Child Rights References in the Universal Periodic Review

Summary:
A compilation of extracts featuring child-rights issues from the reports submitted to the first Universal Periodic Review. There are extracts from the 'National Report', the 'Compilation of UN Information' and the 'Summary of Stakeholder's Information'. Also included is the 'Final Report' and 'Conclusions and Recommendations' from the Review.

Benin – 2nd Session – 2008
Date of consideration: Wednesday 7th May 2008 - 9.00 a.m. - 12.00 p.m.

National Report

Benin has signed various international and regional human rights conventions including:
- Convention no. 138 of the ILO on the minimum age for work.
- Convention no. 182 on the worst forms of child labour.

Benin has introduced laws which translate the obligations of international law into their domestic judicial and legal system, including:
- Law No. 2006-04 of 05 April 2006 on the conditions of displaced minors and the suppression of child trafficking.
- Inter-ministerial sanctions of 1st October 2003 on those who commit sexual violence in schools or general secondary, technical or professional educational establishments.

Benin has introduced various mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights, including:
- Free pre-school and primary education since the 2006-2007 school year. This was introduced by the government of Benin to guarantee the right to education for all children of school age. This has resulted in an exponential increase in enrolment in schools throughout the country and an improvement in pre-school and primary education due to the large-scale construction of classrooms.
- Free health services for children aged 0-5.
- A national policy on the protection and integration of disabled people, and a proposed law on this issue. A school for deaf children has already been set up in Vedoko, and also special classes for children with learning disabilities in a school in Cotonou.

Benin also has a state institution, the National Commission on Child Rights.

Benin has ratified the CRC and has introduced most of this into their domestic law through the Child Code, and the introduction of laws relating to sexual violence and female genital mutilation.

Benin demonstrated how it met with the requirements of the international human rights instruments to which it is a party. The child rights provisions include:
- The right to education – The state guarantees the right to education, and education is compulsory in Benin. There has been free pre-school and primary education in Benin since October 2006. Benin has expressed its aim to meet the requirement of the Millennium Development Goal number two to achieve universal primary education. Funding for educational resources increased in 2005, and the budget for this sector is 86,511,000,000 francs or 22.55 per cent of state resources. Both the state and NGOs are working on the ground to try to increase the enrolment of girls in school. They have also created a ministry for literacy and the promotion of national languages.
- The right to health - Law No. 2003-04 of 3 March 2003 on sexual health provides access for adolescents to health services including those related to reproductive health, sexual education, contraception and family planning services.
- The rights of women, children and the protection of the family – A ministry for the rights of women, children and the family has been set up.
The government of Benin has made the development of the education sector a priority, along with the right to education and the right to health.

Benin recognises that it still faces challenges, including the protection of people with disabilities; the promotion of respect for the rights of children and adolescents; increasing the effectiveness of free pre-school and primary education; and extending this to free secondary and technical education.

**Compilation of UN Information**

The Committee on the Rights of the Child welcomed the ratification in 2006 of Benin to the two OP-CRC.

In 2006, CRC welcomed the adoption of several laws and regulations aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of children and recommended that Benin continue to strengthen its efforts to provide better legal protection for children and ensure that relevant domestic laws are in full conformity with the Convention. It further recommended that Benin expedite the adoption of the Children’s Code and the revision of the Penal Code and the Penal Procedure Code.

Also, in 2006, the CRC20 regretted the absence of an independent and child-sensitive structure with a mandate that includes the power to receive and address individual complaints of alleged violations of the rights of the child.

CRC was concerned that Benin had not yet adopted a national plan of action for children and recommended that a National Policy and Strategy on Child Protection be adopted. CRC further recommended that Benin continue and strengthen its efforts to improve the coherency and coordination of all the activities for the implementation of the Convention so as to ensure effective coordination among central and local authorities as well as cooperation with children, young people, parents and non-governmental organisations. In 2004, the HR Committee noted the efforts made by Benin to increase public awareness of human rights but was concerned that these efforts have been limited. It recommended that, as expressly stipulated in article 40 of the Constitution, Benin integrate human rights education in the primary, secondary, higher and vocational education curricula.

In 2002, CESCR noted that the prevalence of certain traditions, customs and cultural practices, including those set down in the 1931 Dahomey Code of Customary Law, leads to substantial discrimination against women and girls and prevents them from fully exercising their rights under the Covenant. In 2005, while welcoming the adoption of the Personal and Family Code, CEDAW was also concerned about the application of customary practices and about the prevalence of structural patriarchal attitudes as well as deep-rooted stereotypes that may undermine the effectiveness of the Code. Similar concerns were raised regarding the effectiveness of the law on female genital mutilation and about the status of marriages concluded prior to the Code's coming into force. CEDAW also called upon Benin to develop and implement comprehensive educational measures on the provisions of the Personal and Family Code and on other laws designed to eliminate discrimination against women.

In 2006, while noting measures undertaken by Benin, in particular the implementation of the programme of action for 2001-2006, CRC was concerned at the persisting de facto discrimination, lack of statistical data on the number of children with disabilities and insufficient educational opportunities for these children. It recommended Benin to consider developing and adopting a national policy or strategy on persons with disabilities and provide all children with disabilities access to adequate social and health services.

In 2007, while taking note of the efforts made by Benin notably through legislative measures to eradicate ill-treatment against children, CAT was alarmed by reports on trafficking, exploitation, prostitution, genital mutilation, rape and infanticide. It recommended that Benin take necessary measures to prohibit and eradicate torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of children as well as investigate and bring perpetrators to justice. In 2006, the CRC was concerned that infanticide of so-called “sorcerer’s children” motivated by traditional beliefs continues to be practiced in certain communities and on infants with disabilities. CRC recommended Benin to take measures, including legislative ones, to prevent and stop infanticide. In 2004, the HR Committee raised similar concerns.

In 2006, CRC noted with appreciation the efforts undertaken by Benin to prevent the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), including the Law on the Suppression of FGM of 2003, and that some practitioners have abandoned this practice. However, it reiterated its concern at the de facto persistence of practices harmful to the girl child, including FGM. The HR Committee in 2004 and CESCR in 2002 expressed similar concerns. CRC recommended that Benin strengthen and accelerate its ongoing efforts to prevent FGM.

In 2004, while noting the efforts made by Benin, the HR Committee, as also highlighted by UNHCR, expressed its concern at the alarming practice of placing children with a third party as an act of mutual assistance or family or community solidarity (vidomégons), which has become a source of trafficking and economic exploitation of children within Benin. It was concerned that Benin has become a country of transit, origin and destination for international trafficking in children. In 2006, while welcoming the ongoing efforts to combat child trafficking, CRC54 was concerned at the information that a high number of children under 18, especially teenage girls, are still being trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation and domestic labour in other countries. In 2002, CESCR expressed similar concerns. UNICEF noted that a national policy and strategy for child protection with a 5 year action plan has been submitted for Government approval, while a strategy on the integration of disabled persons has also been drawn up. On 16 March 2006, the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights aspects of the victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children wrote to the Government regarding issues of trafficking and exploitation of children. It was reported that hundreds of children from Benin, some as young as six, are trafficked. They noted that allegedly only seven individuals in charge of the trafficking were arrested, before being freed at the end of 2004, with sentences ranging from a few months to a year of imprisonment. They further noted that no measures to encourage them to abandon their illicit activities were taken, and as a consequence, it was alleged that the trafficking was ongoing. In its response, Benin noted that it had been the first State to recognise the existence of this issue and that it had undertaken a number of actions to put an end to it, including signing
multilateral and bilateral agreements. It also informed that despite the absence of any formal complaints by the victims, the individuals in charge of the trafficking had been identified, arrested and brought to justice.

In 2006, CRC expressed concern at the increasing number of children living, working and begging in the streets (the talibés), especially in urban areas, who are also victims of economic and sexual exploitation and at risk of HIV/AIDS infections. It was also concerned at the lack of programmes to address the needs of these children and to protect them. Furthermore, CRC welcomed the inter-ministerial order penalising sexual violence in schools but expressed its concern at reports of sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Also, while welcoming the adoption of the Code on Persons and the Family which sets the legal age for marriage for boys and girls at 18, CRC regretted the lack of clarity on the legal minimum age of sexual consent as there is no provision in the domestic legislation. CRC urged Benin to, inter alia, adopt a plan of action to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and sexual abuse; and ensure that children’s testimonies are recorded in an appropriate way. While welcoming efforts undertaken to combat all forms of abuse and violence against children, CRC was concerned at the acute problem of violence against children and child abuse within families; at the limited measures to prevent and combat ill-treatment. It recommended Benin to, inter alia, design policies and programmes to address these issues and establish effective procedures and child-sensitive mechanisms to investigate complaints. Also, in 2007, while taking note of the legislation prohibiting corporal punishment in schools, CAT was concerned at the absence of such legislation at home and in institutions other than school. In 2006, CRC was also concerned that corporal punishment is widespread throughout society as a method of discipline, due to the generally tolerant attitude towards this practice.

CAT regretted that, according to penal law, juveniles of more than 13 years could be sentenced to a deprivation of liberty. It recommended that Benin take necessary measures to raise the age of criminal responsibility to an internationally acceptable level. In 2006, CRC expressed similar concern. The HR Committee74 was further concerned that few people, including minors, are assisted by a lawyer during criminal proceedings, and that such assistance is mandatory only in the Court of Assizes.

CRC was concerned at the widespread poverty in Benin and regretted the lack of information on the actual extent of children living in poverty. Concern was also expressed at the regional disparities in the standard of living and the direct correlation between poverty, health status and health care, and access to education. While noting the improvements in water supply, the CRC was concerned at the limited access to clean and safe drinking water and adequate sanitation in the country. It recommended that Benin reinforce its efforts to provide support and material assistance, with a particular focus on the most marginalised and disadvantaged families, and to guarantee the right of children to an adequate standard of living.

In 2005, while noting the efforts made by Benin to improve reproductive health care to women, CEDAW was concerned about the lack of access to adequate health care for women and girls, particularly in rural areas. It was concerned about the causes of morbidity and mortality in women, particularly the number of deaths due to illegal abortions, and about inadequate family planning services and the low rates of contraceptive use. It recommended Benin to take measures to improve and increase women's access to health care and health-related services and information, particularly in rural areas; contraceptive services to women and girls; and that sex education be widely promoted and targeted at girls and boys, with special attention to the prevention of early pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Similar concerns were raised by CRC in 2006 as well as by CESC in 2002.

In 2006, CRC noted with appreciation the various health programmes and projects undertaken by Benin, including the Bamako Initiative, the results of the successful immunisation programme and the integrated approach to child survival, the high level of antenatal care and the reasonably high level of assisted births. However, the Committee was concerned that infant, neonatal and maternal death rates remain very high. It was also concerned at the high incidence of malnutrition and recommended that Benin continue to prioritise the allocation of financial and human resources to the health sector. UNICEF also noted that chronic malnutrition has increased from 30.7 per cent in 2001 to 43.1 per cent in 2006 and even higher rates are registered among children from the poorest families throughout the country. FAO noted that Benin is committed to integrating the right to food in the national strategies against malnutrition and food insecurity, taking into consideration the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realisation of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security.

CRC noted with appreciation various measures undertaken by Benin, but was deeply concerned at the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS and that a limited number of HIV/AIDS infected children have access to antiretroviral medication. CRC recommended that Benin continue to, inter alia, strengthen its efforts in combating the spread and effects of HIV/AIDS, including by providing all pregnant women with adequate health and social services free of charge, and by ensuring the provision of antiretroviral drugs and paediatric care. A WHO report indicated that HIV infections within the population progresses slowly but in a constant manner and its pressure on the health system increases in a parallel way.

In 2002, CESC was concerned at the large numbers of children who work, and as a result have no access to education and suggested that Benin monitor child labour effectively. CESC was also concerned at the persistently high illiteracy rate and noted with concern the cultural preference given in educational matters to male children. It was further concerned at the fact that primary education is not free of charge and that parents pay direct and indirect school fees. It recommended Benin to step up efforts to provide girls and boys with equal access to education, to improve the literacy rate and to undertake the progressive introduction of free primary education. In 2005, CESC expressed similar concerns and, inter alia, encouraged Benin to take steps to overcome traditional attitudes and to improve the literacy level of girls and women through the adoption of comprehensive programmes. In 2006, while noting with appreciation the various efforts undertaken by Benin, including the adoption of the national plan of action entitled “Education for All” and the Ten Year Development Plan for the Education Sector, CRC was concerned by the high illiteracy rate, the dropouts, overcrowding in classrooms, the low transition rate to secondary school, the insufficient number of trained teachers, the insufficiency of budget allocations for schools, the poor quality of education, and sexual violence and harassment in schools. It recommended Benin to continue to allocate adequate financial, human and technical resources to address these concerns. UNICEF also noted that the number of children in primary
“vidomégon”, are frequently victims of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including sexual and psychological violence by Societies beyond their daily economic exploitation, child domestic workers, also called “vidomégon”, are frequently victims of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including sexual and psychological violence by Societies.

Beyond their daily economic exploitation, child domestic workers, also called “vidomégon”, are frequently victims of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including sexual and psychological violence by Societies. The HR Committee requested Benin to provide the relevant information on its response to the Committee’s recommendations, related to: the persistence of FGM, conditions of detention and abuse of the system of police custody, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and that that law enforcement officials who perpetrate such violations appear to enjoy widespread impunity.

Summary of Stakeholders' Information

According to Franciscans International (FI), in certain populations in the north of Benin, especially the Bariba and the Peuhl, the babies of mothers who die in childbirth are considered to be “sorcerer’s children”. Babies who are born breech, or where a limb is born before the head, are similarly viewed. A baby identified as a “sorcerer’s child” is considered to be a curse and the source of all unfortunate events in the family – real or imagined – in the past, present and future. In order to redeem the family, the supposed “sorcerer’s child” must be either physically eliminated or sent as far away from the family as possible to work as a slave. The methods of elimination are cruel and varied. This is done by abandoning the baby, by twisting its neck, or by knocking its head against a tree. FI says it is difficult to provide precise numbers, but it is reasonable to say that in over 60 per cent of cases where mother die in childbirth, the children are eliminated. With the rising birth rate in the region, this is a worrying situation.

FI added that infanticide motivated by traditional beliefs is affecting the effective enjoyment of human rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. FI referred back to the CRC’s final observation in 2006 that, “infanticide of so-called “sorcerer’s children” motivated by traditional beliefs continues to be practiced in certain communities and on infants with disabilities.”

According to OMCT, legislation and a governmental policy should urgently be adopted to stop infanticides, notably by sensitizing the concerned parts of the population (particularly women, mid-wives and communities) and giving support to families. FI recommended the implementation of a constructive programme, specifically aimed at early childhood in rural areas, including awareness-raising amongst families about harmful traditional beliefs which impede the rights of early childhood, especially the right to life; the promotion of child rights amongst families and traditional leaders; health centres dedicated to children at risk of becoming victims of infanticide.

The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (GIEACP) added that corporal punishment of children by parents is not prohibited by law in the home. Children have some protection from ill-treatment and neglect by parents or guardians under the Criminal Code, the Code on Persons and the Family (2004) and the Constitution (1990). Corporal punishment is prohibited in schools (structured formal education) by Circular letter No. 100/MENC (1962), but not in law. The GIEACP reported that it has been unable to ascertain whether this prohibition also applies to the traditional system of education where children are educated within the local family and community environment in accordance with current rituals and customs.

OMCT recommended to expressly prohibit in law all forms of corporal punishment against children for any purpose (including education) and in all situations and settings, including at home, and to sensitize key actors (personnel working with children, parents, etc.) on the harmful effects of corporal punishment and on the value of non-harmful conducts of education and child development. GIEACP expressed similar recommendations.

Beyond their daily economic exploitation, child domestic workers, also called “vidomégon”, are frequently victims of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including sexual and psychological violence by Societies.
recommended considering, with targeted international support, the extension of free education up to the secondary level; and continuing

- Algeria asked what measures have been taken to achieve free and mandatory education and tackle the problem of illiteracy. Algeria

(ii) Interactive dialogue and responses by the State under Review

education for all between now and 2015, in conformity with the Millennium Development Goals.

- As to the right to education and culture, Benin has adopted in February 2005 a letter on educational policy in order to guarantee

primary schooling and free health care for children up to five years of age.

- Benin has also taken a number of measures aimed to protect and promote human rights, inter alia, free-of-charge preschool and

Minors’ Protection Police Units (Brigade de protection des mineurs).

- Benin has taken legal or regulatory measures to incorporate international instruments into domestic law and to integrate

recommendations of treaty bodies. This was the case with the Persons and Family Code in 2006 and the Code on the Child in 2007.

OMCT added that ill-treatment that may amount to torture is also used against arrested children to obtain confessions, despite the

existing minors’ protection police unit (Brigade de Protection des Mineurs). Moreover, according to OMCT, excessive duration of police

custody is not uncommon. OMCT urged the Government of Benin to ensure that all measures are taken in order to cease all excessive

use of force by law enforcement agents against individuals during arrest and police custody. The Government should introduce human

rights legal safeguards and ensure their proper implementation.

According to OMCT, there are also reports of cases of violence perpetrated against juvenile detainees by guards and peers.

Concerning the separation of prisoners according to age, OMCT reported that despite the detention of juveniles in separate quarters, this

separation from adults remains limited in practice: adults often enter the juveniles’ quarter; juveniles regularly cross places where adults

live, etc. Regarding women and girls specifically, there is no separation between them: they literally live together. FIACAT and the

OMCT recommend that the government of Benin guarantees the separation of adults and children, and that women are guarded only by

female prison guards.

OMCT further recommended that the conditions of detention be improved, more particularly by ensuring that minors, including girls,

are separated from adults; that all detainees are treated humanely, that they have access to care and can benefit from basic sanitation and

food, with special attention given to the needs of women and children; and that all employees of the detention facilities be provided with

satisfactory and effective human, material and logistical means.

FI reported that boys are favoured over girls in education. The result of this is that many children have no education. OMCT

recommended that the Government of Benin reinforce the action of NGOs working for the promotion and the defence of women’s rights

by investing towards the elimination of illiteracy, the education and instruction of girls and women, notably in the northern part of the

State.

Final Report

- Benin has taken legal or regulatory measures to incorporate international instruments into domestic law and to integrate

recommendations of treaty bodies. This was the case with the Persons and Family Code in 2006 and the Code on the Child in 2007.

- The institutional framework has been strengthened by the creation of various institutions and structures aimed at ensuring the

promotion and respect of human rights, such as the National Commission on the Rights of the Child, the Presidential Mediator and the

Minors’ Protection Police Units (Brigade de protection des mineurs).

- Benin has also taken a number of measures aimed to protect and promote human rights, inter alia, free-of-charge preschool and

primary schooling and free health care for children up to five years of age.

- As to the right to education and culture, Benin has adopted in February 2005 a letter on educational policy in order to guarantee

education for all between now and 2015, in conformity with the Millennium Development Goals.

(ii) Interactive dialogue and responses by the State under Review

- Algeria asked what measures have been taken to achieve free and mandatory education and tackle the problem of illiteracy. Algeria

recommended considering, with targeted international support, the extension of free education up to the secondary level; and continuing
the information campaign in favour of admitting girls to school.

- With regard to the situation of child labour, Brazil noted that child domestic workers are frequently victims of cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment.

- Belgium commended Benin on its efforts to improve the human rights situation, in particular by protecting children, and welcomed progress made in terms of school attendance. It indicated that Benin is one of the partner countries of Belgium since 2002. It noted that the level of malnutrition of children and reports of trafficking of children were issues of concern. It asked whether the world food crisis was likely to worsen the situation of the population and what measures Benin is planning to take to protect the population. Belgium recommended that Benin intensify its efforts to provide support and material assistance to the most marginalised and most underprivileged families to effectively guarantee the rights of children through a sufficient standard of living and the right to education.

- China welcomed measures to eliminate illiteracy and to extend compulsory education and invited Benin to provide details on measures to improve prison conditions and to strengthen the protection of disabled persons and children.

- The Philippines noted increases in the general enrolment rate for girls and boys and in the percentage of households with clean water supply. It asked further information about the village committees set up to combat trafficking of children and on the structure, composition, mandate and impact of these local and grass-roots committees.

- The Russian Federation noted challenges referred to in the national report, such as the development of education, the elimination of discrimination against women and a comprehensive protection of the rights of children. It asked whether Benin is planning to introduce legislation prohibiting corporal punishment of children and what measures are being taken to eliminate harmful traditional practices affecting the health of women.

- The Democratic Republic of the Congo requested information on the issue of trafficking of children and on additional measures taken in that regard.

- Mali asked about measures to eradicate the trafficking of children.

- Canada recommended to Benin to better apply the existing laws concerning trafficking in children and human beings.

- Concerning the rights of women and children, France asked what measures Benin is planning to take in order to strengthen the struggle against traditional practices like FGM and infanticide of witch children. It also noted that practices contrary to the rights of women and children are still too numerous.

- Latvia noted an increase of investments in the national education programmes and indicated that UNICEF noted that the national education budget increased from 20 to 30 per cent in 2007, as well as efforts to achieve gender parity in education. It emphasised the contribution of national education programmes to the improvement of civil society and the progressive development of human rights. It encouraged Benin to continue along these lines and enquired about future plans in this direction.

- While noting that trafficking in children remains a visible phenomenon, the Holy See requested further information on additional measures envisaged to eliminate this phenomenon. Regarding the issue of infanticide of so-called witch children, it recommended that Benin develop an awareness campaign to address traditional beliefs that are harmful to the rights of children, especially their right to life. It also asked which supplementary measures were envisaged to defend the right to life of the child, in particular newborns.

- Azerbaijan encouraged Benin to bring its legislation in line with international standards and give a preponderate place to education. It welcomed the increase of the budget for the educational sector, and that today education expenditures represent 22 per cent of the total budget. It wanted to know what measures were envisaged to solve the problem of children who do not go to school and work in the streets, and to reduce regional inequalities between villages and towns.

- The delegation of Benin responded to various questions raised, in particular on the issue of trafficking in children, indicating that the phenomenon exists and that it has become a scourge for the country, also because of poverty. There is an active cooperation with neighbouring countries to address the issue, and domestic legislation has been adopted criminalizing trafficking. Other measures include the setting up of departmental and local committees to prevent the exploitation of children and of minors’ protection police units (Brigades de protection des mineurs); however, this is not a definitive solution and its elimination requires continuing efforts. Regarding the issue of domestic violence and harmful traditional practices of women and children, the delegation highlighted the need to put into effect the conclusions and recommendations made in 2007 by the Committee against Torture. Regarding harmful traditional practices, including the issue of “witch children,” measures have been taken to address them and to implement recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

- Beginning with the academic year 2006/2007, pre-primary and primary schooling are free of charge. In pre-primary education, the objective is to increase school attendance from 4 to 15 per cent between now and 2015. Measures taken include recruiting additional teachers, increasing and improving infrastructure and the teaching curriculum. Other measures include recruiting supervisory staff, the improvement of programmes, new manuals and ensuring the presence of schools in remote disadvantaged and remote areas, as well as the construction of housing for teachers. On the question of literacy for adults, Benin envisages training trainers and a national policy on literacy was validated in April 2008. The priority plan of action for the reduction of poverty took specifically into account the question of literacy and actions in this direction will be taken very soon to ensure that those who did not have access to education take part in the development of the country.

- On the issue of FGM, a law was voted in 2003 to ban this practice and various measures were taken, including training programmes for public opinion leaders and practitioners of FGM with the help of NGOs, criminal action against individuals who practice FGM,
awareness-raising actions for members of the judiciary, police officers and the population, as well as the reconversion of practitioners towards other activities, with the aim to eradicate this customary practice which is degrading for women and for the society as a whole. The Ministry of the Family deals with eradicating this practice at national level, but in addition Benin is cooperating with neighbouring countries and its partners on an agreement. Finally, measures relating to schooling and raising literacy also contribute to eradicating this practice. One difficulty in this field is the ease of movement of persons with neighbouring countries.

- Cuba remarked that for a country with limited resources such as Benin, pre-primary and primary school teaching have been provided free of charge, as well as health services for children up to five years of age.

- With reference to discrimination against disabled children, Ireland recommended to develop a national policy and further measures concerning disabled persons in order to give disabled children access to social and health services, and asked what efforts have been made in this regard.

- Morocco welcomed the measures taken to ensure the right to education and the policies devoted to free primary education, and noted with interest the efforts made by Benin to guarantee the right to health.

- The Syrian Arab Republic appreciated the establishment of new institutions to protect and promote the rights of the child, such as the National Committee on the Rights of the Child and the national unit to monitor and coordinate child protection activities, as well as the village committee set up to combat child trafficking. It asked about efforts taken to combat illiteracy, especially among women, and about the comprehensive educational measures taken with regard to the provisions of the Persons and Family Code and other laws designed to eliminate discrimination against women.

- Bangladesh noted that in general the situation in Benin is encouraging and referred to the efforts to improve the school enrolment rate of girls and boys, and welcomed the national committee on the rights of the child and the National Unit to monitor and coordinate child protection.

- Senegal welcomed the efforts made by Benin to meet its commitments in the area of human rights, and welcomed the progress made with regard to disabled persons, the realisation of the right to education, and access of drinking water, for which UNICEF noted the significant progress.

- Nigeria noted the efforts of Benin in its fight against children trafficking and reaffirmed that Nigeria will continue collaborating with Benin in this endeavour. It asked further how Benin was able to successfully bridge the gap between boys and girls in school enrolment.

- The Netherlands commended Benin on new projects, programmes and laws to protect the vulnerable, including women, children and disabled persons. Despite these good initiatives, practices such as child abuse, child trafficking, FGM and sexual harassment still persist. It thus recommended that Benin continue to strengthen its efforts to provide for better legal protection for the vulnerable groups and to guarantee their rights on the ground.

- The United Kingdom welcomed Benin’s legislative reforms to eliminate discrimination against women and to protect the rights of children, specifically the adoption of legislation outlawing the practice of FGM, but noted that CEDAW had expressed concern that some forms of FGM are still practiced in some villages and referred to the concerns expressed on the absence of specific laws against domestic violence and the trafficking of women. The United Kingdom also expressed concern that a high number of adolescent girls are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation and domestic labour to other countries, asked whether Benin plans to further work in these areas and recommended that it take further steps to establish and implement laws against domestic violence and the trafficking of women and children, and to ensure that existing laws prohibiting FGM are reviewed and enforced throughout the country.

- While welcoming efforts in the justice sector, which have led to a fairly positive legal framework, Italy noted difficulties regarding the actual achievements of individual rights, often caused by the persistence of certain prejudices or beliefs linked to certain traditions particularly concerning the rights of children and women, where the absence of a strategy to facilitate human rights education is more obvious. It asked whether the authorities are envisaging improvement of their performance in this field.

- Mexico acknowledged the efforts made by Benin to promote and protect human rights and implementing the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, notably as concerns the adoption of a plan of action to prevent and combat exploitation and sexual abuse. Mexico recommended that Benin promote the visit of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography which could contribute to the efforts of Benin in its protection of the children.

- South Africa welcomed efforts made in the area of the right to education despite Benin’s limited resources.

- Mauritania noted the efforts made in the context of combating poverty and the protection of most deprived sections of society. It asked Benin about initiatives adopted to combat FGM and recommended to Benin to pay more importance to the schooling of girls in its education programmes, which would certainly contribute to combating FGM.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

In the course of the discussion, the following recommendations were made to Benin:

- Recommended that Benin develop an awareness campaign to address traditional beliefs that are harmful to the rights of children, especially their right to life (Holy See);

- Recommended that Benin take further steps to establish and implement laws against domestic violence and the trafficking of women and children, and to ensure that existing laws prohibiting female genital mutilation are reviewed and enforced throughout the country (United Kingdom);
- Recommended to Benin to better apply the existing laws concerning trafficking in children and human being (Canada);
- Recommended that Benin promote the visit of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography which could contribute to the efforts of Benin in its protection of children (Mexico);
- Recommended to Benin to accelerate and strengthen its efforts to elaborate laws and policies to deal with female genital mutilation practices (Canada);
- Recommended to Benin to give more importance to the schooling of girls in its education programmes, which would certainly contribute to combat female genital mutilation (Mauritania);
- Recommended to Benin to consider, with targeted international support, the extension of free education up to the secondary level; and to continue the information campaign in favour of admitting girls to school (Algeria);
- Recommended that Benin intensify its efforts to favour support and material assistance to the most marginalised families and the most underprivileged families to effectively guarantee the rights of children through a sufficient standard of living and the right to education inter alia (Belgium);
- Recommended to Benin to develop a national policy and further measures concerning disabled persons in order to give disabled children access to social and health services (Ireland);