



Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

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Summary record of the 1992nd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Friday, 28 April 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Heller

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

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 19 of the Convention *(continued)*

Fourth periodic report of Slovakia (continued) (CAT/C/SVK/4; CAT/C/SVK/QPR/4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Slovakia joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair** invited the delegation to continue replying to the questions posed by Committee members at the 1989th meeting.
3. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the existing psychiatric care system was being reformed in accordance with the goals set out in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. That plan had been drawn up in fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining financial assistance from the Recovery and Resilience Facility of the European Commission; the financial assistance received from that mechanism would serve to fund the reform, which was aimed at humanizing and modernizing psychiatric care and ensuring the availability of community-based psychosocial services. On 1 March 2023, the Health Care Act had been amended to regulate the use of restraints in psychiatric facilities and to expand the rights of patients residing there.
4. Under the current system, persons judged to be in a poor state of health upon admission to a psychiatric facility were usually placed in a closed acute care unit for a limited amount of time. Once their condition had stabilized, they were moved to an open care unit where they could receive visits, make and receive telephone calls and take daily walks. Following the amendment of the Health Care Act, medical facilities offering psychiatric inpatient care were obliged to adopt and make public internal rules for the administration of such care. Those rules were to spell out, inter alia, the modalities for care delivery and were to be complemented by a catalogue of patients' rights that was to be put on prominent display in the facility in question.
5. The amended Health Care Act defined the different physical, mechanical and pharmacological restraints that could be used in psychiatric care facilities and specified the circumstances in which they could be applied. Net beds, also known as cage beds, would cease to be a lawful means of mechanical restraint from 1 January 2025. The Ministry of Health had set up a working group of experts to oversee the phasing out of such beds and their replacement with less restrictive alternatives, such as seclusion rooms and beds in secure wards. The construction of seclusion rooms was scheduled for completion by 21 December 2024. Patients were protected against misuse of restraints by the requirement for health-care facilities to notify the on-duty prosecutor of their use within 72 hours and the patient's designated contact person, legal representative or guardian within 24 hours.
6. The current shortage of medical personnel continued to pose a challenge for the delivery of health care, in general, and mental health care, in particular. The Ministry of Health was working to recruit additional staff to make up for that shortfall.
7. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, although there was no law or regulation preventing persons who had entered a psychiatric hospital voluntarily from leaving the facility, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment had observed during its visit to Slovakia that some psychiatric hospitals did in fact prevent such patients from doing so. It was hoped that the strict enforcement of the amended Health Care Act, which provided that even patients residing in acute psychiatric care units were allowed to leave the facility in question, would help to put a stop to that practice. The Health Care Surveillance Authority was the first port of call for patients wishing to file a complaint; complaints could also be lodged with the Ministry of Health, the Ombudsman's Office and the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, as appropriate.
8. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the measures taken by the Ministry of the Interior in follow-up to the judgments handed down by the European Court of Human Rights in relation to the incidents in Moldava nad Bodvou and Košice included strengthening the capacity of the Department of Control and Inspection Service to report potential crimes and reviewing its decisions to discontinue criminal proceedings. Instructions for police officers

on the use of coercive measures and tactical procedures had been issued. All police officers received annual training on domestic legal regulations and internal rules, which covered human rights and fundamental freedoms and the unacceptability of acts of violence and ill-treatment in the context of police interventions. The appropriateness of the use of coercive measures during police operations was subject to assessment. From 2021 onward, police officers were required to complete training on the proper processing of criminal complaints to help achieve uniformity in practices and to prevent abuse.

9. Several measures had been taken to give effect to the recommendations made to the Chief of Police by the Public Defender of Rights. The law specifying the facilities where persons could be deprived of their liberty pending trial had been amended to clarify the legal framework applicable to such places. The spaces in question were designed to ensure the safety of persons deprived of their liberty and respect for their rights. The Ministry of the Interior had devised a plan for the gradual remodelling of existing premises to ensure that they met the standards set by the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In March 2019, the Chief of Police had ordered the immediate removal of all fixed security devices to which detainees could be handcuffed in order to ensure the eradication of that practice.

10. **A representative of Slovakia**, summarizing the results of the national strategy for the integration of the Roma population up to 2020, said that Roma culture and identity had been promoted through a range of cultural and educational activities, including those organized by the Museum of Roma Culture in Slovakia and those financed by the Fund for the Support of the Culture of National Minorities. Temporary special measures had likewise been adopted to accelerate the achievement of equality between the Roma and the non-Roma population; those measures had helped to strengthen the enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation.

11. The measures taken to promote the integration of members of the Roma community into the labour market had included providing them with tailored employment and career guidance services and work experience opportunities. National training initiatives had served to increase the employability of long-term unemployed Roma.

12. Data collected by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights showed that only 34 per cent of Roma children were enrolled in preschool education, compared to 77 per cent of non-Roma children. Although the number of Roma children attending kindergarten had gradually increased following the amendment of the Education Act in 2021 to introduce compulsory preschool education for children when they reached the age of 5, the enrolment rate for those children still lagged behind that of their non-Roma counterparts, despite the availability of hardship assistance.

13. The initiatives undertaken to improve access to health care for the Roma community included health promotion and disease prevention projects funded by the European Union, psychosocial support schemes, and awareness-raising and information campaigns underscoring the importance of healthy living. During the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, a massive online information campaign had been launched to help to curb the spread of the disease in the Roma community, and special teams had been deployed to roll out vaccination drives and to provide assistance in areas with a large Roma population. A pilot project aimed at ensuring equal and dignified treatment for the Roma in hospitals had also been implemented. Interministerial cooperation on Roma-related matters had been strengthened, and a workplan had been drawn up with input from non-governmental organizations, academics and other stakeholders.

14. The amendment of the law on land tenure in 2017 had provided local authorities with a simplified means of legalizing Roma settlements. Subsidies worth over €10 million had been granted for the construction of social housing in areas inhabited by the Roma community. Some 500 apartments had been built since 2016. Multimillion-euro projects to provide temporary housing and improve sanitation and infrastructure in those areas had also been carried out. Progress had likewise been made in improving data collection on the Roma population in Slovakia and in mapping Roma communities.

15. The strategy for promoting the equality, inclusion and participation of the Roma population up to 2030 was a living policy document focused on combating racism and discrimination against the Roma in the areas of housing, health, education and employment.

The main aims of the strategy were to end the segregation of Roma communities, to promote non-discrimination by changing people's attitudes and improving relations with the non-Roma population and to reduce existing inequalities by promoting equal opportunities in the above-mentioned spheres of life. The strategy was aligned with the Government's development objectives and took into account recommendations received from international human rights monitoring bodies. It had been devised in consultation with a variety of stakeholders from the governmental and non-governmental sectors and was being implemented on the basis of three-year action plans that were subject to a monitoring and evaluation process involving national and international partners.

16. The working definition of anti-Roma racism developed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance had been adopted by the National Council in September 2022, and a list of examples of anti-Roma racism had been drawn up to help clarify what types of acts should be outlawed. It had been recommended that the Government should analyse and, if necessary, amend domestic legal regulations to ensure their alignment with that definition and adopt additional measures to protect the rights of the Roma population.

17. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, in 2003, the Ministry of Health had established an expert working group to investigate illegal sterilizations in Slovakia, whose findings had revealed a number of procedural shortcomings. The Government had then reviewed the relevant health legislation to bring it into line with the country's European Union and international obligations. That review had led to the adoption of the Health Care Act of 2004, which established the principle of informed consent. The Act stipulated that medical professionals must provide information on the purpose, nature, consequences and risks associated with health-care services in a clear and considerate manner and without pressuring the patients in any way. Patients whose intellectual capacity and health allowed them to provide such consent must be given sufficient time to make informed decisions.

18. Under the Health Care Act, sterilization was defined as the prevention of fertility without the removal or damage of reproductive glands. It could be performed only upon written request by a person with full legal capacity, by the legal representative of a person unable to give informed consent or on the basis of a court order requested by such a legal representative. The information provided by medical professionals to ensure informed consent must cover alternative forms of contraception, potential changes in the circumstances that had led to the request and the medical consequences and possible failure of sterilization. The procedure must be carried out by a qualified medical specialist at least 30 days after the submission of informed consent.

19. The Ministry of Health had developed a standard consent form in Slovak and minority languages. Undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing education programmes for doctors, nurses and midwives covered the legal aspects of health care, including the need to seek informed consent for sterilization in accordance with the Health Care Act. The Health Care Surveillance Authority was an effective mechanism for monitoring compliance with the law by medical professionals. The performance of sterilization without free, full and informed consent and the falsification of medical documentation were both offences under the Criminal Code. There had been no recorded instances of such offences since 2004.

20. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, in March 2023, the Ministry of Justice had issued a preliminary bill providing for a one-off compensation payment of €5,000 for persons who had been subjected to unlawful sterilization between July 1966 and 31 December 2004 in a Slovak medical facility. To ensure the timely adoption of the relevant legislation, the Ministry was working with a member of the National Council who had submitted his own bill with very similar provisions, under which compensation would be granted if the sterilization had been performed in violation of the law in force at the time or in circumstances in which the patient's capacity to provide free and informed consent had been seriously impaired. The investigation conducted in 2003 had shown that many women had been sterilized on the same day as giving birth, which was the reason for the introduction of the 30-day period between consent and sterilization. Those women would be deemed to have been in circumstances that seriously impaired their capacity for consent.

21. Victims of forced sterilization would be expected to submit information on when and where the procedure had been informed, along with the attendant circumstances, and their

medical records or an affidavit stating that they were not in possession of such documentation. The latter option had been provided for based on lessons learned from the experience gained in Czechia, where similar legislation had been introduced.

22. Although the national human rights institution had suggested that the Ministry of Justice should review the compensation claims, that responsibility had been assigned to the Ministry of Health, which had better access to archives of medical records. The claim forms would not be translated into minority languages, but public bodies such as the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and the Centre for Legal Aid, which had offices throughout the country, would be required to provide assistance in completing the forms. Such in-person assistance would be more effective, given the literacy issues faced by many older victims from marginalized Roma communities and the lack of minority language skills among Ministry of Health officials. If the law was adopted in 2023, the deadline for filing claims would be the end of 2025.

23. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, since the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, 1,300,000 refugees had entered Slovakia from Ukraine and 1,150,000 persons had returned to Ukraine. More than 100,000 persons had applied for temporary protection, including 40,000 children, and 210 had applied for asylum. What were known as “tolerated residence permits” afforded foreign nationals with temporary protection and would remain valid until at least March 2024 without requiring permit holders to take any further administrative steps. Ukrainians accounted for 56 per cent of the foreign nationals in Slovakia.

24. Since the start of the conflict, the Government had provided more than 830 metric tons of humanitarian aid worth €5 million to Ukraine and offered accommodation to 260,000 Ukrainian refugees. More than 10,000 Ukrainian children were currently enrolled in Slovak schools. The Ministry of the Interior was working closely with the International Organization for Migration to make assisted voluntary return and reintegration arrangements and to provide other services, such as financial support for vulnerable groups, employment and legal advice, Slovak language courses, interpretation assistance and computer skills courses. The activities of special offices established under a national programme to improve services for victims of crime had been expanded to provide support to Ukrainian refugees. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had helped prepare the national refugee response plan.

25. Under the Dublin III Regulation, 28 persons had been transferred to Slovakia and 44 persons had been transferred from Slovakia to another country in 2022. The Gabčíkovo humanitarian centre, with a capacity of 1,000 persons, was currently accommodating 852 Ukrainian nationals. Health care was provided on the premises, and the League for Mental Health offered individual and group sessions in Ukrainian with a special focus on older persons. The asylum facilities of the Migration Office were currently accommodating 801 persons.

26. A number of national plans and programmes to combat trafficking in persons had been launched since 2007. In 2019, 20 investigations and 14 prosecutions had been initiated in cases involving 66 trafficking victims, including 10 children. In 2020, 28 investigations and 15 prosecutions had been initiated in cases involving 62 victims, including 16 children. In 2021, 39 investigations and 19 prosecutions had been initiated in cases involving 43 victims, including 13 children, the youngest of whom had been an illegally adopted child of 3 years of age. In 2022, 29 investigations and 19 prosecutions had been initiated in cases involving 58 victims, including 10 children.

27. The 24-hour national hotline for trafficking victims had introduced a Ukrainian language service in April 2022 that had thus far taken 76 calls. Other preventive measures included awareness-raising activities, publications and seminars. In response to recent cases of trafficking in persons for the purpose of forced marriages involving minors, information materials had been prepared in cooperation with the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and the National Coordination Centre for Combating Violence against Children.

28. **A representative of Slovakia** said that new provisions on the preconditions and duration of pretrial detention had entered into force in 2021. Accused persons could be held in detention only if there was reason to believe that they would abscond or attempt to

influence other persons involved in the proceedings. Pretrial detention must be based on a reasoned court decision indicating why non-custodial alternatives could not be used. The decision could be challenged, and the accused person's relatives were informed of it. The maximum length of pretrial detention was 7 months for misdemeanors, 19 months for most criminal offences and 25 months for particularly serious crimes; periods of pretrial detention were deducted from the sentence if the person was convicted. Pretrial detention for the purpose of preventing attempts to influence other persons involved in the proceedings could not exceed 5 months.

29. From 2018 to 2022, pretrial detention had generally not exceeded 120 days for cases tried in district courts or 300 days for cases tried in specialized courts dealing with the most serious crimes. The usual duration of detention during trial proceedings had been up to 100 days for district courts and between 3 months and 1 year for specialized court trials. Since the end of 2020, the Ministry of Justice had awarded voluntary compensation in the 4 cases in which detention decisions had been quashed upon appeal and in the 27 cases of lawful detention decisions when the defendant had not been convicted. The reparation included an apology for the violation of rights and monetary compensation of approximately €20 per day of detention. Between 2017 and 2022, the Constitutional Court had considered 369 cases concerning pretrial detention on the merits and found in favour of the claimant 75 per cent of the time.

30. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the cells used for pretrial detention were being modernized to bring them into conformity with the Convention in accordance with a recommendation of the Public Defender of Rights made in 2015.

31. **A representative of Slovakia** said that he would try to explain why his Government believed that the basic definition of torture set out in article 420 of the Criminal Code was indeed in line with the Convention, as certain elements of the definition might have been lost in translation. That article provided for a prison sentence of from 2 to 6 years for anyone – not necessarily a public official – exercising public authority, or acting with the explicit or implicit consent of a person with such authority, who caused physical or mental suffering by means of torture or ill-treatment. The notion of implicit consent was equivalent to acquiescence and the offence covered ill-treatment as well as torture. In his Government's view, the definition incorporated all elements of the definition in article 1 of the Convention except the examples of possible motives. Any intentional act of torture or ill-treatment entailed criminal liability, regardless of the purpose for which it had been committed.

32. However, the Criminal Code defined aggravating circumstances which, if found to have been present, carried more severe penalties for most offences, including torture. In the case of torture, aggravating circumstances included an outcome of death or serious injury, its commission by more than one person, cases in which the victim was classified as a protected person and cases in which the torture had been motivated by hatred of an individual or group based on various grounds, including race, nationality, sex, political beliefs and sexual orientation. Disability would be added to that list under a forthcoming amendment to the Criminal Code. Accordingly, the element of discrimination was part of the broader legal definition of torture.

33. It was true, however, that as yet no one had been convicted of torture. The police officers involved in the cases of ill-treatment against Roma individuals that had eventually gone before the European Court of Human Rights had been charged with abuse of authority – an offence that, unlike torture, could only be committed by a public official. Establishing responsibility for that offence was easier than for the offence of torture because it was only necessary for the persons to have exercised their authority in a manner contrary to the law, to have exceeded their authority or to have failed to comply with an obligation or judicial decision. The penalty was similar to that for torture, namely from 2 to 5 years' imprisonment or 4 to 10 years in aggravated circumstances, which included special motives. In the previously mentioned cases, the presence of aggravating circumstances had been established.

34. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, under all the bilateral extradition treaties that Slovakia had signed, a person could be extradited to stand trial or serve a sentence only if the act in question was an offence in both jurisdictions and carried a penalty of at least 1 year of imprisonment. Where there was no applicable bilateral treaty or other relevant international

instrument, it was the Code of Criminal Procedure that applied. The Ministry of Justice had not received any request for judicial cooperation in torture cases between 2018 and 2022; however, the General Prosecutor's Office had received two such requests, one from Czechia to interview a witness and another to admit a criminal complaint. None of the cases brought before the Constitutional Court between 2018 and 2022 had related to the offence of torture; therefore, the definitions under the Criminal Code and the Convention had not been invoked or applied.

35. **A representative of Slovakia** said that there were currently 19 minors in pretrial detention and 9 others serving sentences out of the overall inmate population of approximately 10,000. Convicted juvenile offenders served their sentences in the country's only prison for minors. Juveniles were never held in cells of less than 4 m² and were held separately from adults throughout their stay. Derogations from the segregation rule were provided for by law and subject to judicial oversight. Minors in pretrial detention were held under a mitigated regime whereby they were free to move about the unit, had access to a kitchen and washing machine and could place telephone calls without restriction. Minors not held under that regime must be allowed out of their cell for a minimum of eight hours a day and were entitled to a weekly one-hour visit. All facilities where minors were held had a designated staff member who, among other tasks, liaised with schools to ensure the continuity of their education and organized leisure and sports activities. Standards for the treatment of juvenile detainees, including a set of goal-oriented activities, were being developed.

36. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the outcomes of the National Action Plan to Prevent and Eliminate Violence against Women for 2014–2019 included improved coordination; the establishment of a national 24-hour helpline for women experiencing violence and a network of support facilities; and the development of regional action plans, legal and professional frameworks for multi-institutional cooperation, standards for the provision of victim services, awareness-raising campaigns and programmes for perpetrators of violence against women. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family had designed the National Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities Strategy for 2021–2027 and the corresponding action plan, whose goals included the development, in cooperation with various ministries and non-governmental organizations, of a new 2022–2027 national action plan on violence against women that would enhance protection, improve data collection and expedite the prosecution of offenders. The first progress report was due in May 2024.

37. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the shooting that had occurred in Bratislava on 12 October 2022 had initially been classified as premeditated murder. However, following the police investigation, it had been reclassified as a terrorist attack. The police had taken immediate steps to identify and apprehend the perpetrator and ensure the safety of persons potentially at risk. Law enforcement agencies had not received any advance information about the suspect's radicalization. While that terrorist attack had brought to the fore the impact of the Internet and social media in the radicalization and recruitment of young people, the Ministry of the Interior had begun addressing the issue before that attack had occurred and, as part of that effort, had established a centre for combating hybrid threats. In order to fight terrorism by addressing the causes of radicalization, the Government had adopted a security strategy focused on protecting the foundations of democracy and the rule of law, raising awareness of human rights, seeking to put an end to negative stereotypes, restoring public trust in institutions, encouraging the population to report illegal activity and promoting social integration.

38. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, while the 2019 bill concerning the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights had ultimately not been passed, it had nonetheless borne fruit, including, for instance, a steady increase in the Centre's budget and additional recruitments. Moreover, the process for electing the Executive Director had been made more transparent. In fact, the interviews of the candidates in the latest election had been streamed online. With the establishment of the offices of the Public Defender of Rights, the Commissioner for Children and the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, the Centre had become more focused on monitoring and training, though it continued to deal with issues of discrimination. The need to transpose the relevant European Commission directives, which included many elements of the Paris Principles, should facilitate the legislative process for introducing further reforms.

39. **Mr. Tuzmukhamedov** (Country Rapporteur) said that he was curious to know whether the three extradition cases that had gone before the European Court of Human Rights had done so by dint of the complainants' efforts or as a result of the State party's internal procedures. It would be useful to know whether, in addition to being classified as a terrorist act, the shooting on Zámocká Street had also been considered to have had a special motive, since the victims belonged to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community. He would appreciate an update on the case of the terrorism suspect arrested in Slovakia in June 2022 thanks to joint efforts on the part of the Slovak authorities and the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation.

40. In follow-up to the delegation's replies, he wished to know whether judges and lawyers also received training concerning the Istanbul Protocol and, in particular, the recognition of signs of torture; what the nature and duration of isolation for newly arriving prisoners had been during the COVID-19 pandemic; the extent to which the pandemic had restricted prison monitoring; and whether article 420 of the Criminal Code also covered mental suffering as a form of torture or ill-treatment.

41. **Mr. Rouwane** (Country Rapporteur) said that he wished to know whether the offices of the Commissioner for Children and the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities were considered government bodies like the Office of the Public Defender of Rights and whether the State party was consulting with the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture regarding the establishment of the national preventive mechanism, since the option that Slovakia was contemplating – the designation of all three bodies to fulfil the role of that mechanism – was rather complex. He would welcome comments on the practice of holding migrant families with children in detention facilities, plans to set up a permanent body for coordination with the United Nations system and the proposed reforms of the justice system.

42. **The Chair** said that the Association for the Prevention of Torture could also assist with the implementation of the Optional Protocol.

43. **Mr. Liu** asked what human rights awareness-raising activities were conducted in Roma communities and whether law enforcement agencies recruited Roma individuals.

44. **Ms. Pūce** said that she would appreciate further details about the proposed alternatives to the use of cage beds in psychiatric institutions and specifically about seclusion rooms, about who provided security at psychiatric institutions and the training they received, and about any protocol on the application of chemical and physical restraints. She also wished to know whether the complaint mechanism was merely reactive or whether action could be taken in the absence of a complaint.

The meeting was suspended at 5.05 p.m. and resumed at 5.20 p.m.

45. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the fact that the extradition cases referred to earlier had gone all the way to the European Court of Human Rights was indeed exceptional. The shooting on Zámocká Street had initially been classified as murder with a special motive due to the element of hatred; however, the offence of terrorism, under which the attack had later been reclassified, did not have an aggravated form, since the penalty of 20 to 25 years' imprisonment was already rigorous. To his knowledge, there was no specific training for judges and lawyers on the detection of signs of torture. The definition of torture covered physical and psychological harm, including emotional distress, but since torture was such a serious offence, the psychological effects would have to be quite severe as well in order to constitute torture.

46. While the original plan had been to designate the Public Defender of Rights as the national preventive mechanism, the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities had argued convincingly that the role would best be played by all three entities within their respective areas of expertise. Steps had been taken to address the financial implications of that arrangement. The independence of the three entities was guaranteed under their respective founding Acts, and both of the commissioners' offices had been established in keeping with the relevant human rights treaty and, thus, with the Paris Principles. The heads of those entities were elected by the legislature and, although the fact that the offices were represented by single individuals could be problematic vis-à-vis the Paris Principles, many similarly structured ombudsman's offices around the world had nonetheless been granted category A

status. Neither relevant human rights treaty body had called into question the independence of the Commissioners. The Government had not consulted with the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture or the Association for the Prevention of Torture when considering the format of the mechanism but had referred to the extensive lists of resources and tools provided by those agencies.

47. **A representative of Slovakia** said that all the judicial reforms mentioned in the first half of the dialogue had been in force since January 2021. For instance, the retirement ages for Constitutional Court judges and ordinary court judges were 72 and 67 years, respectively. The Ministry of Justice was remapping judicial districts to facilitate further specialization among the country's judges.

48. **Mr. Matulay** (Slovakia) said that members of the Permanent Mission would be meeting with the Chair of the Subcommittee the following week.

49. **A representative of Slovakia** said that, while there were no recorded cases of torture in which the victims had been women or children, a joint investigation team had been established to handle war crimes investigations and had some 100 cases under way. The Sečovce detention centre had been adapted to house families with children together. Proper hygiene measures were maintained, and children had three meals and two snacks a day as well as access to age-appropriate educational and recreational activities, including out of doors, and health care, either on site or at an external facility. Where necessary, interpretation services were provided for medical appointments. The detention centre also had staff specialized in caring for vulnerable groups and in teaching the Slovak language. Services at the centre were provided in cooperation with the Slovak Humanitarian Council and the European Union.

50. **A representative of Slovakia** said that all the measures taken in places of deprivation of liberty in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had been implemented in consultation with the public health authorities. On admission, prisoners had been placed in quarantine with others who were admitted at the same time. They had not been in isolation within the meaning of solitary confinement. Transfers between prisons had been limited, and prisoners had been tested prior to transport. Online visits and courses had been introduced. Prison monitoring had not been affected beyond the requirement that inspectors should respect hygiene measures. Most of the changes to pretrial detention facilities and prisons, as described on the previous day, had been made in response to recommendations by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture; the Government's replies to the issues raised by the European Committee in that connection during its last periodic visit in 2018 were available online in English and Slovak.

51. **A representative of Slovakia**, responding to questions regarding integration strategies targeting the Roma population and refugees, said that Slovakia intended to make preschool education compulsory from the age of 3 and was allocating funds from the Recovery and Resilience Plan to boost school staffing by 2025 to accommodate the influx of students. In addition, as part of the efforts of the Ministry of Education to address the problem of student absenteeism, parents who, beyond a specified period of time, failed to send their children to school would lose part of their social benefits. More than 305 police officers specialized in Roma affairs were deployed to patrol Roma communities. The Office of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities was involved in providing training, including on conflict resolution, to those officers as well as to the local population. The feedback thus far was positive, and there were plans to increase support for municipal violence prevention efforts.

52. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the Ministry of Health and the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities would further explore alternatives to the use of restraints with a view to introducing the necessary legislative amendments. The planned seclusion rooms would not be so-called "padded cells" but, rather, rooms with secure furniture, an observation window, a video surveillance system and natural light. Patients would be placed there only as long as was necessary. There were over 25 psychiatric treatment and case management protocols, including a protocol on the use of chemical and physical restraints.

53. **A representative of Slovakia** said that the Health Care Surveillance Authority, which monitored all fields of medicine, investigated complaints once they were received; there was

no mechanism for taking action ex officio. A second proposed amendment to the Health Care Act was under discussion with a view to setting up a systematic internal and external oversight mechanism for psychiatric institutions. Security at psychiatric hospitals was ensured by health-care professionals, although, pursuant to the amended Health Care Act, a non-medical member of staff was designated for special training in the use of restraints and communication with psychiatric patients.

54. **Mr. Matulay** (Slovakia) said that the delegation appreciated the frank dialogue held with the Committee, which had helped pinpoint challenges to be overcome, and eagerly awaited its concluding observations. As the country celebrated its thirtieth anniversary, the Government looked forward to continuing to strive, in tandem with civil society, towards the common goal of human rights for all, including freedom from torture.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.