

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs

Hearing of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under the International Convention on the Rights of the Child

INTRODUCTION

This paper informs Members of the proceedings of the hearing of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (“the Committee”) on the Report (“the Report”) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (“the HKSAR”) under the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (“the Convention”), as well as the Concluding Observations made by the Committee after the hearing.

THE HEARING

2. The Committee considered the second report of the People’s Republic of China (including the HKSAR and the Macau Special Administrative Region) on 19 and 20 September 2005 in Geneva, Switzerland. The Hong Kong team, which was part of the Chinese delegation, was led by a Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs. The team comprised 6 other officials from the Home Affairs Bureau, the Department of Justice, the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau and the Education and Manpower Bureau. The opening statement and the concluding remarks of the leader of the Hong Kong team are at Annexes A and B respectively.

3. The hearing proceeded by clusters of articles of the Convention. Questions were asked and comments made in respect of each cluster. Major comments of the Committee Members, as well as the HKSAR team’s response, are set out as follows –

(a) Comment

Hong Kong should adopt a holistic and comprehensive approach towards policy-making with regard to matters relating to children; the Government should set up a Children’s Commission with broad

authority, and enact a single piece of legislation to protect children's rights.

Response

The HKSAR Government does have holistic policies on children's rights and well-being, but administratively the policies are divided among various bureaux and departments, which support and complement one another to ensure that the policies under their respective purviews have taken into account the best interest of the child. We consider this arrangement effective and have no immediate plans of changing it;

The HKSAR Government is also examining at the possibility of setting up a Children's Commission, and the various issues involved, such as the need to restructure the Commission of Youth which covers those who fall within the definition of children, as well as the proposal's funding and human resources implications. While these are being considered, the Government will establish a Children's Rights Forum as an interim measure to provide a forum for exchanging views on relevant subjects among children rights NGOs, children representatives and the Government.

(b) Comment

Hong Kong should adopt the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

Response

Both the sale of children and child prostitution are illegal in the HKSAR, and we already have very strong protection for children in that regard. That said, we have every intention to have the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography applied to Hong Kong, but before we can achieve that, we need to bring our existing laws in line with the provisions of the Protocol. We have completed the necessary research on this matter. We would expect to see Hong Kong's adoption of the Protocol soon.

(c) **Comment**

Access for disabled children to facilities and public places should be improved.

Response

The Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123) has stipulated obligatory requirements for building-design to incorporate access for people with disabilities for new buildings. We do have some problems with historical buildings.

(d) **Comment**

Education for minority children should be enhanced to cater for their special needs.

Response

The Government has always provided places for ethnic minority children in special schools where English is the principal medium of teaching. Since the last academic year, the Government has implemented a policy of integrating ethnic minority children into mainstream Chinese schools. Parents can choose to enroll their children into Chinese-medium schools. The Home Affairs Bureau complements this policy with other support services, including an After-School Support Service which offers tutorial classes to help the children keep up with their studies in a language other than their mother tongue. The programme also includes a support service for parents to help them in supervising their children's homework.

(e) **Comment**

The problem of bullying in schools should be dealt with seriously.

Response

The Government has a zero-tolerance policy towards bullying in schools. Upon receipt of reports of such incidents, educational psychologists and school development officers will visit the schools in question and provide consultation and follow-up services as appropriate. The Education and Manpower Bureau has also strengthened the existing curriculum with topics on life education to enhance student's abilities in dealing with their emotions and

cultivate positive values. In addition, efforts have also been made to help schools and parents to manage the problem: the Education and Manpower Bureau has produced resource packages and leaflets on the development of a harmonious environment in schools, and held seminars and workshops on anti-bullying.

(f) **Comment**

Children's views should be heard and taken into consideration.

Response

At present there are a number of channels through which children can expressed their opinions on Government policies and other subjects of public interests. Examples include the highly successful Children's Council funded partly by the Government and organized by three of our NGOs specializing in children's rights, the District Youth Councils, the Junior Chief Executive project organized by the Hong Kong Boys' and Girls' Association, as well as this newly established Children's Rights Forum. The Government will continue to listen to the views of children and take them into account when making policy decisions.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

4. The Concluding Observations of the Committee were issued on 30 September 2005. They contain the Committee's comments and recommendations on the implementation of the Convention in China (including the Mainland, Hong Kong and Macau). A copy is at Annex C for Members' information.

5. We are now studying the various recommendations therein with a view to further improving the Government's work in protecting children's rights, and will provide the Committee with a full response in our second report, which is due for submission by 31 March 2009 as part of China's combined third and fourth report.

**Home Affairs Bureau
October 2005**

Annex A

Opening statement by Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs
at United Nations hearing on child's rights

Mr Chairman, distinguished Members,

I am grateful to you and to Ambassador Sha for the opportunity to introduce our report. I would first like to introduce my team.

Our delegation comprises representatives of the policy bureaux that are responsible for the policy issues with which we believe the Committee is most likely to be concerned.

As Deputy Secretary of the bureau whose mandate includes human rights, I have the honour to lead the team. Other team members are:

- Mr Stephen Wong, Deputy Solicitor General, and Mr Godfrey Kan from the Department of Justice;
- Ms Linda Lai, Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food;
- Ms Michelle Wong, Principal Education Officer; and
- Finally, my Home Affairs Bureau colleagues, Ms Amy Yeung, and Ms Cynthia Tong.

Major issues of concern

I am aware that the Committee intends to focus in this hearing on the questions that it sent to us in June this year. I would like to take this opportunity to address a few of the issues that I know to be of major concern to Members. In that regard, I propose to start with the question of child poverty.

Child poverty

I am pleased to be able to tell you that, in January this year, we announced the establishment of a Commission on

Poverty. Its terms of reference are to:

- study and identify the needs of the poor;
- make policy recommendations to prevent and alleviate poverty and promote self-reliance; and
- encourage community engagement, delineate responsibility between the Government, the social welfare sector and community organisations, foster public-private partnerships, and mobilise social capital in alleviating poverty.

The Commission has agreed that children and young people are to rank among its top priorities and that they should be the focus of their immediate work programme.

Mr Chairman, we in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) attach the greatest importance to the well-being of children, especially those with special needs. Our policy is to ensure that the healthy and balanced development of our children is not compromised by their families' financial position. To that end, government agencies provide such services as child care, comprehensive disease prevention and health promotion, and other support services. Children with special needs, such as those with physical or behavioural problems, receive special treatment. Additionally, as the Committee is aware, we provide nine years of free and universal education and highly subsidised education at the higher levels.

We have given details of these services in our report, and I take this opportunity to inform the Committee of a recent initiative in the important area of early childhood development. This is the 'Comprehensive Child Development Service' for children from birth to the age of five, which we announced earlier this year. Currently at the pilot stage, the service is an integrated, community-based programme, involving inter-sectoral and multi-disciplinary collaboration among Government departments and relevant agencies to augment the services provided by the Maternal and

Child Health Centres, which we discussed in our report. It ensures better alignment of the delivery of health, education, and social services to ensure the early identification of children's special needs and those of their families. Together, these things help to ensure that appropriate services can be made available to them in a timely manner.

A Children's Commission

I now turn to the question of an independent monitoring mechanism for children's rights, which we in the HKSAR generally think of as meaning a Children's Commission. This is, of course, a question that the Committee raised in its 1996 concluding observations and again under item B1 of the list of issues. In both cases, we said that we were not entirely convinced that such an institution offered any advantages over the systems already in place. But we undertook to review our position and I take the opportunity to inform the Committee of the state of progress.

The review is now underway, but it will take some time before a decision is reached. Pending that decision, we have decided, as an interim measure, to establish a Children's Rights Forum to provide a regular and formal platform for the discussion of matters concerning children's rights. Membership will comprise children's representative, NGOs, and Government officials. As a complementary measure, we will initiate a pilot 'Children's Rights Education Funding Scheme' for funding public education projects on children's rights in the 2006-07 financial year. These measures will make for direct interface between the Government, children and the organisations that serve them and will help to increase public awareness of the Convention and the rights it protects. They may not go so far as some of our interlocutors would like. But they will ensure that there is progress and no loss of momentum pending a decision on a Children's Commission.

The Optional Protocol

Another question that I am sure the Committee will wish us to address is why the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography does not yet apply to Hong Kong. I wish to assure Members that we have every intention that the Protocol should so apply. The reason why this is not yet done is a technical one: essentially Hong Kong is a common law jurisdiction and for a treaty to take effect in our domestic law, it is necessary that we either enact specific legislation for that purpose, or amend existing laws so as to bring them into line with the provisions of the treaty. As it happens, our laws conform quite closely to the provisions of the Protocol, particularly since the enactment, in 2003, of the Prevention of Child Pornography Ordinance. However there are still some gaps and minor differences.

Given that the differences are small, it was tempting to consider seeking accession first with a view to amending our laws later. But Articles 26 and 27 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties provide that every treaty in force is binding upon the parties to it and must be performed in good faith. As a party may not invoke the provisions of its internal law as justification for its failure to perform a treaty. So common law jurisdictions generally aim to having the requisite legislation in place prior to agreeing to be bound by a treaty. We have completed the necessary research and have initiated the law drafting process.

Both the sale of children and child prostitution are illegal in the HKSAR and, as far as we know, non-existent. We also have specific legislation in place to prohibit child pornography and child sex tourism. As things now stand, we already have very strong protections for children. The gaps between our laws and the requirements of the Protocol are, as I have said, of a technical nature. I wish to reassure the Committee that we are working steadily towards the eventual application of the Protocol to the HKSAR.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Mr Chairman, I wish to affirm our total commitment to the Convention. My team and I are ready to answer any questions the Committee may wish to ask.

Thank you.

Annex B

Concluding statement by Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs at
United Nations hearing on child rights

Mr Chairman, distinguished Members,

I would like to thank you and Ambassador Sha for the opportunity to introduce our report and to exchange views with Members on children's rights issues concerning the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China.

We in the HKSAR attach the greatest importance to the well-being of children. Our children are our future. The best interests of the child will be our general and guiding principle in all matters relating to the welfare and development of children.

We have a vibrant civil society in the HKSAR. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working for the promotion of children's rights are particularly active. A few of them are here today. I would like to take this opportunity to thank children's rights NGOs in the HKSAR for their dedication and hard work. We work with our friends in the NGOs as partners in promoting the well-being of our children.

To promote dialogue and co-operation between the Government, children and civil society organisations, we will shortly establish a Children's Rights Forum and a funding scheme for the promotion of children's rights education. The forum will provide a platform for discussion between Government officials, children's representatives and members of human rights and children's rights NGOs.

I wish to reassure Members that we have every intention to apply the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography to the HKSAR. We will work

diligently towards that goal.

Mr Chairman, I would like to thank Members for their valuable comments and suggestions on the children's rights situation in the HKSAR. We will carefully consider the advice and recommendations Members have given us.

Finally, I wish to confirm once again our commitment to the Convention.

Thank you.

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Fortieth session

**CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES
PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 44 OF THE CONVENTION**

Concluding observations:

**China (including Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative
Regions)**

1. The Committee considered the second periodic of China (CRC/C/83/Add.9, Parts I and II), submitted on 27 June 2003, at its 1062nd to 1065th meetings (see CRC/C/SR.1062-1065) held on 19 and 20 September 2005, and adopted at the 1080th meeting (CRC/C/SR.1080), held on 30 September 2005, the following concluding observations:

A. Introduction

2. The Committee welcomes the submission of the State party's comprehensive and informative periodic report which consisted of three parts covering the mainland and Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions, as well as the detailed written replies to its list of issues (CRC/C/Q/CHN/2 and Parts I and II), which gave a clearer understanding of the situation of children in the State party. It further notes with appreciation the large high-level, multi-sectoral delegation from the mainland, Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions (SARs).

**B. Follow-up measures undertaken and progress achieved by the State
party**

3. The Committee notes with appreciation the impressive achievements made in reducing poverty which enabled it to attain some of the key Millennium Development Goals ahead of schedule.

4. The Committee welcomes the ratification of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2001.

5. The Committee welcomes the State party's ratification of the 1993 Hague Convention No. 33 on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption on 16 September 2005.

C. Principal subjects of concern and recommendations

1. General measures of implementation (arts. 4, 42 and 44, paragraph 6 of the Convention)

Committee's previous recommendations

6. The Committee notes with appreciation that various concerns and recommendations (CRC/C/15/Add.56 and CRC/C/15/Add.63 with respect to Hong Kong) made upon the consideration of the State party's initial reports (CRC/C/11/Add.7 and CRC/C/11/Add.9 with regard to Hong Kong as a Dependent Territory of the United Kingdom) have been addressed through legislative measures and policies. However, some of the concerns it expressed and recommendations it had made have not been sufficiently addressed. For instance:

- a) with respect to the mainland, the Committee is concerned that there has been limited progress related to recommendations on the establishment of a national human rights institution (CRC/C/15/Add. 56, para. 26) and non-discrimination (CRC/C/15/Add. 56, paras. 34 and 35);
- b) with respect to Hong Kong SAR, the Committee takes note of the State party's explanation that the Committee's previous recommendations on coordination and assessment (CRC/C/15/Add.63, para. 20) were not considered practical. Nevertheless the Committee remains of the opinion that national legislation and policy must take a holistic and comprehensive approach to the implementation of the Convention, which requires that priority be given to children's issues, such policy be actively coordinated and assessments be made regarding the potential impact of policy decisions on children.

7. The Committee urges the State party to make every effort to address the recommendations issued in the concluding observations on the

initial reports that have not yet been implemented, and to address the list of concerns contained in the present concluding observations on the second periodic report.

Reservations and declarations

8. The Committee welcomes the withdrawal of the State party's reservation to article 22 as applied to Hong Kong SAR. However, it regrets that reservations remain with regard to article 6 and are applied to the entire State party, and that for Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions reservations with respect to articles 32 and 37 (c) remain in force.

9. The Committee recommends that the State party review and withdraw all reservations to the Convention for all areas under its jurisdiction.

Legislation

10. While welcoming the significant progress made with respect to legislative reform in mainland China, the Committee is concerned that not all laws applicable to children fully conform to the Convention.

11. The Committee recommends that in the mainland, the State party continue to review legislation to ensure full conformity with the principles and provisions of the Convention, as highlighted in paragraphs 33, 40, 45, 48, 53, 82, 93-94 of these concluding observations, and paragraphs 11 and 13 of the Committee's concluding observations on the initial report under the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRC/OPSA/CO/2).

Coordination and a National Plan of Action

12. The Committee notes with appreciation the elaboration of a second National Plan of Action, the National Children's Development Programme (2001-2010) for the mainland, and also takes note of the growing number of committees and working groups at the state, regional and county levels to monitor and implement child rights. However, it is concerned that coordination is fragmented and implementation of the Programme is not uniform across all regions and localities in the mainland and that coordination of implementation at local and regional levels is sometimes insufficient.

13. As noted in above in para. 6 (b), the Committee is concerned at the

lack of a comprehensive Plan of Action for the implementation of the Convention in Hong Kong SAR and that the coordination of existing programmes and policies is rather sectoral and fragmented. The Committee notes the information provided by the delegates of Macau SAR that a comprehensive Plan of Action is under discussion.

14. The Committee recommends that in the mainland, the State party further strengthen the coordination between the bodies and institutions working on the implementation of the National Children's Development Programme (2001-2010) at all levels in order to ensure uniform implementation in all regions and provinces.

15. The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation that in Hong Kong SAR, the State party improve the coordination of its activities on the implementation of the Convention by developing and implementing a Plan of Action for Hong Kong SAR. The Committee recommends that in Macau SAR, the State party expedite its discussions in this regard and elaborate and implement a comprehensive Plan of Action for Macau SAR.

Independent monitoring

16. The Committee notes the information that various ministries in the mainland may receive complaints from the public, but it is concerned at the lack of an independent national human rights institution with a clear mandate to monitor the implementation of the Convention. It similarly regrets the absence of an independent national human rights institution with a specific mandate on child rights in the mainland and Hong Kong and Macau SARs.

17. The Committee recommends that the State party establish, in the mainland, Hong Kong and Macau SARs respectively, a national human rights institution which includes a clear mandate for the monitoring of children's rights and the implementation of the Convention at national, regional and local levels and in accordance with the Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions (The Paris Principles) contained in General Assembly resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993. While drawing the State party's attention to the Committee's General Comment No. 2 (2002) on the role of independent national human rights institutions, the Committee notes that such institutions should have a mandate to receive, investigate and address complaints from the public, including individual children, and be provided with adequate financial, human and material resources. In the case of Hong Kong SAR, such an institution could be a specialized branch of the existing Ombudsman's office.

Allocation of resources

18. The Committee commends the State party for the significant increases in budgetary resources allocated, in the mainland, to compulsory education, maternal and child health care, social relief and to anti-trafficking programmes in recent years, but remains concerned that some crucial areas, such as education, continue to be under-funded. While it notes the significant resources allocated to the development of poorer regions, it remains concerned that those resources still need to adequately target the most vulnerable groups.

19. The Committee is concerned that in Hong Kong SAR insufficient resources are allocated to reduce poverty and that income disparities are increasing within the population. It is concerned that social welfare schemes, which were reduced as a result of the economic hardship of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, have not been positively readjusted as the economy has regained its momentum.

20. The Committee recommends that in the mainland, the State party ensure that its budgetary allocations to key areas for children, in particular health and education, keep pace with increases in Government revenue. It further recommends that the State party develop an adequate monitoring system to ensure that budgetary allocations are effectively reaching the most vulnerable groups and reducing regional disparities, in particular between rural and urban areas and eastern and western provinces.

21. The Committee recommends that in Hong Kong SAR, budget allocations are targeted towards reducing income disparities, including through increased funding for social safety nets. It also recommends that an adequate monitoring system be established in order to ensure that budgetary allocations benefit the most vulnerable populations.

Data collection

22. The Committee welcomes the State party's efforts to improve its collection of statistical data in all parts of the State party and notes with appreciation the information provided by the delegation that a new mechanism for the collection of disaggregated data will soon be established in the mainland. However, the Committee remains concerned about the limited public accessibility to reliable and comprehensive statistical data in the mainland on all areas covered by the Convention.

23. The Committee recommends that the State party further strengthen its efforts to collect reliable and comprehensive statistical data on all areas covered by the Convention and ensure that such data is systematically made available to the public in a timely manner in all parts of the State party. It further recommends that the State party explore the development of central databanks on children's statistics for the mainland and the Special Administrative Regions respectively, so as to ensure that statistical data is used for the development, implementation and monitoring of appropriate policies and programmes for children.

Dissemination of the Convention

24. The Committee notes that the Convention has been translated into the main minority languages used within the State party. However it is concerned that professionals working with and for children, as well as children and parents themselves, have limited awareness and understanding of the Convention in Hong Kong SAR and the mainland.

25. The Committee recommends that the State party, in all areas under its jurisdiction:

- a) further strengthen its efforts to disseminate the Convention in all languages, and also through the use of child-friendly materials and school curricula;
- b) expand its programmes to sensitize parents and children about the Convention; and
- c) increase its efforts to provide adequate and systematic training on children's rights for professional groups working with and for children.

Cooperation with civil society

26. The Committee notes the information that in mainland China, non-governmental organizations are becoming increasingly active, but it is concerned that the space given to them and the scope of their activities remain very limited.

27. The Committee recommends that in mainland China, the State party facilitate and encourage the independence and expansion of activities by non-governmental organizations, in particular those working for the promotion and protection of child rights inter alia by ensuring their free and active involvement in the implementation of the Convention, including in the

preparation of reports and the implementation of the Committee's concluding observations and recommendations.

2. General principles (arts. 2, 3, 6 and 12 of the Convention)

Right to life

28. The Committee notes with satisfaction the legal measures enacted to prohibit selective abortions and infanticide in mainland China. Nevertheless it remains concerned that selective abortions and infanticide as well as the abandonment of children, in particular girls and children with disabilities, continue to be a negative consequence of existing family planning policies and societal attitudes.

29. The Committee urges the State party to continue and strengthen its efforts to guarantee the right to life, survival and development of all children in its territory. It recommends that the State party strengthen its implementation of existing laws against selective abortions and infanticide, and to take all necessary measures to eliminate any negative consequences arising from family planning policies, including abandonment and non-registration of children and imbalanced sex ratios at birth.

Non-discrimination

30. While noting efforts by the State party to address the Committee's previous concerns related to discrimination, it remains concerned about discrimination against certain groups in the mainland, such as girls; children infected with or affected by HIV/AIDs; children with disabilities; ethnic and religious minorities, such as Tibetan, Uighur and Hui children; and internal migrant children.

31. The Committee is concerned about the persistence of discrimination against refugee, asylum-seeking and undocumented migrant children in Hong Kong SAR, and the lack of legislation specifically prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race or sexual orientation. The Committee regrets the lack of available information on the practical implementation of art. 2 of the Convention in Macau SAR.

32. The Committee recommends that in the mainland the State party strengthen efforts to eliminate discrimination against girls, children infected with or affected by HIV/AIDs, children with disabilities, Tibetan, Uighur and Hui children and other ethnic and religious minority children, internal

migrant children and other vulnerable groups by:

- a) ensuring equal access to basic services for these children, including health, education and other social services, and that services used by these children are allocated sufficient financial and human resources;
- b) enhance monitoring of programmes and services implemented by local authorities with a view to identifying and eliminating disparities.

33. The Committee recommends that in Hong Kong SAR the State party expedite its efforts to draft and adopt legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race or sexual orientation. The Committee requests that in its next periodic report specific information be included on the practical implementation of art. 2 in Macau SAR.

34. The Committee requests that specific information be included in the next periodic report on the measures and programs relevant to the Convention on the Rights of the Child undertaken by the State party to follow up on the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and taking account of Committee's General Comment No. 1 on the aims of education (2001).

Best interests of the child

35. The Committee is concerned about the limited information provided by the State party in all areas under its jurisdiction on how the principle of the best interests of the child is taken as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children.

36. The Committee urges the State party to include in its next periodic report more detailed information on the implementation of article 3 and on how it ensures that the best interests of the child is taken as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children.

Respect for the views of the child

37. The Committee notes with concern that in mainland China children are not able to file complaints in court or be consulted directly by the courts without parental consent, except in the case of children 16 years or older who earn their own livelihood. It regrets the limited amount of information provided on the representation of students in schools and how their views are

taken into account.

38. The Committee notes with appreciation the efforts made by the State party in Hong Kong to support organizations representing children, such as the Children's Council Working Committee. However, it remains concerned that children's views are not sought systematically on all policies and programmes affecting them. The Committee regrets the lack of information on the how the views of the child are taken into account in all settings in Macau SAR.

39. In the light of article 12 of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts in the mainland, Hong Kong and Macau SARs, to ensure that children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and have those views be given due weight in policy-making, administrative proceedings, schools and the home. It encourages the State party to provide more detailed information on this issue, with respect to all areas under its jurisdiction, in the next periodic report.

40. Furthermore, the Committee recommends that in the mainland the State party review legislation affecting children with a view to ensuring that they be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceeding affecting them, and that due weight be given to those views in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

41. The Committee recommends that in Hong Kong SAR, the State party systematically ensure active participation of children's organizations when developing policies or programmes affecting them, such as the current education reform. It further encourages the State party to consider establishing a standing body to represent children's views in the political process.

3. Civil rights and freedoms (arts. 7, 8, 13-17, 19 and 37(a) of the Convention)

Birth registration

42. The Committee notes with appreciation the significant efforts taken by the State party to address the Committee's previous concerns regarding the non-registration of children. However, it continues to be concerned that, in part because of existing family planning policies, all children are not systematically registered immediately after birth in mainland China, and that this disproportionately affects girls, children with disabilities and children

born in some rural areas.

43. The Committee recommends that the State party continue to strengthen its efforts to ensure that all children, in particular girls and children with disabilities, are registered immediately after birth and to continue to provide flexible measures to allow older children, who have not been registered to do so throughout mainland China with a particular emphasis on rural areas. It further suggests that the State party consider revising the Hukou system of registration in order to reinforce such initiatives.

Freedom of religion

44. While noting the adoption of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Act in 2001 which guarantees freedom of religion for ethnic minorities in mainland China, the Committee is concerned about reports that children, in particular Tibetan Buddhist, Uighur and Hui children have had restrictions placed on their ability to study and practice their religion and some cases have been detained for participating in religious activities. It is also concerned at reports that children of families practicing their religion, notably the Falun Gong, are subject to harassment, threats and other negative actions including re-education through labour. The Committee notes the information provided about the Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, but remains concerned that it has not yet been possible to have this information confirmed by an independent expert.

45. The Committee recommends that the State party take all necessary measures to ensure the full implementation of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Act. In particular, the Committee recommends that the State party:

- a) Enact explicit legislation guaranteeing freedom of religion for those under 18, that is not tied to a limited number of recognized faiths, and which respects the rights and duties of parents to give guidance to the child in the exercise of his or her rights in this regard in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child;
- b) Repeal any ban instituted by local authorities on children of any age from participating in Tibetan religious festival or receiving religious education;
- c) Repeal any ban instituted by local authorities on children of any age from attending mosques or receiving religious education throughout the mainland;
- d) Take all necessary measures to ensure that children may choose whether to participate in classes on religion or

- atheism;
- e) allow an independent expert to visit and confirm the well-being of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima while respecting his right to privacy, and that of his parents.

Corporal punishment

46. The Committee is concerned that in mainland China the existing regulations banning corporal punishment in schools are unevenly implemented. It is also concerned that corporal punishment is not banned in the home and continues to be socially acceptable.

47. The Committee is concerned that corporal punishment within the family is not prohibited by law and continues to be practiced in the home in Hong Kong and Macau SARs.

48. The Committee urges the State party, in all areas under its jurisdiction, to:

- a) explicitly prohibit by law corporal punishment in the family, schools, institutions and all other settings, including penal institutions; and,
- b) expand public education and awareness-raising campaigns with the involvement of children on alternative non-violent forms of discipline in order to change public attitudes about corporal punishment.

4. Family environment and alternative care (arts. 5, 18 (paras. 1-2), 9-11, 19-21, 25, 27 (para. 4) and 39 of the Convention

Children deprived of family environment

49. The Committee welcomes efforts made by the State party, in particular the adoption of the Standards for Social Welfare Institutions for Children in 2001, for the mainland. However, it remains concerned at the significant number of children abandoned within the mainland and the large number of children living in institutions. It regrets the lack of precise statistical data on the number of children entering and leaving such institutions.

50. The Committee is deeply concerned that existing quotas for persons entering Hong Kong and Macau SARs from the mainland and

regulations regarding the right of abode in the Special Administrative Regions contribute to separation of children from their parents and hinder family reunification.

51. The Committee recommends that in mainland China, the State party:

- a) continue its efforts to improve alternative care for children deprived of a family by replicating and expanding successful models such as foster care and domestic adoption throughout the mainland;
- b) develop effective strategies to prevent child abandonment, which include early identification of families and children at risk and the possibility for social workers to intervene and help families directly;
- c) Ensure that children, if transferred to an institution, are integrated into small groups and individually cared for in a family-like environment;
- d) Ensure that all forms of alternative care meet quality standards in conformity with the Convention by establishing an effective monitoring mechanism which includes a periodic review of each placement in accordance with art. 25 and a complaints mechanism accessible to children, and by ensuring that all institutions, programmes and services have properly trained and accredited staff, and;
- e) Ensure that all deaths of children in alternative care are properly documented and investigated, and that appropriate follow-up actions are taken when necessary.

Adoption

52. As noted in para. 5 above, the Committee notes with appreciation the ratification of the 1993 Hague Convention No. 33 on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. However, the Committee regrets the inadequate information available on the number of international adoptions and the number of agencies facilitating such adoptions in the mainland. It is further concerned about the lack of explicit guarantees that children without birth certificates maintain their right to identity throughout the adoption process.

53. The Committee recommends that the State party:

- a) extend the application of the 1993 Hague Convention No. 33 to Hong Kong and Macau SARs as soon as possible;
- b) ensure incorporation of the legal provisions of the 1993 Hague Convention into domestic legislation in the mainland and Hong Kong and Macau SARs;
- c) further strengthen the monitoring of agencies facilitating international adoptions, in particular with regard to possible trafficking of children and the use of fees and donations paid by adopting parents,
- d) enact legislative and administrative measures to guarantee that all children without birth certificates are guaranteed their right to identity throughout the adoption process, and;
- e) educate government officials and other professionals working with children without parental care that adoptions, in particular international adoptions are an exceptional option for alternative care, and that the principles of non-discrimination and the best interests of the child must be taken into account when making such decisions.

Abuse and neglect, maltreatment, violence

54. The Committee is concerned about the limited information available with regard to abuse, neglect and maltreatment of children in mainland China as well as the limited number of programmes available to combat violence and provide assistance to victims.

55. While noting efforts made to increase the number of social workers in Hong Kong SAR, the Committee is concerned that policies and programmes to assist child victims of violence are not fully effective.

56. In all parts of the State party, the Committee recommends that efforts to combat abuse, neglect, violence and maltreatment be strengthened, including through mandatory reporting requirements for staff working with children, such as doctors, teachers and social workers, and the establishment of specific helplines accessible and available to children.

57. With respect to the mainland, the Committee recommends that the State party conduct further research into different forms of violence against children in the home, schools and institutions and use the findings to:

- a) strengthen existing legislation on protection of children from all forms of violence ;

- b) develop strategies and interventions to prevent and combat violence, including through school-based education programmes aimed at raising awareness and skills among children to address different forms of violence, and;
- c) develop programmes to ensure that all child victims of violence receive appropriate assistance relating to care and recovery.

58. With respect to Hong Kong SAR, the Committee recommends that the State party:

- a) Define in a more explicit manner the forms of sexual abuse and increase education and training for professionals working with and for children on the identification, handling and prevention of all forms of abuse;
- b) strengthen coordination and follow-up of individual cases of abuse, neglect and maltreatment and ensure that all victims of any form of abuse, and their families, have access to social services and assistance, and;
- c) ensure handling investigations without any discrimination as to whether the alleged perpetrators are from within or outside the family.

59. In the context of the Secretary-General's ongoing in-depth study on the question of violence against children (A/RES/56/138) and the related questionnaire to Governments, the Committee acknowledges with appreciation the written replies of the State party and the participation of representatives from mainland China and Hong Kong SAR in the Regional Consultation for East Asia and the Pacific held in Thailand from 14 to 16 June 2005. It further appreciates the organization of national level consultations in Beijing from 16 to 17 May 2005. The Committee recommends that the State party use the outcome of this regional consultation as a tool to take action, in partnership with civil society, to ensure the protection of every child from all forms of physical, sexual or mental violence, and to gain momentum for concrete and, where appropriate, time bound actions to prevent and respond to such violence and abuse.

5. Basic health and welfare **(arts. 6, 18 (para. 3), 23, 24, 26, 27 (paras. 1-3) of the Convention**

Children with disabilities

60. With respect to mainland China, the Committee is concerned about:

- a) the lack of specific disaggregated data on children with disabilities;
- b) the narrow definition of disability;
- c) the significant discrepancy in the number of children with disabilities between urban and rural areas, and;
- d) the exception made to the one-child policy, allowing families who have a child with disabilities to have a second child, which promotes de facto discrimination against children with disabilities.

61. The Committee recommends that the State party take into account the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (General Assembly resolution 48/96) and the recommendations adopted by the Committee on its day of general discussion on the rights of children with disabilities (see CRC/C/69) to ensure the implementation of the all the principles and provisions of the Convention for children with disabilities within its jurisdiction. It further recommends that in mainland China, the State party:

- a) strengthen its system of data collection to ensure the availability of precise data on children with disabilities, disaggregated by sex, age, rural or urban areas, living arrangements and type of disability;
- b) establish a definition that adheres to internationally accepted standards, and;
- c) take all necessary measures to eliminate de facto discrimination against children with disabilities, in particular abandonment of such children.

Health and health services

62. While noting the marked improvement in health care indicators, the Committee reiterates its previous concern with regard to existing disparities in the mainland between rural and urban areas, eastern and western provinces and Han and ethnic minorities related to infant and child mortality, nutrition, and other child health indicators. It is also concerned at the persistence of malnutrition as well as the emergence of child obesity and inadequate breastfeeding policies throughout the State party.

63. The Committee recommends that the State party take all necessary

measures to provide universal access to maternal and child health services for all children in its jurisdiction, including for non-registered children. It further urges the State party to develop policies and programmes to adequately address the problems of malnutrition and obesity in children and to promote breastfeeding through strengthening the implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes in all parts of the State party, including the China Code for Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, and through the promotion of Baby Friendly Hospitals in Hong Kong SAR.

Adolescent health

64. The Committee is concerned at the lack of information on adolescent health services available in mainland China and Macau SAR, as well as the high incidence of teenage pregnancies and abortions in Hong Kong SAR.

65. The Committee recommends that in all areas of its jurisdiction, the State party pay close attention to adolescent health and the provision of appropriate adolescent health services, taking into account its General Comment No. 4 (2003) on adolescent health and development in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and strengthen its efforts to promote adolescent health, including sexual and reproductive health education in schools, and to introduce school health services, including youth-sensitive and confidential counseling and care.

Mental health

66. The Committee appreciates the measures taken by the State party in Hong Kong SAR to address the high number of suicides by youth. It remains concerned about the lack of data and information on mental health services available for children in the mainland and Macau SAR, and on tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse.

67. The Committee recommends that in all areas under its jurisdiction, the State party expand preventive and therapeutic mental health services for adolescents and develop programmes to decrease tobacco smoking, alcohol consumption and drug abuse among adolescents, in particular through the development of campaigns specifically designed for adolescents on health-behavioral choices and life skills. It further recommends that in Hong Kong SAR, the State party continue to strengthen its efforts to prevent youth suicide.

HIV/AIDS

68. The Committee welcomes the development of policies and programmes for children infected with, and affected by, HIV/AIDS in mainland China. Yet, the Committee expresses its concern about that implementation of these policies and programmes is insufficient.

69. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its implementation of policies and programmes for children infected with, and affected by, HIV/AIDS in the mainland by:

- a) increasing the financial resources allocated to these programmes;
- b) strengthening cooperation with local authorities to ensure that they are adequately trained and equipped to implement programmes and policies in conformity with the best interest principle of the Convention (art. 3);
- c) strengthening public information campaigns to raise awareness about the disease and to eliminate discrimination against children with HIV/AIDS, as mentioned in para. 32 of these concluding observations.

70. In the light of the Committee's General Comment No. 3 on HIV/AIDS and the rights of the child (CRC/GC/2003/3) and the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights (E/CN.4/1997/37), the Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS both in the mainland and Special Administrative Regions and continue to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS among adolescents, particularly among those belonging to vulnerable groups.

Standard of living

71. The Committee commends the State party for impressive economic achievements in mainland China and increased resources allocations for people living in poverty in recent years, including through the provision of scholarships to disadvantaged children. However, it is concerned that poverty, in particular with regard to certain regions and specific populations, such as the migrant or 'floating' population, as well as growing disparities remain serious concerns.

72. Similarly, despite the economic achievements of Hong Kong SAR, the Committee remains concerned at the existence of child poverty among vulnerable populations such as the unemployed, immigrants and single parent families, and at the lack of an established poverty line which hinders the formulation of appropriate policies to combat poverty.

73. The Committee recommends that in mainland China, the State party continue to strengthen its efforts to achieve a balanced economic development, including through adjustments in budgetary allocations mentioned in para. 20 of this document and through the consolidation of the database on child poverty. It further urges the State party to expand benefits, such as scholarships, for disadvantaged children, including from vulnerable populations such as the ‘floating population’ and from poor regions in western China.

74. The Committee recommends that in Hong Kong SAR, the State party establish a poverty line and develop appropriate policies to combat child poverty which addresses widening income disparities while expanding access to social welfare benefits to all vulnerable populations including new immigrants.

7. Education, leisure and cultural activities (arts. 28, 29 and 31 of the Convention)

Education, including vocational training and guidance

75. While noting efforts made by the State party in mainland China, the Committee is concerned about remaining disparities in access and availability of education which negatively affects girls, children with learning difficulties, ethnic minority children, children living in rural areas and Western provinces and migrant children. The Committee is also specifically concerned about the existence of miscellaneous fees for compulsory education, high student-teacher ratios, high drop-out rates in middle and secondary school and the quality of education throughout the mainland.

76. In Hong Kong SAR, the Committee is concerned about drop out rates in secondary schools, the competitive nature of the school system and bullying in schools. The Committee regrets the limited amount of information available on these issues in Macau SAR.

77. The Committee recommends that in mainland China, the State party:

- a) Eliminate all miscellaneous and other ‘hidden’ fees for primary education to ensure that it is truly free;
- b) increase its allocation of resources to education in step with increases in GDP as directed by the Education Law, target those resources to ensuring that all children, in particular

girls, children with learning difficulties, ethnic minority and migrant children complete nine years of compulsory education and have equal access to early childhood education and development programmes;

- c) promote the development of flexible learning systems so that children who have dropped out of school, in particular due to poverty or migration, are able to complete compulsory education and earn appropriate accreditation through non-formal channels, and also ensure the availability and accessibility of suitable technical and vocational education and training;
- d) ensure that all teaching and learning materials are also available in ethnic minority languages and with culturally-sensitive content for the primary and secondary level;
- e) further strengthen efforts to improve the quality of education, including through teacher training and the improvement of teacher-student ratios;
- f) strengthen the implementation of its policy on “all-round development” in particular through the development of a curriculum promoting children’s active learning capacities which also includes a focus on a child’s right to play and leisure;
- g) seek technical assistance in this regard from inter alia UNICEF and relevant national agencies.

78. In Hong Kong SAR, the Committee recommends that the State party:

- a) develop programmes aimed at addressing the drop out rates in secondary education;
- b) further strengthen existing programmes aimed at addressing violence in schools, including with the participation of students themselves;
- c) enhance the quality of education in a manner that seeks to reduce the competitiveness of the education system and promotes active learning capacities and the right of a child to play and leisure.

79. In Macau SAR, the Committee encourages the State party to expedite its plans to expand free compulsory education to 12 years in duration. The Committee requests further information on the quality of education and programmes aimed at reducing violence in schools in the next

periodic report.

**8. Special protection measures
(arts. 22, 38, 39, 40, 37(b)-(d), 32-36 of the Convention)**

Refugee and migrant children

80. The Committee notes the efforts made by the State party to allow the approximately 300,000 Indochinese refugees to settle permanently in mainland China. However, it is concerned that the children born in China of these former refugees are not granted Chinese citizenship. It is further concerned that children entering mainland China from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are categorically considered as economic migrants and returned to the DPRK without consideration as to whether there are risks of irreparable harm to the child upon return.

81. With regard to the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong, the Committee notes that refugee children and undocumented migrant children are not guaranteed access to education.

82. The Committee recommends that the State party extend all human rights guarantees in its Constitution and in the Convention, with respect to both the mainland and Special Administrative Regions, to all children within its jurisdiction, including refugees and asylum-seekers and other undocumented migrants. In particular, the Committee recommends that the State party:

- a) Amend legislation to allow children born in China of former Indochinese refugees in mainland China to obtain Chinese citizenship;
- b) Ensure that no unaccompanied child, including from DPRK, is returned to a country where there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of irreparable harm to the child for instance through disproportionate punishment for violating immigration laws, in accordance with the Committee's General Comment on Unaccompanied Minors (no. 6);
- c) Amend legislation and regulations to ensure that all refugee, asylum-seeking or undocumented migrant children in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region are able to attend school without undue delays.

Economic exploitation

83. The Committee welcomes the ratification of ILO Conventions nos. 138 and 182 in 1998 and 2002 respectively. However, it is concerned about the absence of specific data on child labour in the mainland, yet reports indicate that it is widespread. It is also concerned about the lack of legislation and specific administrative regulations defining and protecting children from exploitation in hazardous work. The Committee is further concerned about the widespread practice of re-education through labour.

84. The Committee recommends that the State party further strengthen its implementation of ILO Conventions nos. 138 and 182 in particular by:

- a) Gathering specific disaggregated data on child labour and using it to develop, in cooperation with working children, effective measures to prevent and eliminate all forms of child labour,
- b) developing detailed regulations on the forms of hazardous and dangerous work in which all persons under 18 should not be engaged, in consultation with the children affected, and;
- c) ensuring that that re-education through labour does not result in children working in violation of the principles and provisions of ILO Conventions nos. 138 and 182.

Street children

85. While noting with appreciation the efforts of the State party in mainland China, the Committee is concerned at the significant numbers of children living and working in the streets.

86. The Committee recommends that in mainland China, the State party strengthen its efforts related to street children, in particular by:

- a) undertaking further research into the situation of children living and working in the streets, and use such research to develop appropriate programmes and policies to reduce the number of street children and provide them with appropriate assistance;
- b) prioritizing family and community-based interventions aimed at reintegrating these children successfully into their families;
- c) increasing the resources provided to local authorities providing services to street children and their families.

Sexual exploitation and trafficking

87. With respect to mainland China and Macau SAR, the Committee notes with appreciation the submission of the initial report under the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and refers the State party to the relevant recommendations contained in CRC/C/OPSA/CO/2. The Committee regrets that the application of the Optional Protocol has not yet been extended to Hong Kong SAR. While welcoming the amendments to the Crimes Ordinance aimed at strengthening the protection of children from pornography, it is concerned at the absence of any data or reported cases of child prostitution in Hong Kong SAR.

88. In order to prevent and combat trafficking in children for sexual and other exploitative purposes, the Committee recommends that the State party in Hong Kong SAR:

- (a) Further develop and enhance systems of early-prevention of sexual exploitation and trafficking;
- (b) Further strengthen its efforts to identify and investigate trafficking cases, to improve understanding of the issues of trafficking and ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted;
- (c) Develop and adopt a comprehensive policy to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and trafficking in children, including the root causes and actors that place children at risk of such exploitation;
- (d) Provide adequate programmes of assistance and reintegration for sexually exploited and/or trafficked children in accordance with the Declaration and Agenda for Action and the Global Commitment adopted at the 1996 and 2001 World Congresses against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children;
- (e) Ratify the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000).

Administration of juvenile justice

89. The Committee welcomes the State party's abolition of the death penalty in mainland China for persons who have committed an offence while under the age of 18. However, it is concerned that life imprisonment continues to be possible for those under 18, even if such a sentence is not

often applied. While noting efforts to reform laws related to juvenile justice, such as the Law on the Protection of Minors, the Committee remains concerned that existing legislation, regulations and administrative procedures do not adequately set out the detailed obligations of the authorities and the judiciary for the protection of children in conflict with the law at all stages.

90. While noting that the State party has raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility in Hong Kong SAR, the Committee remains concerned that the age of 10 years is too low. The Committee is further concerned that children between the ages of 16 and 18 are not consistently accorded special protection when coming into conflict with the law.

91. The Committee shares the concerns of the delegates from Macau SAR about the lack of restorative justice for children in conflict with the law and welcomes the information they provided about plans to reform the juvenile justice system.

92. In light of the recommendations adopted by the Committee on its day of general discussion on juvenile justice (CRC/C/46, paras. 203-238), the Committee recommends that in all areas under its jurisdiction, the State party ensure the full implementation of juvenile justice standards in particular articles 37, 40 and 39 of the Convention, and other relevant international standards in this area, such as the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules), the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the Riyadh Guidelines), the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of Their Liberty, and the Vienna Guidelines for Action on Children in the Criminal Justice System. It further recommends that in all jurisdictions the State party provide training on relevant international standards to those responsible for administering juvenile justice.

93. Within mainland China, the Committee further recommends that the State party:

- a) abolish life sentences for persons who have committed offences while under the age of 18;
- b) amend legislation so as to ensure that all children deprived of their liberty, including in Work Study Schools, have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, and the right to challenge the legality of their deprivation of liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority in a timely manner;
- c) ensure that deprivation of liberty is always used as a last

resort, and strengthen and expand possibilities for alternative sentencing, such as mediation, probation, community service or suspended sentences;

- d) Ensure that both sentenced and released persons below 18 are provided with educational opportunities, including vocational and life-skills training, and recovery and social reintegration services, in order to support their full development;
- e) Seek technical cooperation and assistance from, inter alia, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Prevention (UNODC), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

94. Within Hong Kong SAR, the Committee further recommends that the State party:

- a) Raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to an internationally acceptable level;
- b) abolish life sentences for persons who have committed offences while under the age of 18;
- c) Ensure that all children under the age of 18 are consistently accorded special protection when coming into conflict with the law, and that their cases are heard in specialized juvenile courts by appropriately trained magistrates, and;
- d) ensure that deprivation of liberty is always used as a last resort, and strengthen and expand possibilities for alternative sentencing, such as such as mediation, probation, community service or suspended sentences.

95. In Macau SAR, the Committee recommends that the State party expedite its plans for reform of the juvenile justice system, and ensure that such reforms include:

- a) measures to ensure that detention is used only as a last resort and an expansion of the possibilities for alternative sentencing such as probation, community service or suspended sentences;
- b) possibilities for restorative justice, such as family group conferencing;
- c) an expansion of services to assist juvenile offenders with social reintegration in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

9. Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

96. The Committee recommends that the State party extend the application of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography to Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. It further recommends that the State party ratify the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which it signed on 15 March 2001, and extend its application to Hong Kong and Macau SARs.

10. Follow-up and dissemination

Follow-up

97. The Committee recommends the State party to take all appropriate measures to ensure full implementation of the present recommendations, inter alia, by transmitting them to the members of the National People's Congress and the State Council in the mainland, the Executive and Legislative Councils in Hong Kong SAR and the Executive Council and Legislative Assembly in Macau SAR, and to relevant provincial or local authorities, when applicable, for appropriate consideration and further action.

Dissemination

98. The Committee further recommends that the second periodic report and written replies submitted by the State party and related recommendations (concluding observations) adopted by the Committee be made widely available in the languages of the country, including through Internet (but not exclusively), to the public at large, civil society organizations, youth groups, professional groups, and children in order to generate debate and awareness of the Convention, its implementation and monitoring.

11. Next Report

99. In light of the recommendation on reporting periodicity adopted by the Committee and described in the report of its twenty-ninth session (CRC/C/114), the Committee underlines the importance of a reporting practice that is in full compliance with the provisions of article 44 of the

Convention. An important aspect of State parties' responsibilities to children under the Convention is ensuring that the Committee on the Rights of the Child has regular opportunities to examine the progress made in the Convention's implementation. In this regard, regular and timely reporting by State parties is crucial. The Committee recognizes that some State parties experience difficulties in initiating timely and regular reporting. As an exceptional measure, in order to help the State party catch up with its reporting obligations in full compliance with the Convention, the Committee invites the State party to submit its third and fourth periodic reports in one consolidated report by 31 March 2009, the due date for the submission of the fourth report. The report should not exceed 120 pages (see CRC/C/118). The Committee expects the State party to report every five years thereafter, as foreseen by the Convention.
