

how often such procedures were initiated and against whom. As homosexuality was outlawed in Eritrea, he would be grateful, too, for clarification as to whether the prohibition applied equally to adults and minors and for an explanation of the usual course of action against minors who engaged in homosexual behaviour. He would also appreciate data on the number of children who had been affected by the prohibition of homosexuality.

56. **Ms. Aho** said that she wished to know what measures were taken to ensure access to healthcare for vulnerable rural populations. She would appreciate information on policies and strategies to raise awareness around breastfeeding and on access to information on sexual and reproductive health, contraception and preventing early pregnancies. She also wished to learn more about mental healthcare facilities, in particular whether children, adolescents and adults were housed separately and whether there were adequate numbers of qualified mental health personnel. She would be grateful for information on drug regulations, prevention measures and how young people were protected from drug use. She would be interested, too, in information about HIV/AIDS care centres in rural areas, the general national HIV prevalence rate and efforts to educate young people about the disease, as well as about the support in place for children living with or orphaned by HIV/AIDS.

57. She wished to know how the State party addressed natural disaster risks, whether children were involved in disaster prevention planning or informed about it in schools and how the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 was implemented. Lastly, she would appreciate information about anti-poverty policies, particularly for rural populations.

58. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that she would be interested to learn about the legal framework guaranteeing access to free compulsory education and measures to improve access to pre-primary education, especially for vulnerable children in rural areas, and to enhance school infrastructure, learning environments and teacher training at the pre-primary level. She wished to know about steps taken to ensure that education was truly free by addressing hidden costs such as those for school supplies and uniforms. She also wondered what the State party had done to mitigate disparities in access to education from one region to another, improve the quality of education and address overcrowded classrooms by reducing student–teacher ratios. It would be useful to receive information about measures taken to improve teacher training in general and conduct evaluations of educational quality, as well as an explanation of the way such evaluations were acted upon. In view of challenges such as early marriage, pregnancy, long travel distances and the risk of sexual violence, she would be interested to learn more about measures to reduce school dropout rates, particularly at the secondary level and among girls. In that regard, she wondered whether the Government planned to review the practice of mandatory national service to prevent children from dropping out of school to avoid it. It would be useful to learn whether human rights education had been or would be introduced into school curricula and what efforts were made to ensure that children with disabilities, vulnerable children and poor children had access to cultural activities, leisure and sports.

59. **Ms. Otani** said that the Committee remained concerned about the adequacy of legal protections against child labour under Labour Proclamation No. 118/2001 and the Transitional Penal Code, particularly regarding the worst forms of child labour and hazardous work and children in informal employment, and would appreciate clarification in that regard. While the Government denied the existence of compulsory child labour, she would be grateful for the delegation's comments on reports that such practices in fact existed, particularly in agriculture. She also wished to learn more about the services available to child victims of labour exploitation. She would welcome updates on the living conditions of children formerly in street situations and the results of efforts to reintegrate them with their families or place them in alternative care, as well as clarification regarding the apparent lack of disaggregated data on child victims of trafficking in persons; in particular, she wished to know whether data on trafficking cases existed but were not broken down by age or whether no cases involving children had been reported.

60. She wondered whether she had understood correctly that the age of criminal responsibility was currently 9 under the Transitional Penal Code. She wondered, too, about the age range for the special procedures applicable to young offenders under the Transitional Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code, as the Transitional Penal Code reportedly

treated children over the age of 15 as adults. She would welcome information on detention conditions for children, including in relation to overcrowding, sanitation and access to basic services, and wished to know whether free legal assistance was available for child defendants. She also wondered whether the State party planned to establish specialized child court facilities and procedures.

61. She would appreciate further information on the Sawa Education and Training Centre and wished to know whether national service included military training and whether persons under the age of 18 could be required to undertake it. It would be useful, too, to receive detailed information on the measures in place to prevent underage conscription. In addition, she wondered whether the Government would allow an independent United Nations investigation into underage conscription, about which the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights the Eritrea had expressed concern in 2023 and 2024, and whether there were mechanisms to support child victims of underage conscription or other rights violations who entered Eritrea from war zones. Lastly, she wished to remind the State party of its obligation to submit an initial report under the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.