



Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/15/Add.233
30 June 2004

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Thirty-sixth session

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

Concluding observations: Panama

1. The Committee considered the second periodic report of PANAMA (CRC/C/70/Add.20), submitted on 27 March 2002, at its 951st and 952nd meetings (see CRC/C/SR.951 and 952), held on 19 May 2004, and adopted, at the 971st meeting (CRC/C/SR.971), held on 4 June 2004, the following concluding observations.

A. Introduction

2. The Committee welcomes the submission of the State party's second periodic report, as well as the detailed written replies to its list of issues (CRC/C/Q/PAN/2) which, although submitted late, permitted a clearer understanding of the situation of children in the State party. It further notes with appreciation the high-level delegation sent by the State party and welcomes the frank dialogue.

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

3. The Committee notes with appreciation the adoption of laws and the establishment of various mechanisms aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of children such as:

(a) The creation of the Ministry of Youth, Women, Children and Family Affairs (1997);

(b) The establishment of the Committee for the Elimination of Child Labour and the Protection of Child Workers (1997);

- (c) The establishment of the Consejo Nacional de la Niñez y la Adolescencia (National Council for Childhood and Adolescence) (2003);
- (d) The National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents (Panama 2003-2015);
- (e) Law No. 38 on domestic violence and children and adolescent mistreatment (2001);
- (f) Law 40 and its amendments concerning the system of juvenile justice;
- (g) The enactment of the laws establishing the indigenous *comarcas* (territorial districts of the indigenous peoples) of the Kuna of Madungandi (1996), the Ngobe-Buglé (1997) and the Kuna of Wargandi (2000).

4. The Committee welcomes the ratification of a number of human rights-related instruments such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and (No. 182) the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 in 2000; and the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption in 1998.

C. Principal areas of concern and recommendations

1. General measures of implementation

The Committee's previous recommendations

5. The Committee notes with satisfaction that various of its concerns expressed and recommendations (CRC/C/15/Add.68 of 24 January 1997) made upon the consideration of the State party's initial report (CRC/C/8/Add.28) have been addressed through legislative measures and policies. However, recommendations regarding, inter alia, non-discrimination (para. 26), training and education for professionals working with or for children (paras. 27 and 32), child labour (para. 33), sexual abuse and domestic violence (para. 35) and juvenile justice (para. 36) have not been given sufficient follow-up. The Committee notes that those concerns and recommendations are reiterated in the present document.

6. **The Committee urges the State party to make every effort to address those recommendations contained in the concluding observations on the initial report that have not yet been implemented and to address the list of concerns contained in the present concluding observations on the second periodic report.**

Legislation

7. The Committee acknowledges the legislative activities over the past five years (resulting in various laws and/or amendments to existing laws), but is concerned at the lack of a comprehensive legislative policy regarding the implementation of children's rights. In this regard it welcomes the information that a comprehensive code for children is being drafted. The Committee also regrets that the lack of financial resources hampers the implementation of legislation, in particular the new juvenile penal procedures (1999).

8. **The Committee recommends that the State party develop and implement a comprehensive legislative policy to integrate in domestic laws the provisions and principles of the Convention. It further recommends that the State party expedite the promulgation of a comprehensive code for children through a participatory process that includes the civil society, in particular children.**

Coordination

9. The Committee notes the creation in 1997 of the Ministry of Youth, Women, Children and Family Affairs responsible, inter alia, for the coordination of policies, plans and programmes for children. However, the Committee is concerned that the heterogeneity of the many institutions and the weak coordination between economic and social policies seriously hamper effective implementation of the Convention (CRC/C/70/Add.20, see paras. 57-59).

10. **The Committee recommends that the State party undertake all necessary measures to strengthen the Ministry of Youth, Women, Children and Family Affairs in order that it can play its role as an effective mechanism of coordination of all policies, plans and programmes for the implementation of the Convention.**

National Plan of Action

11. The Committee welcomes the launching of the National Plan of Action in November 2003 and the establishment of the National Council for Children and Adolescent Rights, but is concerned about the lack of a comprehensive national policy to promote and protect the rights of the child.

12. **The Committee recommends that the State party take all necessary measures, inter alia, by providing adequate human, financial and other resources, for the full implementation of the National Plan of Action and ensure that the National Council performs its role, in particular with regard to the implementation of the Convention, in the most effective and efficient manner. It also recommends the adoption of a comprehensive national policy to promote and protect the rights of the child.**

Independent monitoring

13. The Committee notes the fact that children can file individual complaints about a possible violation of their rights with the National Council for Children and Adolescent Rights or the Children's Delegate in the Ombudsperson's Office or the Ministry of Youth, Women, Children and Family Affairs. But the Committee is concerned at the lack of coordination between these bodies, the limited access of children and their families to this service and the effectiveness of these complaint procedures. In addition, the Committee is concerned about the lack of clarity concerning the monitoring role of each of these bodies.

14. **The Committee recommends that the State party establish a single independent and effective mechanism for the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention; this mechanism could be the Children's Delegate with an adequate number of local branches. This mechanism should be provided with adequate human and financial resources and easily accessible to children. It should monitor the implementation of the Convention, deal**

with complaints from children in a child-sensitive and expeditious manner and provide remedies for violations of their rights under the Convention, in accordance with the Committee's general comment No. 2 (2002) on national human rights institutions.

Resources for children

15. The Committee is concerned about the lack of information on social investments and that resources allocated for children in the national budget are insufficient to respond to national and local priorities for the protection and promotion of children's rights.

16. **The Committee recommends that the State party pay particular attention to the full implementation of article 4 of the Convention by:**

(a) Prioritizing budgetary allocations at the national and local levels in the context of decentralization to ensure implementation of the economic, social and cultural rights of children, in particular those belonging to economically disadvantaged groups, "to the maximum extent of ... available resources"; and

(b) Identifying the amount and proportion of the State budget spent on children in the public, private and NGO sectors in order to evaluate the impact and effect of the expenditures and also the accessibility, the quality and the effectiveness of the services for children in the different sectors.

Data collection

17. The Committee acknowledges the newly created Integrated System of Indicators for Development and the data collection by, inter alia, the centre for information and the Social Cabinet, but it is concerned about the continuing insufficiency of measures to collect disaggregated statistical data and other information on the situation of children belonging to the most vulnerable groups, in particular girls, street children, disabled children, children living in rural areas, refugees, asylum-seekers and indigenous children.

18. **The Committee reiterates its recommendation to the State party that it give priority attention (e.g. by strengthening existing mechanisms) to the development of a system of collection of data disaggregated by age, gender, rural/urban area and social ethnic origin, and to the identification of appropriate disaggregated indicators with a view to addressing all areas of the Convention and all groups of children in society, in order to evaluate progress achieved and difficulties hampering the realization of children's rights. The State party should consider seeking technical assistance from UNICEF, among others.**

Dissemination and training

19. The Committee welcomes the training activities undertaken by the State party for teachers, judges, police officers and officials at correctional institutes. However, it remains concerned about traditional attitudes towards children and adolescents in society and that children, as well as many professionals working with and for them, are not sufficiently aware of the Convention and the rights-based approach enshrined therein.

20. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Strengthen public awareness campaigns on the Convention aimed at the general public and specifically at children;**

(b) **Continue to carry out systematic education and training on the principles and provisions of the Convention for all professionals working with and for children, in particular teachers, judges, parliamentarians, law enforcement officials, civil servants, municipal workers, personnel working in institutions and places of detention for children, immigration officers, mass media personnel, health personnel, including psychologists, and social workers.**

2. Definition of the child

21. The Committee expresses its concern that the Family Code allows marriage to be contracted by children as young as 14 if they have reached puberty or have had a child together or if the girl is pregnant.

22. **The Committee recommends that the State party review the rules governing the contracting of marriage between children under 18, with a view to increasing the minimum age for marriage between under-age children who have had children together. This age should be the same for boys and girls. Awareness-raising campaigns and other measures should be undertaken to prevent early marriages.**

3. General principles

Non-discrimination

23. The Committee is deeply concerned about the long-existing and grave disparities, inter alia, in the standard of living, access to basic social services like education, health, clean (drinkable) water and sanitation, and between different groups of the population, in particular those living in urban and rural areas. These hamper the enjoyment of rights, in particular by children in rural areas and indigenous children.

24. The Committee reiterates its concern that societal discrimination persists against girls, children belonging to indigenous, minority and other marginalized groups, children with disabilities, children of migrant workers and refugees.

25. **The Committee reiterates its recommendation that the State party take measures aimed at developing a culture of human rights and at changing attitudes towards children in general and children belonging to indigenous groups in particular. The Committee also recommends that the State party undertake all necessary proactive measures to combat societal discrimination, in particular against girls, children and adolescents belonging to marginalized groups, indigenous children, children with disabilities, other minorities, refugee children and children of migrant workers, through, inter alia, public education and awareness campaigns.**

26. **The Committee requests that specific information be included in the next periodic report on the measures and programmes 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 general comment No. 1 on the aims of education (2001).

Respect for the views of the child

27. The Committee welcomes the efforts made by the State party to promote respect for the views of the child. The Committee remains concerned that traditional attitudes towards children in society limit the effective respect for their views within the family, the schools, other institutions and society at large.

28. **The Committee recommends that the State party, in accordance with article 12 of the Convention:**

(a) **Promote and facilitate respect for the views of children, and their participation in all matters affecting them, by courts and administrative bodies and in families, schools and other institutions;**

(b) **Provide educational information to, inter alia, parents, educators, government administration officials, the judiciary and society at large on children's right to have their views taken into account and to participate;**

(c) **Undertake a regular review of the extent to which children's views are taken into consideration, in particular children from vulnerable groups such as indigenous and poor children, and of the impact this has on policies, programmes and on children themselves.**

4. Civil rights and freedoms

Birth registration/right to identity

29. The Committee is concerned about the difficult access to birth registration procedures, which particularly affect children of African descent, indigenous children and children living in rural areas and in border areas with Colombia and Costa Rica.

30. **The Committee recommends that the State party review the efficiency of the birth registration system to ensure that births are registered in rural and indigenous areas and among refugee and asylum-seeking children and children born out of wedlock, and take all necessary measures to harmonize the activities of the different governmental agencies and institutions involved in birth registration.**

Implementation of articles 13 to 17 of the Convention

31. The Committee regrets the lack of specific information about the implementation of the civil rights of children (arts. 13-17). The Committee is also concerned at reports that marginalized poor adolescents have been arrested, ill-treated and/or detained, apparently without legal basis, when gathering together.

32. The Committee urges the State party to provide in its next report specific information about the implementation of these rights and to protect adolescents against illegal arrest, detention and ill-treatment.

Corporal punishment

33. While welcoming the prohibition of corporal punishment and other forms of violence against children by the adoption of Law 38 on domestic violence and mistreatment of children and adolescents, which allows for the removal of the alleged perpetrator of violence against the child from the home, the Committee is concerned at the lack of specific measures for its full implementation.

34. The Committee recommends that the State party takes the necessary measures:

(a) For the full implementation of Law 38, inter alia, through public education campaigns about the negative consequences of ill-treatment of children in order to change attitudes about corporal punishment, and promote positive, non-violent forms of discipline in the family, the schools and other institutions as an alternative to such punishment;

(b) To strengthen complaints mechanisms for children in institutions to ensure that complaints of ill-treatment are dealt with effectively and in a child-sensitive manner by an independent body;

(c) To ensure sufficient financial and other resources for the effective implementation of this law.

5. Family environment and alternative care

35. The Committee welcomes the activities of Family Committees and the support that the Institute for the Training and Use of Human Resources provides to families via scholarships, but is concerned about the insufficient social and economic policies, plans and programmes to support parents to fulfil their responsibilities. It is also deeply concerned at the many problems poor families and female-headed households face, which may result in neglect and abandonment of children, and the fact that many children lack the moral and economic support of their fathers.

36. The Committee urges the State party to develop and implement a comprehensive policy for the family to protect their children's rights which would include:

(a) Measures to strengthen the competence of parents and to provide them with the necessary material assistance and support in that regard, with particular attention to poor families and female-headed households;

(b) Measures to make fathers more aware of their parental responsibilities and to ensure that they provide the necessary financial child support;

(c) Measures to provide children who cannot be raised by their natural parents with an alternative family environment by organizing an effective system of good quality foster care, including kinship care;

(d) Measures to ensure that children in institutions are enjoying the rights enshrined in the Convention and that their situations are effectively monitored and regularly reviewed in order to make their stay in those institutions as short as possible;

(e) Provision of decentralized services accessible and affordable to families, e.g. at the local level, which give them support, inter alia on conflict mediation, for maintenance of the child, particularly in cases where the father does not or cannot provide for that maintenance; and

(f) Measures to facilitate family reunification of refugee children.

Adoption

37. The Committee welcomes the ratification of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption of 1993 but is concerned that there is still a need for more effective measures to guarantee adoption procedures respectful of the rights of the child and to prevent the abuse of adoption, e.g. for trafficking of children.

38. In light of article 21 of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the State party take all necessary measures to regulate and monitor national and intercountry adoptions, e.g. through the effective implementation of the Hague Convention, and that adequate training be provided to concerned professionals.

Child abuse and neglect

39. While the Committee notes the measures undertaken to improve reporting of child abuse, it is concerned that recovery and counselling services for victims are insufficient to meet the increased demand for such services.

40. The Committee reiterates the following recommendations to the State party:

(a) That effective public awareness campaigns be developed and that measures be adopted to provide information, parental guidance and counselling with a view, inter alia, to preventing violence against their children, including the use of corporal punishment;

(b) That more training be provided to law enforcement officials, social workers and prosecutors on how to receive, monitor, investigate and prosecute complaints in a child-sensitive manner;

(c) That all victims of violence have access to counselling and assistance with their recovery and reintegration.

6. Basic health and welfare

Children with disabilities

41. The Committee welcomes the establishment of the National Council for Comprehensive Care of Disabled Minors and the executive decree establishing regulations for the inclusive education of individuals with special education needs. But it expresses concern about the lack of detailed statistical information, and that the children with disabilities living in indigenous rural areas do not have adequate access to services such as health and education. The Committee is also concerned at the lack of information on the integration of children with disabilities in different sectors such as education, sports and socio-cultural activities.

42. **The Committee recommends that the State party, taking 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 at its day of general discussion on the rights of children with disabilities (see CRC/C/69), ensure adequate collection of statistical information, pay special attention to children with disabilities in rural and indigenous areas and take all necessary measures to integrate children with disabilities in mainstream schools, social/cultural activities and sports.**

Health and health services

43. The Committee welcomes the considerable reduction in levels of child mortality and the eradication of several communicable diseases, but is concerned that this progress has not been accompanied by a similar reduction in the rate of maternal mortality and that there is a significant discrepancy in the mortality indicators between urban and rural areas. The Committee is concerned that breastfeeding is not widely used.

44. **The Committee strongly recommends that the State party continue to strengthen its efforts in health reform, in particular with regard to primary health care, ensuring accessibility of quality health care in all areas in the country, including far-reaching programmes, training of local villagers in safe midwifery and providing adequate prenatal care. The Committee further recommends that the State party encourage exclusive breastfeeding for six months after birth, with the addition of an appropriate infant diet thereafter.**

Adolescent health

45. While noting the legislation (e.g. Law 29 on the health and education of pregnant teenagers, 2002) on the protection of pregnant teenagers and the programme on responsible parents, the Committee is concerned at the high prevalence of teenage pregnancies and STIs and at the lack of significant measures taken to prevent these problems. The Committee is further concerned at the lack of adequate programmes for reproductive health, sex education, family planning and mental health.

46. **The Committee recommends that the State party ensure adequate adolescent health services as stated in its general comment No. 4 (2003) on adolescent health, implementing in particular programmes on reproductive health, sex education and family planning. The Committee further recommends that the State party implement programmes on mental health.**

HIV/AIDS

47. While appreciating the efforts made by the State party to provide free access to antiretroviral drugs, the Committee expresses its concern about the increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS in the State party and the high number of children who are infected with HIV.

48. **The Committee refers the State party to its general comment No. 3 on HIV/AIDS and the rights of the child (2003) and recommends that it strengthen efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, including through:**

- (a) Preventive programmes;**
- (b) Undertaking a comprehensive study on the prevalence and negative impact of STIs and HIV/AIDS, including the number of children affected;**
- (c) Developing child-sensitive and confidential counselling, care and reintegration facilities that are accessible without parental consent when this is in the best interests of the child; and**
- (d) Seeking technical cooperation from, among others, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO and UNAIDS.**

Standard of living

49. The Committee notes with concern the persistent high rate of poverty in the State party, especially in rural areas, and the growing disparities between rich and poor.

50. **The Committee recommends that the State party formulate a comprehensive national strategy to reduce poverty, targeting the most disadvantaged regions and groups and ensuring that the needs of all children are met, seeking international cooperation and assistance whenever necessary.**

7. Education, leisure and cultural activities

51. While noting the State party's efforts to improve the educational system and noting with satisfaction the improvements mirrored in education indicators, the Committee remains concerned at the persisting disparities in access to education of vulnerable children, inter alia, children living in rural areas, indigenous children and refugee children, who do not have access to adequate education in terms of their cultural values and identity. The Committee is also concerned at the low level of retention and completion, especially among youth in secondary education. The Committee is concerned as well at the low quality of the infrastructure of the educational process.

52. The Committee recommends that the State party allocate financial and human resources in order:

- (a) To put special emphasis on the elimination of illiteracy;**
- (b) To promote pre-school, primary and secondary education with a view to universal coverage;**
- (c) To pay special attention to the needs of vulnerable children, e.g. girls, indigenous and refugee children, working and street children, in order to fulfil their basic right to education;**
- (d) To upgrade the infrastructure of the educational system (building more schools, improving existing schools, upgrading training, paying teachers an adequate wage, adopting interactive learning methods to fight school dropout and repetition); and**
- (e) To offer more facilities for non-formal learning and vocational training, including for children who have not completed primary and secondary education.**

8. Special protection measures

Refugee and asylum-seeking children

53. The Committee welcomes the ratification of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and the State party's cooperation with UNHCR. The Committee is concerned about the lack of information on the situation of refugee and asylum-seeking children and on the implementation of and follow-up to its previous recommendations.

54. The Committee reiterates its recommendation that the State party ensure adequate protection of refugee children, including in the fields of education, health and social services, and cooperate in a constructive and effective manner with UNHCR in this regard.

55. The Committee recommends that the State party take action to regularize the situation of those children of Colombians under temporary protection in Darien who were born in Panama and to facilitate their naturalization. It also recommends full respect for the principle of non-refoulement and, whenever deportations are permissible under international law, that they be carried out in such a way as to avoid separating children from their parents. The State party should consider revising the current practice of restricting the freedom of movement of those Colombians under temporary protection, especially the young people.

Economic exploitation, including child labour

56. The Committee welcomes the efforts made by the State party to reduce child labour and the ratification of ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182. The Committee remains concerned about the high number of children involved in labour, mainly as domestic and rural workers (in sugar cane plantations), and that the State party has not adequately enforced child labour provisions.

57. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensures the full implementation of the child labour provisions and take all necessary measures to prevent child labour, in rural as well as urban areas (child domestic workers);**

(b) **Develop preventive measures that target those soliciting and providing sexual services, including materials on the legislation concerning the sexual abuse and exploitation of minors, and education programmes, including programmes in schools on healthy lifestyles;**

(c) **Increase the number of trained labour inspectors and trained professionals providing psychological counselling and other recovery services to victims;**

(d) **Train law enforcement officials, social workers and prosecutors on how to receive, monitor, investigate and prosecute complaints in a child-sensitive manner.**

Sexual exploitation/trafficking

58. The Committee welcomes the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It remains concerned that sexual exploitation and abuse continue to be serious problems and that the victims of sexual exploitation do not have access to appropriate recovery and assistance services. The Committee also remains concerned about the lack of data to determine the real dimension of the problem of child abuse and sexual exploitation and about the insufficient measures to prevent and combat trafficking of children.

59. **The Committee recommends the adoption and effective implementation of adequate legislation to prevent and combat trafficking, sexual exploitation and pornography involving children. It also recommends the provision of sufficient financial resources for the implementation of the activities promoted by the new National Committee against Commercial Sexual Exploitation. The Committee further recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Undertake awareness-raising campaigns, particularly for children, parents and other caregivers;**

(b) **Ensure that trafficked children and children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation are always treated as victims and that perpetrators are prosecuted;**

(c) **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.**

Juvenile justice

60. The Committee is concerned that insufficient efforts have been made by the State party in reviewing its juvenile justice system to bring it into full conformity with the Convention and other related international instruments. It is also concerned, inter alia, that Law 46 establishes a regime more severe in the field of penal responsibility of adolescents, in particular increasing the maximum period of preventive detention from two to six months with the possibility to extend it to one year.

61. **The Committee recommends that the State party continue its efforts to reform the legislation concerning the system of juvenile justice in line with the Convention, in particular articles 37, 40 and 39, and other United Nations standards in the field of juvenile justice, including 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.**

62. As part of this reform, the Committee particularly recommends that the State party:

(a) **Protect the rights of children deprived of their liberty and improve their conditions of detention and imprisonment, notably by establishing special facilities for children with conditions suitable to their age and needs and by ensuring the existence of social services in all those facilities, and guarantee separation from adults in all pre-trial and other detention centres;**

(b) **Investigate, prosecute and punish any case of mistreatment committed by law enforcement personnel, including prison guards, and establish an independent, child-sensitive and accessible system for dealing with complaints from children;**

(c) **Ensure that children remain in regular contact with their families while in the juvenile justice system, notably by informing parents when their child was detained and where he/she is being held;**

(d) **Introduce regular medical examination of children by independent medical staff;**

(e) **Make every effort to establish a programme of recovery and social rehabilitation of juveniles following judicial proceedings;**

(f) **Take into consideration the recommendations of the Committee made at its day of general discussion on juvenile justice (CRC/C/46, paras. 203-238);**

(g) **Request technical assistance in the area of juvenile justice and police training from, among others, UNICEF.**

Children belonging to a minority or indigenous group

63. The Committee, acknowledging the adoption of the new legislation creating three indigenous *comarcas*, remains concerned that lack of economic resources is an obstacle to developing specific programmes on education, health and social services for indigenous children. The Committee is also concerned about the preservation of the identity of indigenous children since bilingual education remains a challenge in indigenous areas and education lacks resources of all kinds.

64. The Committee recommends that the State party take all necessary measures to ensure that indigenous children enjoy all their rights without discrimination, including equal access to culturally appropriate services including health, education, social services, housing, potable water and sanitation. The Committee also recommends that the State party, with the full participation of indigenous communities and children, develop public awareness campaigns, including through the mass media, to combat negative attitudes and misperceptions about indigenous children. The Committee also recommends that the State party pay particular attention to guarantee the preservation of the identity of indigenous and Afro-Panamanian children, e.g. by the implementation of the national plan to develop bilingual intercultural education.

9. Dissemination of documents

65. Finally, in light of article 44, paragraph 6, of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the second periodic report and written replies submitted by the State party be made widely available to the public at large and that the publication of the report be considered, along with the relevant summary records and concluding observations adopted by the Committee. Such a document should be widely distributed in order to generate debate and awareness of the Convention and its implementation and monitoring within the Government, the Parliament and the general public, including concerned non-governmental organizations.

10. Next report

66. In light of the recommendation on reporting periodicity adopted by the Committee and described in the report on 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 States 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 States parties is crucial. As an exceptional measure, in order to help the State party catch up with its reporting obligations so as to be in full compliance with the Convention, the Committee invites the State party to submit its third and fourth reports in one consolidated report by 10 January 2008, the due date for the submission of the fourth report. The consolidated report should not exceed 120 pages (see CRC/C/118). The Committee expects the State party to report thereafter every five years, as foreseen by the Convention.
