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Gabon

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I. OVERVIEW

1. Located in the subregion of central Africa, Gabon is bordered by Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea to the north, the Congo to the east and south and the Atlantic Ocean to the west, with 800 km of coastline. Straddling the equator, Gabon covers an area of 267,667 square kilometres and has an estimated population of 1.5 million inhabitants, 51 per cent of whom are women and 49 per cent men. The population is predominantly urban (80 per cent) and young.
2. Some 45 per cent of the Gabonese population are aged under 15, and 47.6 per cent are aged under 18. Life expectancy at birth is 56 years for men and 55 years for women.
3. Gabon has been an independent State since 17 August 1960 and returned to a multiparty system in 1990. It is a parliamentary democracy, based on respect for the principle of separation of powers (executive, legislative and judiciary branches), with a presidential system. The president is El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba.
4. The Gabonese Republic is divided into nine provinces, each of which is headed by a governor: Estuaire (Libreville), Haut-Ogooué (Franceville), Moyen-Ogooué (Lambaréné), Ngounié (Mouila), Nyanga (Tchibanga), Ogooué-Ivindo (Makokou), Ogooué-Lolo (Koulamoutou), Ogooué-Maritime (Port-Gentil) and Woleu-Ntem (Oyem).
5. With a gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$ 7,245 per capita in 2006, Gabon is classed as a higher middle income country. However, approximately 33 per cent of the Gabonese population lives below the poverty line.
6. According to the 2007/08 Human Development Report, published by the United Nations Development Programme, Gabon's human development index (HDI) world ranking has risen by five places: from 124th place to 119th place. It is now ranked eighth among African countries.

A. National body responsible for drafting the report

7. Gabon has a National Committee for the Drafting of Human Rights Reports, established by decree No. 000102/PR/MDHLCCLEI of 15 January 2007. This committee reports to the Ministry of Human Rights and is responsible for:
 - (a) Gathering data on the subjects covered by the various international human rights instruments ratified by Gabon;
 - (b) Analysing these data;
 - (c) Helping the authorities with dissemination and preparation of reports.

Committee members consist of representatives of Government departments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the area of human rights.

B. Methodology

8. This report, which has been drawn up by the National Committee for the Drafting of Human Rights Reports, describes the progress made by Gabon in the promotion and protection of human rights and it shows how the Government has implemented its international human rights commitments. The methodology adopted by the Committee, prior to the actual drafting of the report, consisted in broad consultation among government departments and human rights NGOs, in order to make them aware of the new universal periodic review mechanism.

9. Subsequently, the Committee gathered technical data from those bodies, in line with the general directives adopted by the Human Rights Council, and prepared a draft report, which was submitted to all members of the Committee for their appraisal. The draft report was then submitted to, and validated by, the inter-ministerial council at its meeting of 19 March 2008. The Committee based its preparatory work on a number of official documents, including legislation and regulations, and the international instruments Gabon has acceded to in good faith.

II. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

A. National legislation

- The Constitution
- Act No. 16/66, on compulsory primary education
- Act No. 19/95 of 13 February 1996, on organization of social security for disabled persons
- Act No. 24/96 of 6 June 1996, on political parties, which makes no distinction between men and women regarding participation in public life
- Act No. 7/96, on political elections, which does not discriminate in this regard
- Act No. 05/98 of 5 March 1998, on the status of refugees in the Gabonese Republic
- Act No. 87/98 of 20 July 1999, on the Nationality Code, which furthered the interests of women and children
- Acts Nos. 09/89 and 10/99, on preventive detention and on compensation for wrongful preventive detention
- Act No. 1/2000 of 18 August 2000, setting out measures to protect the health and social rights of women, mothers and children and repealing Order No. 64/69
- Act No. 09/2004 of 21 September 2005, to prevent and combat child trafficking in the Gabonese Republic
- Act No. 19/2005 of 3 January 2006, on the establishment and organization of the National Human Rights Commission
- Order No. 59/76 of 1 October 1976, on the protection of minors
- Decree No. 00269/PR/SEAS/UNFG/CAB of 31 May 1971, on welfare in Gabon

- Decree No. 01389/PR/MASPF of 2 November 1982, proclaiming a National Day for Persons with Disabilities
- Decree No. 00647/PR of 19 July 2000, on the responsibilities, structure and operation of the appeals office
- Decree No. 00648/PR of 19 July 2000, on the responsibilities, structure and operation of the National Commission for Refugees
- Decree No. 00646/PR of 19 July 2000, on the responsibilities, structure and operation of the subcommittee on eligibility
- Decree No. 000152/PR/MNASBE of 4 February 2002, on the responsibilities, structure and operation of the National Centre for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities
- Decree No. 00243/PR/MASSNBE of 12 April 2002, on the distribution of school textbooks
- Decree No. 00102/PR/MISPD of 17 October 2002, establishing the Department of Prison Health and the Department of Social Affairs, which is responsible for social issues
- Decree No. 000024/PR/MTE of 6 January 2006, regulating checks, investigations and searches for the purpose of preventing and combating child trafficking in the Gabonese Republic
- Decree No. 000873/PR/MFPEPF of 17 November 2006, on the establishment, responsibilities and structure of a national observatory for children's rights
- Decree No. 000102/PR/MDHLCCLCI of 15 January 2007, on the establishment and structure of the Gabonese National Committee for the Drafting of Human Rights Reports
- Decree No. 103/PR/MDHLCCLCI of 15 January, proclaiming a National Human Rights Day
- Decree on the establishment and structure of the Directorate-General for Human Rights
- Decree No. 00031/PR/MTEFP, on combating trafficking in minors
- Decree No. 298/PR/MFPF, on the establishment, responsibilities and structure of the National Commission for the Family and the Advancement of Women
- Order No. 000/PM/MDCRPE/AS of 12 December 1972, establishing a court welfare office in Libreville
- Order No. 0012/MASSBE/DGAS of 5 November 1985, establishing a school for deaf children
- Order No. 1145/PM/PAECF of 30 July 2000, establishing an identity card for refugees and regulating issuance and renewal

- Order No. 000158/PM/MSNASBE of 8 August 2000, on the establishment, responsibilities and structure of a committee to monitor the implementation of the platform for action on trafficking for labour exploitation
- Order No. 001/SEAS/UNFG, on houses for healthy children
- International Labour Organization (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182, ratified in 2004
- Decision No. 055/MASSNCRA/SG//DAS/SASS of 5 April 1992, establishing an ad hoc commission on the foster care for abandoned children
- Decision No. 000001/PM/MESI/PDM of 3 June 2006, establishing the procedure for the care and repatriation of trafficked children in the province of Ogooué-Maritime
- Civil Code
- Criminal Code
- Labour Code

B. Instruments ratified by Gabon

10. Gabon is party to several international instruments on the promotion and protection of human rights, as shown in the following table:

International instrument	Ratified
Charter of the United Nations	1960
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	1960
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	29 February 1980 (R)
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	21 January 1983 (R)
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	21 January 1983 (R)
International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid	29 January 1980 (R)
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	21 January 1983 (R)
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	5 May 2004 (R)
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	8 September 2000 (R)
Convention on the Rights of the Child	9 February 1994 (R)

Convention on the Political Rights of Women	19 April 1967 (R)
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography	10 September 2007 (R)
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	17 September 2007 (R)
African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights	20 February 1986 (R)
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child	18 May 2007 (R)
OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa	August 1975
Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights	14 August 2000 (R)
Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court	20 September 2000 (R)
United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime	10 December 2004 (R)
Convention relating to the Status of Refugees	27 April 1964 (R)
Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees	28 August 1973 (R)
Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide	21 January 1948 (A)

III. PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

A. Promotion of human rights

11. In its work to promote human rights, Gabon has focused its efforts on raising awareness and training. In this connection, the Department of Human Rights, led by Deputy Prime Minister Paul Mba Abessole, prepared a document that was the first of its kind in Gabon, a White Paper on Human Rights in Gabon. Within this framework, awareness-raising campaigns have been conducted for specific population groups (adults and children), on specific topics in the area of health, education, labour and improved welfare.

1. Awareness-raising campaigns

12. The campaigns essentially consisted of the following:

- (a) A travelling exhibition to raise awareness of children's rights, which toured primary and secondary schools throughout the country from 10 May to 16 June 2004;
- (b) A public information campaign on children's rights, in Franceville and Port-Gentil, from 22 May to 2 June 2006;
- (c) A public information campaign on the White Paper, in the districts of the municipality of Libreville, in 2005;

(d) Visits to army barracks, police camps, prisons and other places of detention in Libreville and the interior, in 2006.

(a) Children's health

13. As in other countries, children represent Gabon's future, and the Government therefore attaches great importance to anything that affects their physical or mental health. In this context, with the assistance of the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Gabon conducted an extensive awareness-raising campaign on health, child mortality and maternal mortality.

14. This campaign gave rise to a number of programmes, including the 2004 Integrated Management of Childhood Illness programme.

15. The first days against maternal and neonatal mortality brought to light a worrying state of affairs in Gabon. The maternal mortality rate is approximately 519 per 100,000 live births; in other words, 250 deaths per year, according to the 2000 demographic and health survey.

16. Various activities to reduce maternal mortality have been carried out by the Government of Gabon, with the aim of:

(a) Improving medical monitoring and childbirth assistance;

(b) Reducing risk factors related to pregnancy (malaria, anaemia and malnutrition).

17. At the same time, an information campaign to raise awareness of the issue of teenage pregnancy resulted in the liberalization of contraception and the creation of national centres for welfare counselling with a mission to provide, free of charge, reception and a listening ear, information, guidance and advice and, where necessary, specialist support tailored to the individual.

18. In Port-Gentil, in the province of Ogooué-Maritime, health workers have set up meetings with girls in order to inform them about contraception methods and family planning.

19. In the same vein, in November 2005 the Ministry of Education's AIDS Prevention Committee officially distributed educational, training and awareness-raising materials on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS to heads of primary and secondary schools.

(b) Combating trafficking and exploitation of children

20. In accordance with the relevant international conventions, Gabon is firmly committed to combating trafficking and exploitation of children. The monitoring committee set up for this purpose has conducted several information and awareness-raising seminars, which have considerably reduced a problem that had begun to take on alarming proportions in Gabon.

21. It is worth noting, however, that those responsible for trafficking are not Gabonese nationals, but our brothers from friendly countries.

(c) Women

22. Under the Constitution and by its ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Gabon recognizes gender equality and equity.

23. Thus, as part of its efforts for the advancement of women, the Government has established an Observatory for Women's Rights and Equality, with the aim of defending the rights of women, family and children.

24. To complement this policy, the Office for the Coordination of Women's NGOs and Associations works towards the same goal, in partnership with the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women.

25. In order to further consolidate women's involvement in economic life, the Government has established a President's Prize for the promotion of women's socio-economic activities.

26. Also, with the aim of preventing mother-to-child transmission, STDs and HIV/AIDS, various actions have been carried out in the field, including promoting voluntary testing and organizing awareness-raising, information and education campaigns targeting the most vulnerable population groups and people living with HIV/AIDS.

27. These campaigns have focused on the different modes of contamination, risk behaviour and prevention.

(d) Persons with disabilities

28. The first action taken in respect of this population group was to take a census. Gabon now has statistics for people with disabilities, by category.

Gabon: persons with disabilities

	<i>Estuaire</i>	<i>Haut-Ogooué</i>	<i>Moyen Ogooué</i>	<i>Nyanga</i>	<i>Ogooué-Invidio</i>	<i>Ogooué Lolo</i>	<i>Ogooué Maritime</i>	<i>Woleu Ntem</i>
Motor disabled	1 393	471	316	471	387	367	358	470
Mentally disabled	404	32	67	128	69	72	35	120
Visually impaired	392	80	82	147	144	148	112	190
Blind	178	77	175	137	0	128	5	161
Multidisabled	314	19	97	0	76	0	0	50
Deaf	300	69	50	93	100	93	26	180
Sickle cell anaemia	222	0	3	3	0	0	8	60
Other invisible disabilities	35	0	0	2	0	0	2	0
Total	3 238	748	790	981	776	808	546	1 231
Percentage	35.51	8.20	8.67	10.76	8.51	8.86	5.99	13.50

(e) Minorities

29. The Government has worked to improve the promotion of minorities' rights; some 80 per cent of Pygmies (minorities) are now informed and aware of hygiene practices conducive to the health and development of children and women.

30. The first stage of the provision of birth certificates consisted in awareness-raising among Pygmy populations on the benefits of registering their children at birth.

31. All Pygmies registered in the 29 villages concerned are informed and aware of the need to register their children at birth.

<i>Target towns</i>	<i>Population over five</i>	<i>Population informed</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Makokou	199	199	100
Mékambo	569	569	100
Lopé	75	75	100
Minvoul	270	270	100
Total	1 113	1 123	100

(f) Civil society

Civil society is very active, and has carried out a number of actions to promote human rights.

32. The Association Against Ritual Crimes uses regular awareness campaigns to denounce the persistence of ritual crimes in Gabon.

33. The Gabonese Movement for Family Welfare organizes awareness-raising campaigns to combat teenage pregnancy and introduce family planning.

34. The Gabonese Association for People with Disabilities is also involved in the promotion of human rights, using travelling exhibitions to promote awareness-raising.

2. Training

35. Generally speaking, awareness-raising ties in closely with training. In the area of health, the new system of management of childhood illness, initially introduced in Libreville and Owendo, required new skills to be learned. Sixty per cent of health workers from these municipalities received training on techniques related to Integrated Management of Childhood Illness. This programme covers:

- (a) Promotion of exclusive breastfeeding;
- (b) Feeding children;
- (c) Immunization of children;
- (d) The use of iodized salt in food;
- (e) Preventive hygiene to combat diarrhoea.

36. The Integrated Management of Childhood Illness programme has made it possible to monitor childhood illnesses in each municipality and has yielded reliable data on childhood illnesses, in particular the most common ones (acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea, malaria and malnutrition).

37. In order to address the problem of malaria, which affects 64 per cent of pregnant women, the Ministry of Health held two workshops in Lambaréné and Mouila in 2006 to train trainers on strategies for combating malaria during pregnancy.

38. The approach used in the workshops was intermittent preventive treatment in pregnancy, in line with WHO recommendations.

39. The workshop enabled national experts to update their knowledge of:
- (a) The process of malaria transmission;
 - (b) Health care during pregnancy, and prevention techniques.
40. In 2002, in collaboration with the French cooperation agency, the project for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) was supplemented by special training in new obstetric practices and treatment of opportunistic diseases, and actions to increase public awareness and harness public support.
41. In December 2005 health workers in Port-Gentil were given a training seminar on reducing maternal mortality. The aim of the seminar, which was organized by the Ministry of Health's Reproductive Health Services project, with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), was capacity-building among health workers in the area of family planning.
42. The project for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) has a total of 87 prenatal consultation facilities throughout the country. The project's results for 2007 show that the information given on prevention appears to have been appropriate for the target population, and testing is accepted by women. Thus 78.6 per cent of infected women received treatment prior to delivery and 62 per cent gave birth in a maternity clinic. Of the 382 children born HIV-positive, 353 (92.4 per cent) were given treatment at birth.
43. In terms of combating child trafficking, one key aspect of the Government's action plan is the training of relevant actors in combating child trafficking and exploitation. The training is mainly aimed at the security forces, labour inspectors, NGOs, judges, social workers, watchdog committees, staff of technical ministries, municipal councillors, occupational associations, community leaders, foreign communities, religious communities and young people.
44. In this connection, the monitoring committee has organized several training, information and capacity-building seminars:
- (a) Seminar to train trainers for the security forces, labour inspectors and judges in combating child trafficking for the purposes of exploitation, organized in Lambaréné by the monitoring committee, with technical support from UNICEF, from 22 to 30 October 2003;
 - (b) Introductory training seminar on the issue and on techniques for dealing with victims of child trafficking, organized in partnership with UNICEF and the Embassy of the United States of America to Gabon, from 18 to 20 January 2001;
 - (c) Seminar to draw up a subregional agreement on repatriation of trafficked children in humanitarian conditions, organized in Libreville by the Government with the technical support of the International Labour Organization (ILO);
 - (d) Capacity-building seminar for the security forces and labour inspectors, organized by the Government in Libreville, from 26 to 29 November 2003;
 - (e) Capacity-building seminar for the security forces and labour inspectors, organized by the Government in Libreville in June 2004, under the ILO/IPEC/LUTRENA project;

(f) Capacity-building seminars for members of watchdog committees in Ogooué-Maritime, (in collaboration with ILO and UNICEF), Haut-Ogooué (in collaboration with ILO and the provincial Governor) and Woleu-Ntem (in collaboration with ILO).

(g) Training workshop on project preparation, organized in Port-Gentil in February 2005, in collaboration with ILO.

45. Two training and awareness-raising sessions for the minority Pygmy populations on HIV/AIDS and STDs have been held in the 29 target villages.

B. Protection of human rights

46. Gabon became aware very early on of the need to set up human rights protection mechanisms, and in the preamble to the Constitution explicitly recognizes human rights and freedoms. Domestic law and the international instruments Gabon has ratified also acknowledge these fundamental principles, as the foundation of human dignity.

1. Children's rights

47. In the area of health, Gabon is committed to a policy of protecting children's rights and has incorporated all relevant texts into its legal order. The Government has placed particular emphasis on immunization, in order to fully protect all children against childhood diseases by administering all boosters.

48. An Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) has been set up in cooperation with UNICEF. It focuses on immunization of the under-fives against tuberculosis, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio and measles. A new approach to vaccination called "Reach Every District" has been adopted with the objective of implementing what are known as outreach strategies in neighbourhoods and communities, targeting every child in its own environment.

49. Several initiatives have been carried out using this new approach since 2004:

(a) November 2004: measles vaccination campaign, targeting children aged 0 to 14. The opportunity was also taken to give vitamin A to children aged 0 to 5, to address growth problems. By the end of the campaign, 625,472 children had received measles vaccine, a vaccination rate of 80.41 per cent. The highest rates were recorded in the provinces of Nyanga (103.26 per cent); Ngounié (102.66 per cent) and Ogooué Lolo (102.5 per cent), while 210,041 children (81.19 per cent) received a dose of vitamin A;

(b) 2004: National Technical Commission established to run vaccination campaigns throughout the territory;

(c) November 2005 to January 2006: Reach Every District vaccination campaign against polio, hepatitis B, measles and BCG, run in two phases:

- (i) The first step was to try to increase collective immunity among infants, by giving additional doses of vaccines to children aged 0 to 11 months;
- (ii) The second phase aimed to reach a maximum of children aged 0 to 5, wherever they live.

(a) HIV/AIDS

50. The plan for combating the epidemic puts particular emphasis on tighter national coordination in the fight against HIV/AIDS, both nationally and internationally. Coordination involved:

- (a) Monitoring and evaluation of the disease;
- (b) Reducing the socio-economic impact of HIV on individuals by setting up the ACCESS project, which aims at getting drugs to people living with HIV/AIDS more quickly by bringing the cost of treatment down. Provision is made for schoolchildren, students, the very poor, officials with a salary less than or equal to CFAF 100,000, pregnant HIV-positive women, infants and children under the age of 12;
- (c) Reaching families and communities, through psychosocial support for persons infected with HIV/AIDS (pregnant women, orphans and vulnerable children);
- (d) The use of antiretroviral drugs;
- (e) Prevention of mother-to-child transmission;
- (f) The establishment of outpatient treatment centres in some provincial capitals.

51. In April 2002 the mother-to-child transmission prevention project (PMTCT) was implemented in collaboration with the French cooperation agency. The aim is to reduce the risk of transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to child. The project targets pregnant women, pregnant infected women and their unborn children. The main activities under the project are:

- (a) Pre- and post-test counselling;
- (b) HIV testing offered at all antenatal consultations;
- (c) Antiretrovirals given to HIV-positive women;
- (d) Assistance during delivery;
- (e) Post-natal support and care;
- (f) Antiretroviral medication for children born to HIV-positive mothers;
- (g) Care for AIDS orphans and children at risk provided by the Organization of African First Ladies against AIDS (OAFLA);
- (h) Aid for girls from the Ministry of the Family, for the new school year and for income-generating activities.

(b) Education

52. School is open to all children without distinction of any kind. Under Act No. 25/59 of 22 June 1959, school is compulsory for children aged 6 to 16. Act No. 16/66 of 9 August 1966, on the general organization of education in the Gabonese Republic, reinforces this provision and makes education free and compulsory from the age of 6 to 16.

(i) *Child trafficking*

53. The fight against child trafficking began in earnest on 9 February 1994, following the World Summit for Children, whose theme was “A World Fit for Children”.

54. It was then that the Gabonese Government decided to commit to the protection of children for the sake of Gabon’s future as a dignified and prosperous nation, by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Although children are protected, child labour regulated and child exploitation prohibited, the offence of child trafficking is not yet established in domestic law and regulation. It was therefore a matter of some urgency to create an appropriate legal framework. Thus, following a workshop on trafficking in children for domestic service in West and Central Africa, held in Cotonou in July 1998, Gabon became involved in the fight against child trafficking.

55. The Government’s commitment resulted in 2000 in a subregional consultation, organized in partnership with UNICEF and the ILO on “Developing strategies on the trafficking of children for the purposes of labour exploitation in West and Central Africa”, held in Libreville from 22 to 24 February 2000, and the establishment of an inter-ministerial commission for consideration of the common platform for action produced by that consultation and monitoring of its implementation.

56. The task of the Interministerial Commission is to promote and coordinate policies and actions to prevent and combat child trafficking.

57. The Commission met on 20 June 2000 and proposed a framework for action consisting of eight priority objectives, including:

(a) The establishment of an appropriate legal framework, with a select committee set up in the Ministry of Justice to consider the amendments to the Criminal Code required to incorporate a specific offence of trafficking in children;

(b) The establishment of a focal point in each ministry affected by this problem.

58. On 8 August 2000, a committee to monitor the implementation of the common platform for action on trafficking in children for labour exploitation was established in the Ministry of Labour and Employment by Prime Ministerial decree (Order No. 001058/PM/MSNASBE).

59. The Monitoring Committee, which is a technical body of the Interministerial Commission, is charged with implementing the policies and initiatives adopted by the Commission.

60. Following the creation of the Interministerial Commission and the Monitoring Committee, other structures have been set up:

(a) Arcades Call Centre

61. A structure for assistance and support for child victims of trafficking and exploitation, and for applying the procedures for return to the family home. It has a telephone hotline and its mission is to monitor, to provide a listening ear and to inform children and the public. It is the link between the child and the authorities.

(b) Angondjé Centre

62. This is a reception centre for children in social difficulties.

(c) Watchdog committees

63. Their mission is to help improve the support given to child victims of trafficking who have been removed from exploitative situations. The watchdog committees were formed and put in place with ILO support, under the IPEC/LUTRENA project.

64. Each watchdog committee is made up of representatives of the administration and of civil society and, in operational terms, comprises three bodies:

(i) Coordination Unit

65. This is the committee's decision-making body and is responsible for ensuring its proper functioning, for promoting, planning and coordinating its work and for monitoring the work of the reception unit and task force.

(ii) Reception Unit

66. This unit consists of social workers.

(iii) Task Force

67. This unit comprises a labour inspector, a judge and two members of the security forces.

(ii) Support for trafficked children

68. There are three main phases in the provision of support for trafficked children:

(a) Removal;

(b) Administrative and psychosocial support, board and lodging;

(c) Return to country of origin or resettlement in Gabon.

2. Women's rights

69. The Government has taken a number of steps to protect women.

70. With regard to the treatment of HIV/AIDS and mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT), there has been a clear improvement in territorial coverage. Since 2007 pregnant women have had greater access to counselling and testing.

71. As to preventive treatment, 70 per cent of pregnant women who tested HIV-positive have received antiviral drugs, to reduce the risk of transmission of HIV/AIDS to their child.

72. In addition, a strategic plan to combat HIV/AIDS during 2008-2012 was approved by the Government on 21 February 2008. The following are some of the recommendations issued:

(a) To improve the management of sexually transmitted infections nationwide in order to prevent the risk of HIV transmission;

(b) To ensure the supply, distribution and availability of female condoms to women;

(c) To provide coverage and access to services for prevention and mother-to-child transmission;

(d) To create a favourable legal environment by enacting laws aimed at safeguarding basic freedoms and fundamental rights;

(e) To enhance training opportunities for women.

73. Other efforts have been made, in particular to support teenage mothers and address the problem of widows and orphans.

74. To show its willingness to consider the problems relating to children's and women's rights, the Government has created a special department, the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Protection of Women.

3. Rights of persons with disabilities

75. As government responsibilities are currently distributed, the Department of Social Affairs is responsible for formulating and monitoring policy on the social and occupational integration and reintegration of persons with disabilities.

76. Successive governments have also taken social measures to improve their living conditions, with the support of disabled persons' organizations and particularly the National Federation of Associations for Persons with Disabilities and the Gabonese Association for People with Disabilities. The main initiatives are:

(a) Decree No. 00269/PR/SEAS of 3 May 1971, on welfare in Gabon;

(b) Opening in 1985 of the National School for Hearing-Impaired Children, whose operation requires multiform support;

(c) Proclamation of a National Day for Persons with Disabilities, under Decree No. 1389/PR/MASPF of 12 November 1982. This day is supposed to be observed every year throughout the country but unfortunately this is not yet the case. There is also the International Day of Disabled Persons;

(d) Adoption of Act No. 19/15 of 13 February 1996, on social security for persons with disabilities.

77. The Act includes various provisions relating to the social integration of the rights of the disabled in areas as diverse as health, education, housing, sport and leisure. It establishes rights to:

(a) Reduced medical fees in State institutions;

(b) Reduced public transport fares;

(c) Reduced charges for access to cultural and sports centres;

(d) Reduced tuition fees in State or charity schools.

78. The main objective of Act No. 19/15 of 13 February 1996 is thus to enable people with disabilities to regain their personal autonomy so as to facilitate not only integration into their own social environment but also, to the extent possible, their participation in the country's revenue-generating activities.

Persons with disabilities: school enrolment and employment

	<i>Motor disabled</i>	<i>Multi-disabled</i>	<i>Blind</i>	<i>Visually impaired</i>	<i>Deaf</i>	<i>Mentally disabled</i>	<i>Sickle-cell anaemia</i>	<i>Various</i>	<i>Total</i>
Primary	265	49	4	143	62	37	93	8	661
Secondary	163	12	2	81	1	19	23	0	301
Higher	39	2	0	4	0	0	0	0	45
Illiterate	2 909	367	699	733	568	682	122	29	6 109
Total	3 376	430	705	961	631	738	238	37	7 116

4. Refugees' rights

79. In accordance with the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951, as supplemented by the Protocol of 31 January 1967, and the 12 September 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, on 5 March 1998 Gabon adopted Act No. 5/98 on the status of refugees in the Gabonese Republic. Under this framework the Government of Gabon began issuing refugee identity cards in 2007.

5. Minority rights (Pygmies)

80. The Gabonese population includes one minority that accounts for 1 per cent of the total, namely the Pygmies. In an effort to better protect them and promote their integration, the State has decided to set up a comprehensive development project for Pygmies, in cooperation with UNICEF, with the following main components:

- (a) Provision of birth certificates to Pygmy children;
- (b) Vaccination of Pygmy children;
- (c) Formation of a team of traditional counsellors on hygiene and health;
- (d) Agreed development through micro-projects;
- (e) Introduction of basic social services for Pygmies (education, health, literacy, village water supply, etc.).

81. The results of this project include:

- (a) 90 per cent of rural Pygmy children have a birth certificate;
- (b) 80 per cent of Pygmy children under 5 in target villages are vaccinated against EPI target diseases;
- (c) 80 per cent of Pygmies are informed and aware of hygiene practices conducive to the health and development of children and women;
- (d) 52 traditional counsellors and 78 young peer educators have been trained as facilitators and communicators on priority themes.

(a) Birth certificates

82. The provision of birth certificates was done in four stages:

(a) Awareness-raising among Pygmy populations on the benefits of registering their children at birth;

(b) Registration of births;

(c) Issuance of birth rulings in lieu of certificates by the courts in the two provinces concerned;

(d) Transcription of the rulings onto birth certificates.

(b) Vaccination for the under-5s

83. Goal: 80 per cent of Pygmy children aged under 5 in the target villages to be vaccinated against the EPI target diseases. Result: 85 per cent of Pygmy children in 29 villages have been vaccinated.

Antigens administered

VAR	OPV2	HepB
YF	OPV3	HepB1
TT1	DTP	HepB3
TT2	DTP1	BCG
Measles	DTP2	RVAX
OPV	DTP3	ARF
OPV1	HEP	Polio

84. Immunization campaigns under this project have yielded the following results:

<i>Target towns</i>	<i>Children under 5</i>	<i>Children vaccinated</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Makokou	43	27	62.79
Mékambo	151	125	83
Lopé	23	23	100
Minvoul	63	63	100
Total	280	238	85

6. Civil society

85. By adopting Act No. 62 on associations, Gabon, like other States in the international community, has made it possible for associations to form to defend their interests. It is under these provisions that two associations that are particularly active in the field of protection of human rights have emerged.

(a) Gabonese National Association of People with Disabilities

86. This association was created on 12 December 1980, initially as the Ibobu Club. It is a non-political, social association with national scope. It has its headquarters in the Nkembo district of Libreville and received charitable status under Order No. 118, as amended by Order No. 114/MTCLT/DGAT/DGA of 22 June 1982, when it changed its name.

87. In terms of promotion of human rights, the Association defends the rights of people living with a disability, irrespective of gender, race, origin, religion or political persuasion, and of the marginalized poor. It works with the ministries responsible for these issues (Social Affairs and Human Rights) and judges and court officials, and indeed wherever there is a need.

88. This Association was behind Act No. 19/95, on social security for disabled persons in Gabon, and lobbies for the implementation of existing laws, such as Decree No. 00269, on social security in Gabon.

89. It also campaigns for socio-political, economic and occupational integration of members of the community through, for example:

- (a) Admission without competitive examination to higher vocational and specialist education;
- (b) Inclusion of disabled students in a range of schools;
- (c) Full compliance with the Labour Code in labour recruitment;
- (d) Organizing a National Day for Persons with Disabilities (until 1995);
- (e) Establishing provincial offices for the organization;
- (f) Financing numerous individual micro-projects in the community for the empowerment of disabled persons.

90. Since it is not subsidized, however, the Association has in recent years been faced with enormous administrative and financial problems.

(b) Association Against Ritual Crimes

91. This organization uses awareness campaigns to denounce the persistence of ritual crimes in Gabon.

92. Recently, in order to improve people's standard of living, the Government adopted (21 August 2007) two ordinances, one of which sets up a mandatory health insurance and social security scheme and the other a family allowance scheme for Gabonese of limited means. The first covers the risks associated with sickness and maternity. The second aims to relieve some of the burden of child maintenance (a grant for childbirth, and an allowance at the start of the school year, payable for all schoolchildren, whether born in or outside marriage, adopted or fostered, or orphans).

93. Now that it has set up the institutional framework, Gabon is striving to take the required practical action. The Government's measures and political will are constrained chiefly by a shortage of human and financial resources.

IV. SHORTCOMINGS AND PROSPECTS

94. Gabon is genuinely committed to the promotion and protection of human rights. There are limits to what it can do in practice, however, owing to a number of shortcomings in human terms (capacity-building) and in institutional, financial and material terms.

A. Shortcomings

95. For the victims of child trafficking, the difficulties relate in part to:

- (a) Inadequate reception facilities;
- (b) The heavy cost of a lengthy stay;
- (c) Insufficient supervisory staff;
- (d) The difficulty of reintegrating into Gabonese society owing to pressure from the traffickers.

96. The problems arise in particular from the constraints involved in returning to their countries of origin.

97. As to persons with disabilities, there are difficulties of several kinds:

- (a) Lack of provision for their disabilities (ramps, access to basic social services);
- (b) Failure to apply legislation granting them certain rights (disability card);
- (c) A lack of educational provision, which leaves them illiterate.

98. In the specific case of the Pygmies, their difficulties have to do with integration into modern society:

- (a) Remoteness from principal social centres;
- (b) Low school enrolment rate.

99. In general, despite many efforts on the part of the State to enable civil society to organize itself better, its contribution in terms of capacity-building and financial resources is relatively modest.

100. The lax implementation of laws and regulations, and the lack of resources to enable it to meet its many responsibilities, may partly explain this relative failure.

B. Prospects

101. Gabon is planning important measures in various areas, as follows:

- (a) Translating the various human rights instruments into national languages;
- (b) Displaying these instruments on posters in police stations and other public places;
- (c) A national study on child labour and trafficking in Gabon;
- (d) Setting up a watchdog committee in Estuaire province and training its members on the question of child trafficking and exploitation;

- (e) Validation of the national road map produced under the regional action plan of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS);
- (f) Public health information and local awareness campaign using a participatory community approach (Libreville, Owendo, Cocobeach, Cap Esterias, Mayumba, Oyem, Bitam);
- (g) Launch of a project to take account of disabled persons and Pygmies in school curricula, in cooperation with UNESCO and Education Populaire;
- (h) Teaching human rights principles in schools (a human rights textbook has already been prepared for secondary schools);
- (i) Support and guidance for NGOs in the promotion and protection of human rights;
- (j) Introduction of educational and vocational training facilities in prisons (a national commission has been set up for this purpose);
- (k) Multiform support to the National School for Hearing-Impaired Children.

102. Gabon has always been regarded by the international community as a moderate country from the human rights standpoint, when compared with the violations observed in other countries.

103. Since the advent of multiparty democracy, Gabon has adopted a new constitution guaranteeing all human rights and making explicit reference to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights.

104. To the extent possible, the Government undertakes to honour its international commitments in respect of the promotion and protection of human dignity, and has therefore ratified the majority of the relevant international conventions to which it is a party.

105. It is this commitment that has led to the Government's recent decision to abolish the death penalty in Gabon.

106. This idyllic picture does not obscure the fact that much remains to be done. Gabon therefore asks the international community to provide the material and financial support it needs for this comprehensive programme of reform.

107. The ultimate goal is to allow Gabon's people to make the concept of human rights part of their daily lives. This will undoubtedly be a long process, but if everyone, men and women, young and old, believer and atheist, rich and poor, stands up as one and acknowledges that their neighbour is the most precious of assets, the challenge can be met, for the greater good of humanity.
