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Chair: Mr. Tafrov (Bulgaria)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 65: Promotion and protection of the rights of children

(a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children (A/68/257, 253, 263, 267, 274, 275 and 487)

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children (A/67/269)

1. **Mr. Lake** (Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) presented the reports of the Secretary-General on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/68/257), collaboration within the United Nations system on child protection (A/68/253), the girl child (A/68/263) and the follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on children (A/67/269). The data in each report demonstrated real progress since the first special session on children, held in 1992: new or better child trafficking and domestic violence laws, decreasing acceptance of corporal punishment and female genital mutilation, near universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols and a dramatic decline in the child mortality rate. Nevertheless, 18,000 children still died every day from preventable causes, 25 per cent of children under five were stunted by malnutrition, 150 million children aged five to 14 were engaged in child labour and millions of children living in the midst of conflict, as in the case of the Syrian Arab Republic, were being denied their rights. He drew particular attention to the plight of AIDS orphans, child heads of household, girls denied an education and/or married before adulthood and children without birth certificates. Investing in children was more than a moral responsibility. According to statistics, it was also the most practical path to accelerated development.

2. A UNICEF study, "Narrowing the Gaps to Achieve the Goals", had concluded that the most cost-effective approach was to target the most disadvantaged children, a finding echoed by the report on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Taking inspiration from those documents and their recommendations and from the growth of powerful global movements such as Scaling Up Nutrition, the international community must build support, especially among governments, for investing in the future of every child.

3. **Ms. Astiasarán Arias** (Cuba) expressed sincere appreciation for the work done by UNICEF on behalf of children in Cuba and around the world. She assured UNICEF of her Government's firm commitment to implementing the new country programme approved at the 2013 regular session of the UNICEF Executive Board. Her country remained committed to working closely with UNICEF.

4. **Ms. Velichko** (Belarus) thanked UNICEF for preparing the fourth round of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey on the situation of children and women in Belarus. Her Government looked forward to future cooperation in that area and would be hosting a regional conference on improving cooperation on the protection of the rights of children in 2014.

5. **Ms. Zerrougui** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), introducing her report (A/68/267), called the Committee's attention to the plight of thousands of children in the Central African Republic and more than 4 million children in the Syrian Arab Republic. Tens of millions of children in conflict situations were being deprived of an education. Schools, hospitals, teachers and schoolchildren remained subject to widespread attack. Children continued to be abducted or re-recruited into armed groups, sexually assaulted, killed and maimed by explosive weapons, denied basic humanitarian assistance or health care and detained without due process. She would maintain her focus on building and sustaining the innovative, broad-based partnerships and collaboration required to address those challenges. Her office was working with health and education partners in and outside the United Nations system to strengthen policy and operational frameworks for ensuring access to health care and education during conflict and would continue to reach out to regional and intergovernmental organizations such as the African Union, with which the United Nations had recently signed a partnership agreement.

6. Preventing the recruitment of child soldiers also called for constructive engagement and partnership, especially with Member States that were still in the process of professionalizing their security forces. Her office's global initiative to end the recruitment and use of children by government security forces by 2016 had thus far brought about the implementation of six action plans, as well as the recent adoption by Yemen of a plan prepared with the support of the United Nations.

7. She urged parties to conflict to commit to the immediate cessation of all violations of children's rights and, in particular, to address the devastating impact of explosive weapons on children by upholding the principles of precaution, distinction and proportionality. She welcomed the recent ratifications of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and encouraged States that had not yet done so to sign, ratify and implement that instrument, as well as the Arms Trade Treaty. She stressed the importance of building a robust framework to provide support for education in emergencies and called on Member States and regional organizations to include children's needs in the mediation process and in peacebuilding, recovery and development efforts. She was counting on Member States to redouble their efforts to sustain the work of the United Nations and other child protection actors through their political support, expert advice and resources.

8. **Mr. Köhler** (Observer for the European Union) said that the European Union welcomed the action plans concluded with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, the action plan developed with Yemen and the partnership agreement signed with the African Union, which it stood ready to support. He asked how the Special Representative planned to move forward on integrating the release and reintegration of child soldiers in the mediation process. Welcoming her campaign to end the recruitment and use of children by government armed forces, he requested her views on possible avenues for ending the recruitment and use of children by non-State actors.

9. **Mr. Doujak** (Austria) said that his Government welcomed the Special Representative's emphasis on emerging issues, particularly the misuse of schools for military purposes. It was following with interest the efforts of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack to develop draft guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict (Lucens guidelines). Recalling that, in accordance with the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), such children should be considered primarily victims, not perpetrators, he said that the issue of children in detention during and after armed conflict was of great concern to his Government, which applauded the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross to address the issue in

greater detail in international humanitarian law. His delegation welcomed the close collaboration and cooperation between the Special Representative's office and UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Member States and non-governmental organizations, including the project to develop training standards and materials for peacekeepers, which it had supported financially. He would be interested to know what the Special Representative considered the main challenges for mainstreaming child protection across the United Nations system.

10. **Ms. Strachwitz** (Liechtenstein) requested information on the Special Representative's plans for working with regional organizations. She would also appreciate further details on the initiative to end the recruitment and use of children by government security forces in armed conflict.

11. **Ms. Sigrist** (Switzerland) asked whether the Special Representative saw a need to develop specific instruments on the inclusion of children's issues in mediation processes and peace agreements. She would also like to know whether the Special Representative had any plans for helping States incorporate the draft Lucens guidelines in their national legislation and military guidance. Switzerland, which had signed the Arms Trade Treaty in June 2013 and begun the ratification process, urged other Member States to do likewise.

12. **Ms. Alsaleh** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that her Government was striving to ensure that Syrian children were not recruited into the armed conflict and was working to improve their living conditions in cooperation with international humanitarian organizations. It had recently established a commission to gather information on incidents of terrorist groups preventing humanitarian assistance from reaching its destination and detaining humanitarian workers, which it would pass on to the Special Representative. That commission also hoped to meet with the international organizations present in her country. Her Government appreciated the Special Representative's efforts to relieve the suffering of Syrian children and urged her to continue to pursue them unilaterally, without politicization, giving particular attention to women and girls in refugee camps in neighbouring countries, who were subject to rape and forced marriage, and to the living conditions of children in areas under rebel control, for whom indoctrination had replaced education.

13. **Mr. Ponikvar** (Slovenia) asked how the initiative to end child recruitment by 2016 would address the problem of recruitment by persistent perpetrators.

14. **Ms. Hovland** (Norway), noting that the Special Representative had raised the issue of the use of schools for military purposes with the Syrian Government, asked whether she had raised it with the Syrian opposition as well. Her delegation would appreciate information on the Special Representative's further plans to engage on that issue.

15. **Mr. Rohland** (Germany) expressed the hope that the Special Representative's work would keep Security Council resolution 1998 (2011) on attacks on schools and hospitals high on the international agenda. He asked what strategies were being used to prevent non-State armed groups from attacking schools and hospitals and how Member States could help. He requested clarification as to what States might do to promote the Lucens process, beyond integrating the guidelines into their own national legislation and military guidance.

16. **Mr. Elbahi** (Sudan) said that since signing and ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, her Government had taken steps to protect children's rights, including launching a child rights programme in July 2013. It greatly appreciated the work being done by the Special Representative and UNICEF and would continue to cooperate with both entities. It would soon be signing an action plan to end the recruitment of child soldiers. He repeated his invitation to Member States to have their comments included in future reports, as that would strengthen the credibility of the reports.

17. **Ms. Vadiati** (Islamic Republic of Iran) requested information on the recruitment of children by private military companies, as well as on any plans or studies on the long-range impact of armed conflict on children, such as latent health problems caused by the use of chemical weapons in wartime.

18. **Ms. Fahmy** (Egypt) asked the Special Representative to comment on the impact of drones on children, as well as any dialogue that had taken place with non-State actors and the extent to which the Governments concerned had been involved in such dialogue. Thanking the Special Representative for the references in her report to Palestinian children living in refugee camps, she stressed the traumatic impact of foreign occupation on children and expressed concern at the disabilities caused by landmines.

19. **Ms. Zerrougui** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), commenting on her global initiative to end the recruitment and use of children by government forces, said that thus far, eight countries had implemented actions plans removing them from the Secretary-General's list of shame and the Sudan had approved one. Most of those States had also ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It was easier to address violations committed by non-State actors when a Government had mechanisms and legal frameworks for preventing the recruitment of children into its own forces. Her office was also working to identify non-State actors that aspired to inclusion in the political process and were therefore susceptible to leverage. It had already concluded action plans with some non-State actors, for instance, in the Sudan, and was in the process of finalizing a plan with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines.

20. Peace agreements that included plans for demobilizing adults but nothing for child soldiers hindered recovery, capacity-building and development. Her office was working with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs to ensure that children were included in peace processes from the outset, beginning with mediation.

21. In her view, children's issues were already being mainstreamed consistently in situations of armed conflict. Her office insisted on having a child protection officer in the mission setting and the United Nations partnerships with the European Union and the African Union included mainstreaming child protection in peacekeeping policies, legal frameworks and operations. It was important to ensure that United Nations or regional peacekeepers were sensitized to children's issues, because they were likely to encounter child soldiers.

22. To her knowledge, children were not being recruited by private military companies. With respect to the long-term impact of armed conflict on children, UNICEF and other partners were working to address that issue, which was beyond the scope of her mandate. She very much appreciated the support expressed by Member States and the absence of politicization, which made it easier for her to move forward with her work.

23. **Ms. Santos Pais** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children), introducing her report (A/68/274), said that, thanks to recent ratifications, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was only 27 States short of universal ratification and the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure was only two States short of entry into force. To promote children's awareness and understanding of those instruments, her office had developed a child-friendly version of the latter in collaboration with many partners, including young people and children, and was finalizing a similar version of the former.

24. As a result of fruitful collaboration between her office and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the protection of children had been placed high on the United Nations agenda. An open-ended intergovernmental expert group would soon be drafting model strategies and practical measures for eliminating violence against children in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice. The next issue on her own agenda was restorative justice for children. In cooperation with the Permanent Missions of Indonesia and Norway, her office would shortly be hosting a panel discussion to launch a report on that topic.

25. Fostering collaboration with regional organizations and institutions had led to high-level intergovernmental consultations, political declarations, implementation strategies and a promising process for monitoring progress. On 17 October, on the occasion of a third round-table discussion with representatives from regional organizations, institutions and youth, her office would be releasing the findings of its global survey on violence against children, which was informed by reports received from more than 100 States. Overall, the results of the survey reflected increasing attention to protecting children against violence, improved understanding of why and how children were affected by violence and incremental development of legislation and policy to prevent violence against children, supported by the organization of public information campaigns. Some countries had even carried out surveys to capture the incidence and magnitude of children's exposure to violence.

26. Nevertheless, progress was slow, uneven and fragmented. Children remained at risk of violence in every setting, including schools, care and justice institutions and the home. They continued to be involved in exploitative labour, where they often endured sexual abuse and emotional and physical violence. They were increasingly falling victim to trafficking, which itself engendered further violence. Children with disabilities were at much higher risk of violence. Adolescent boys were disproportionately likely to be victims of homicide and, where armed violence was prevalent, girls were at high risk of domestic violence and murder. In general, such violence was associated with inadequate rule of law, weak law enforcement, high levels of organized crime, high homicide rates and a culture of impunity. Violence had profound health, educational, economic and emotional consequences for child victims and their families. It also had far-reaching economic, social and development costs.

27. In short, implementing the recommendations of the United Nations study on violence against children remained as vital in 2013 as it had been in 2006. The protection of children, including the most vulnerable and marginalized children, should be recognized as a priority, cross-cutting concern in discussions of the post-2015 global development agenda.

28. **Mr. Escalante Hasbún** (El Salvador) assured the Special Representative of his Government's commitment to implementing the recommendations that she had made following her visit to El Salvador and called upon Member States to facilitate her mandate. With the number of ratifications of the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure approaching the threshold for entry into force, he asked how, in the Special Representative's opinion, that development would strengthen her office and allow it to work more directly.

29. **Mr. Köhler** (Observer for the European Union) asked the Special Representative whether there had been any progress on changing attitudes towards violence against children and what, in her view, could be done at the national and regional levels to increase awareness. He would also welcome her opinion on what States could do to facilitate children's access to genuinely confidential advisory and advocacy services.

30. **Mr. Moura** (Portugal) asked the Special Representative to elaborate on how protecting children

from violence was relevant to the post-2015 global development agenda.

31. **Ms. Hovland** (Norway) asked the Special Representative whether she had any plans to expand her cooperation with regional organizations and institutions and, if so, in which regions. Her delegation was deeply concerned about the bullying and exploitation of children in cyberspace and fully supported the Special Representative's initiative to organize consultations in order to advance knowledge and develop tools to protect children from those dangers.

32. **Ms. Sumi** (Japan) said that in Japan, where Internet use was widespread, the Government was making a concerted effort to confront violence against children in that context. In view of the Special Representative's emphasis on time-bound targets, she would like to know what kinds of indicators were considered essential for setting time-bound targets for problems such as web-based child pornography.

33. **Mr. Reilly** (United States of America) welcomed the Special Representative's focus on incorporating children's protection from violence in national policies, addressing emerging concerns and tackling violence across children's life cycles, giving priority to the most vulnerable children. He particularly welcomed her intention to address the proliferation of gang violence during her 2014 field visits. With regard to the upcoming strategic consultation on information and communication technologies and children's protection from violence, he would like to hear her views on specific ways of protecting children online, including through the use of new technologies.

34. **Mr. Ponikvar** (Slovenia) said that his Government had just updated the Programme for Children and Youth 2006-2016, which included measures for identifying and addressing violence against children, including expert support services and shelters. One of its aims was to achieve an explicit ban on the corporal punishment of children, including in the home. He asked how the Special Representative planned to promote her valuable initiatives to raise children's awareness of matters relating to violence against them. He would also be interested to hear her assessment of progress on cooperation and exchanges of experience and best practices among regional organizations. He called on all Member States that had not yet done so to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

35. **Ms. Couriel** (Israel) asked what measures should be taken or strengthened to protect survivors of child trafficking, especially girls.

36. **Mr. Doujak** (Austria) expressed the hope that the General Assembly would adopt the draft resolution on model strategies and practical measures on the elimination of violence against children in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice ([E/RES/2013/34](#)), as requested by the Economic and Social Council. He asked the Special Representative what her priorities were for addressing violence against children as a cross-cutting concern and how she would promote the inclusion of violence against children in the post-2015 global development agenda. He would appreciate information on examples of good practice in promoting the genuine participation of children and young people in efforts to protect children from violence.

37. **Ms. Santos Pais** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children), responding to the representative of El Salvador, said that in order to increase awareness of the implications of the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure and promote strategies for its implementation, she had held meetings with the Council of Europe and the League of Arab States in 2013 and would be holding a third meeting in another region in early 2014. Responding to the request by the representative of Austria for examples of good practice in promoting the participation of children and young people, she cited a regional youth forum organized in Ghana in collaboration with civil society partners, UNICEF and the Ghanaian Government, which had produced a long list of recommendations that she would be happy to share with delegations. A young woman from Latin America would be presenting other good examples at the 17 October round table.

38. Responding to the observer for the European Union, she said that changes in attitudes could not be legislated, they took time and effort. It was important to engage in a dialogue with the communities in question. In Kenya, for instance, thanks to concerted awareness-raising efforts by Maasai religious leaders, grass-roots activists and traditional cutters, female genital mutilation was no longer taken for granted. In Sweden, the 1979 law outlawing corporal punishment had been accompanied by an intense public education campaign, with the long-term result that fewer than 1 per cent of Swedish adults supported the use of corporal punishment. The recent UNICEF End Violence

against Children Global Initiative was garnering support from religious leaders and well-known role models, who had joined in promoting it. The UNICEF report on child disciplinary practices at home showed that, while many families continued to practise corporal punishment, more than 90 per cent thought it should not be necessary. The challenge for her office was to help give families the tools they needed to abandon corporal punishment by discussing early childhood programmes, supporting good parenting initiatives and widening the alliance for protecting children everywhere.

39. With respect to child-sensitive reporting mechanisms, she referred the observer for the European Union to a Human Rights Council report (A/HRC/16/56) in which she and the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography had recommended that such mechanisms should be available everywhere in all languages, especially in schools; should ensure confidentiality; should be conducted in an environment sensitive to the rights and vulnerability of the child; and should ensure that incidents were reported to the proper authorities.

40. Responding to the representative of Israel, she said that in order to prevent child trafficking and re-trafficking, it was essential to encourage communities to provide quality education and to give families the assistance they needed to fulfil their obligations to their children. Responding to the question put by the representative of Austria with regard to the post-2015 development agenda, she said that the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of eminent persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda had already identified violence against children as a key priority and had even indicated possible identifiers. Various other reports produced in the context of discussions on the post-2015 development agenda had reaffirmed the Panel's position. Her office was thus promoting a recognized priority. Violence against children impeded their development and, ultimately, economic and social development.

41. Responding to the concerns raised by the representatives of Japan, Norway and the United States in connection with the new information and communications technologies, she called for further research and public education campaigns on violence against children in cyberspace. Teachers' capacity to address the issue also needed to be strengthened. Much

could be gained by empowering young people, as the International Telecommunication Union had done at its very productive global youth summit, held in September 2013.

42. **Ms. M'jid Maalla** (Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography), introducing her report (A/68/275), said that she would focus on part II, on effective prevention strategies in combating the sale and sexual exploitation of children. International and regional standards and instruments on the sale and sexual exploitation of children devoted significant attention to prevention and provided guidance on the types of measures States were expected to undertake in order to avoid and mitigate harm. However, the many national and international prevention measures adopted to date lacked the scope, coordination and permanency required to address the various causes and risk factors holistically. Knowledge about children's risk and vulnerability remained limited, few examples of good practice had been identified and millions of children continued to be sold and sexually exploited.

43. Implementing effective and sustainable prevention strategies was not easy. It required an understanding of multiple, fluid, context-specific risk and demand factors, coupled with concerted national and transnational action. Proactive measures must take into account the multidimensional nature of child vulnerability and create a protective environment, with appropriate integrated protection mechanisms accessible to all children without discrimination. Strategies aimed at achieving systemic social change also required the political will to fund long-term programmes.

44. Improving preventive strategies hinged on improving understanding of the problems, which would require context-specific field studies and the establishment of a reliable, standardized information system for information sharing and analysis. A comprehensive legal framework was also needed, to which end she called on Member States to ratify all the relevant regional and international instruments. Other measures would include establishing easily accessible, child-sensitive reporting mechanisms, together with effective mechanisms for combating corruption and impunity; ensuring comprehensive birth registration, early identification of vulnerable children and adequate support for them; ensuring that all children enjoyed decent living conditions and had free access to education, health services and social security;

strengthening parents' capacity to prevent abuse, violence and exploitation and providing the support they needed to care for their children; identifying and promoting protective social norms; conducting regular public education campaigns and mobilizing communities to combat harmful social norms; giving children and young people the opportunity to express their opinions and incorporating their suggestions in prevention strategies; and strengthening corporate social responsibility for protecting children from sexual exploitation online and in the travel and tourism industries. Regional and international cooperation would also have to be consolidated by adopting a global legal framework; harmonizing and strengthening police and judicial cooperation; sharing and updating information on child victims and perpetrators and drawing up international lists of sexual predators and child pornography websites; harmonizing practices and procedures; and sharing expertise and good practices. Lastly, it was vital to measure the impact of preventive measures systematically through regular evaluation and monitoring.

45 In closing, she thanked all those who had contributed to her work as Special Rapporteur over the preceding six years. Although her term of office would end in March 2014, she would continue to fight steadfastly for the protection of children and she wished her successor every success on the long road ahead.

46. **Mr. Köhler** (Observer for the European Union) thanked the Special Rapporteur for her tireless fight on behalf of children and asked her how States might deal with cases in which a child did not seek access to justice, either out of fear or because sexual exploitation was his or her only means of survival.

47. **Mr. Reilly** (United States of America) said that the success of an integrated, fully developed child protection system depended largely on the ability of governments to prioritize and incorporate child protection in overall policies. Synchronizing best practices and sharing expertise would be essential for combating the sale and sexual exploitation of children. With regard to the enhancement of corporate social responsibility, he asked how Internet service providers and other telecommunications companies, the financial sector and the travel and tourism industries could participate more effectively in prevention strategies.

48. **Ms. Klopčič** (Slovenia) announced that her Government had recently ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. Given the importance of cross-regional cooperation, she asked what progress had been made and what challenges remained in that area.

49. **Ms. M'jid Maalla** (Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography), responding to the observer for the European Union, said that the international community must stop using poverty to justify sexual exploitation. Instead, States should work to build faith and trust in the justice system by imposing heavy penalties on sexual predators; make justice accessible through locally available complaint mechanisms; educate children, their families, their communities and those involved with them about the relevant laws and procedures; train judges to deal with children; and, in some countries, root out the belief that adolescent victims of sexual exploitation were criminals.

50. Responding to the United States representative, she said that the private sector, particularly telecommunications companies, Internet service and search engine providers and the banking industry, had a moral and legal responsibility to protect children. They should block pornographic websites, provide "report abuse" buttons and save data for investigative purposes. Steps should be taken to rid the Internet of pornographic images of children, which could resurface indefinitely. It was very important that companies join the European Financial Coalition against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Online, the Financial Coalition Against Child Pornography or the Virtual Global Task Force, which were working to eradicate online sexual exploitation.

51. Responding to the Slovenian representative's question about progress on cross-border cooperation, she said that it was very important to work with organizations such as Interpol and the Virtual Global Task Force. Stumbling blocks included huge differences in judicial procedures and the absence of up-to-date pornographic website and predator lists. It remained difficult to harness the tremendous expertise and cooperation required to identify victims and predators. Cooperation was also needed to launch much needed preventive education programmes in developing countries.

52. **Ms. Sandberg** (Chair, Committee on the Rights of the Child), reporting orally on the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, thanked its outgoing Chair, Mr. Jean Zermatten. In examining the reports of States parties, the Committee had observed encouraging but uneven improvements in awareness of children's rights and willingness to implement them. Violence, disparities between rural and urban areas and inequalities affecting poor and other vulnerable children remained widespread, however. Reports revealed discrimination against children with disabilities, ethnic minorities and girls; large-scale unnecessary institutionalization; unaddressed issues in juvenile justice; and violations of children's rights in conflict areas.

53. The Committee was following closely the intergovernmental process on treaty body strengthening and had had the opportunity to engage directly with the former co-facilitators via videoconference during its sixty-third session in June 2013. She reiterated the Committee's support for the five key principles for process outcomes agreed to at the twenty-fifth meeting of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies: strengthen human rights protection; respect the independence and impartiality of the treaty bodies and their members; be comprehensive and sustainable; provide for full reinvestment of cost-savings in the treaty system; and take full advantage of new technologies. The treaty body strengthening process was of particular importance to the Committee, because the exceptionally large volume of reports submitted under the Convention on the Rights of the Child greatly exceeded its capacity to review them, resulting in an intractable backlog. It welcomed the General Assembly's 2013 authorization to meet in parallel chambers during the pre-sessional working group meetings in June 2014 and January 2015, as well as the co-facilitators' recommendation to increase the Committee's meeting time by three weeks a year, but those measures were insufficient and it hoped that the intergovernmental process would end in mid-2014, as scheduled, having found a comprehensive, sustainable solution. The Committee had improved its own efficiency by establishing country task forces to examine State party reports and using videoconferencing for the consideration of reports, as recommended in the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the strengthening of the treaty bodies (A/66/860).

54. Turning to the Committee's work at its past three sessions, she said that it had reviewed and adopted concluding observations on 34 State party reports. It had sent letters to five State parties expressing concern about violations of children's rights and had issued five press releases on country or thematic issues. Working mostly outside official meeting times and at weekends, it had finalized General Comments on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration; the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health; State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights; and the right of the child to rest, leisure, play and recreational activities, cultural life and the arts.

55. The Committee looked forward to the imminent entry into force of the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure, despite the increased workload that it would involve. Noting that 2014 would mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention's adoption, she encouraged States that had not already done so to ratify it and its Optional Protocols.

56. **Mr. Reyes Rodríguez** (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that signing and ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols would help ensure that all children enjoyed human rights and fundamental freedoms. Despite considerable progress, the latest UNICEF report again painted a picture of child hunger, poverty, inequality, social exclusion and deaths from preventable diseases. Ten years after the United Nations special session on children, the goal of its outcome document, "A World Fit for Children", remained elusive. Yet, even with limited financial resources, it could be achieved if appropriate measures were taken. Actions and policies should apply the principle of the best interests of the child, bearing in mind the vital role of parents and families and the importance of a gender perspective. They should also give due attention to the rights and basic needs of vulnerable children, indigenous children and children with disabilities, who accounted for one in five children in developing countries. Cooperation, including South-South and triangular cooperation, and development assistance should provide encouragement and support.

57. CELAC was concerned about the rise in obesity among children and young people, which, like high blood pressure and diabetes, was closely linked to

prenatal malnutrition and low birth weight. Calling special attention to the issue of child victims of forced disappearance, he urged Member States to adopt measures to prevent and punish child abduction and to cooperate in efforts to find abducted children and return them to their original families. CELAC was also concerned about children's vulnerability to trafficking, involvement in smuggling, sale for purposes of sexual exploitation, rape, abuse, organ harvesting, sex tourism and use in pornography, including online pornography. Coordinated, effective action was needed to address contributing factors such as poverty, social inequality, discrimination, migration, insecurity and organized crime.

58. CELAC recognized the contributions of civil society and the media. The media, in particular, had helped increase awareness of children's issues, disseminate information on children's rights initiatives and educate children, although attention should also be paid to the influence wielded by the media. It acknowledged the efforts made by the United Nations system to devote increasing attention to the rights and well-being of children, including the need to combat violence against children. Action to address such violence should incorporate a gender perspective and involve the State, the family and the community.

59. It was essential to continue to promote the well-being of all the world's children by working to eliminate poverty, inequality and other obstacles to children's enjoyment of their rights. CELAC remained committed to fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals and the Declaration and Plan of Action of the Special Session on Children and was in favour of maintaining the rights and well-being of children on the post-2015 development agenda.

60. **Mr. Raja Zaib Shah** (Malaysia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the commitment of ASEAN to the advancement of vulnerable groups, including children, was reflected in the ASEAN Socio-cultural Community Blueprint and constantly renewed through various policy documents, including, most recently, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Elimination of Violence against Children in ASEAN, adopted in October 2013. The ASEAN countries believed that further progress on the advancement of children required a systematic, comprehensive and multifaceted approach, as well as cooperation and collaboration with regional and

international stakeholders. They would welcome greater cooperation with the United Nations at the national and regional levels. In that connection, it was important that each United Nations child protection mechanism adhered to its mandate and that the bilateral framework between individual States and their United Nations country team was respected.

61. The ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children had visited the headquarters of the European Union in February 2013 as part of an ongoing dialogue on promoting and protecting women's and children's rights. ASEAN appreciated its external partners' contributions to the implementation of activities outlined in the Commission's Work Plan 2012-2106 and would continue to work towards meeting the many challenges for ensuring the promotion and protection of children's rights in the region.

62. **Mr. Goddard** (Barbados), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that promoting and protecting the rights of children should be a priority in the post-2015 development agenda. Violence against children in the Caribbean region had taken centre stage at the twenty-third meeting of the CARICOM Council for Human and Social Development held in July 2012. The urgent need to take further action to address sexual violence against children had led to the convening in December 2012 of the Conference on Combating Sexual Violence against Children in the Caribbean, which had adopted the Bridgetown Declaration and Agenda for Action to Combat Child Sexual Abuse in the Caribbean and had also served as the platform for launching the UNICEF Break the Silence Initiative, aimed at combating child sexual abuse in the Caribbean.

63. To address alarming levels of predominantly gang-related youth crime and violence, five member States had piloted national consultations and workshops on prevention strategies and action, developed in tandem with UNODC. In view of the impact of early childhood experiences on adolescent and adult behaviour, countries in the region were continuing to expand early childhood education in cooperation with several partners, although progress was being hindered by lack of resources.

64. Despite otherwise successful efforts to improve health, the Caribbean region was facing an epidemic in obesity, including child obesity, and non-communicable

diseases. At a special meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development in October 2012, CARICOM ministers had highlighted the role of physical activity and sports in combating non-communicable diseases and promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.