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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 35th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 9 November 2005, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BONOAN-DANDAN

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS (continued)

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (continued)

Third periodic report of Austria (E/1994/104/Add.28; E/C.12/Q/AUT/1; HRI/CORE/1/Add.8)

1. The CHAIRPERSON drew the Committee's attention to the written replies by the Government of Austria to the list of issues.
2. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Beciragic, Mr. Buczolic, Mr. Dossi, Mr. Mair, and Ms. Nowotny (Austria) took places at the Committee table.
3. Mr. DOSSI (Austria), introducing his country's third periodic report (E/1994/104/Add.28), said that his Government was committed to meeting its obligations in the area of development assistance, and in 2005 and 2006 hoped not only to meet the target of 0.33 per cent of gross national income (GNI) set at the Barcelona European Council, but to exceed it. Austria had supported the European Union (EU) agreement on official development assistance, under which member States should reach a level of 0.51 per cent of GNI by 2010, and 0.7 per cent by 2015. Austria would continue to make major efforts to contribute to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.
4. In the area of gender equality, since 2000 the Government had been broadly implementing gender mainstreaming and was progressing towards more elaborate instruments, such as a gender budgeting pilot project. For the first time, now 50 per cent of Austrian government ministers were women, in charge of key policy areas such as external relations, internal affairs, justice and education. In the area of business, Austria had already exceeded the European Union's Lisbon Strategy objective of increasing women's participation in the labour market to 60 per cent by 2010, and was now aiming at 65 per cent. However, the 17 per cent gender pay gap was still a challenge.
5. Gender equality and human rights would be highlighted during the forthcoming Austrian presidency of the European Union, with a meeting of gender equality ministers being held to work on joint action against harmful traditional practices, the results of which would be presented to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at its fiftieth session.
6. In terms of equal treatment in general, as of July 2004, new and amended federal legislation had been introduced which served primarily to incorporate into domestic legislation three EU anti-discrimination directives covering the areas of occupation and employment, social protection, social benefits, education and access to and supply of goods and services, in both the public and private sectors. The new legislation stipulated that no one must be discriminated against, directly or indirectly, for reasons of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion, age or sexual orientation. In addition, new regulations provided for compensation in cases of violation of the principle of equal treatment.

7. Labour policy sought to prevent and eradicate unemployment. To that end, a number of new initiatives had been introduced to promote equal opportunities for women and men as well as a transparent labour market, and to combat social exclusion. In recent years, the budget for active labour market policy had been considerably increased, with additional funds being used to enhance the qualifications of people working in the health-care sector, enable women to acquire additional qualifications, and assist young people entering the labour market. Among other initiatives, new low-wage jobs were to be secured through wage subsidies to be paid under a combined-wage model, and the terminal care allowance for those providing care to terminally ill children would be extended from six to nine months.

8. Austria had one of the highest percentages in Europe of third-country citizens in its labour market, and the number of persons naturalized had increased significantly in the past 10 years. The majority of migrant workers and their family members resident in Austria held long-term work permits. Under recent reforms to aliens legislation, family members joining a relative already established in Austria were legally entitled to a work permit of the same class as that held by the relative after a one-year stay in the country. Citizens from other EU member States who held long-term residence permits were first admitted to the labour market for a period of 12 months and subsequently granted unlimited access. Refugees and asylum-seekers under subsidiary protection for one year now enjoyed unlimited access to the labour market.

9. Although fiscal policy since 2000 had been characterized by attempts to reduce the budget deficit, increasing importance had been attached to combating social exclusion; to that end, social expenditure had risen from 28.4 per cent in 2000 to 29.5 per cent in 2003. Additional funds had been made available for the promotion of employment opportunities for disabled people, unemployment benefits had been increased, and low gross annual incomes had been exempted from taxes. Increases in social security benefits had generally been below the rate of inflation, but people on low incomes were fully protected against inflation. There had been a considerable increase in the cost of medical care, so that contributions had been increased, but measures had been taken to protect the socially disadvantaged and chronically ill.

10. As to asylum policy, there had been a distinct decrease in the number of asylum applications in 2004 compared with 2003, and that trend was continuing, albeit to a lesser extent, in 2005. Although numerous cases were still pending, recent amendments to the law on asylum had accelerated proceedings and reduced the waiting period for asylum-seekers. Additional staff had been appointed to the Federal Asylum Agency and the Independent Federal Asylum Review Board to deal more expeditiously with the workload.

11. Until recently, the federal Government had been solely responsible for providing the necessary support for needy asylum-seekers. However, in May 2004 an agreement had entered into force between the federal Government and the nine Länder which had resulted in the streamlining of responsibilities and significant harmonization in the field of support and care for aliens. All aliens in need of help and protection were guaranteed the necessary basic care, including the provision of medical insurance.

12. The CHAIRPERSON invited Committee members to put questions to the delegation.

13. Mr. KERDOUN, referring to the targets for development assistance, wondered which category of countries received Austrian aid. Was aid granted multilaterally through international organizations, or was it provided on a bilateral basis? In the area of migration, he would be interested to learn why Austria did not intend to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Given that the Convention had not been signed by any of the major Western countries, he wondered whether that was a common position. He would be interested to know if there was a problem with illegal immigration in Austria.

14. Mr. MALINVERNI, also referring to development assistance, wondered why the target of 0.7 per cent of GNI could not be reached before 2015, given that a number of other European countries with comparable economic situations had already met the target. Of the percentage of GNI allocated for development assistance, he wished to know how much actually reached the most vulnerable groups in developing countries.

15. He would be interested to hear the delegation's comments on the lengthy asylum procedures, under which in some cases asylum-seekers waited up to five years for a decision, during which time they were not entitled to legal assistance from the State, but relied on the help of specialized NGOs. He understood that there were a number of different levels in the asylum procedure, and, due to a shortage of qualified personnel, decisions taken at first instance were often not well founded, which made it difficult for asylum-seekers to appeal to a higher instance. He would be interested to learn how the Government dealt with undocumented asylum-seekers: was it true that they did not receive assistance from the authorities? Regarding the recent agreement between the federal Government and the Länder, he wondered which authority now provided assistance.

16. Mr. TIRADO MEJÍA said he agreed with his colleagues' comments on development assistance. He welcomed the Government's efforts to address gender inequality and equal treatment in general. He would be interested to learn whether civil society had been consulted during the preparation of the report. He requested clarification of the view contained in the written reply to question 4 in the list of issues that it was not necessary to adopt a national plan of action on human rights in accordance with the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

17. He would be interested to learn the Government's position on the proposals to draft an optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which would enable the Committee to receive individual complaints.

18. Mr. KOLOSOV asked how the Government's policy on the elimination of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation was applied to the employment of teachers. He personally did not believe it was appropriate to employ persons of other sexual orientations in that capacity.

Articles 1-5 of the Covenant

19. Mr. ATANGANA asked whether the full incorporation of the provisions of the Covenant into Austrian domestic legislation was tantamount to a withdrawal of the reservations mentioned in paragraph 3 of the State party's report (E/1994/104/Add.28). He wished to know whether all the provisions of the Covenant had been incorporated into domestic legislation.

20. Mr. MALINVERNI asked whether, in the event that during legal proceedings a complainant claimed that a federal or Länder law was contradictory to the Covenant, the Constitutional Court could entertain such a challenge.
21. Mr. SADI said he was surprised that Austria, a country that placed particular importance on the exercise of human rights, had not granted the Covenant justiciable status. Individuals should be able to invoke the Covenant during legal proceedings, and judges should be able to cite it. Action should be taken as swiftly as possible. He wished to know why Austria had not adopted a national plan of action on human rights in accordance with the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.
22. Mr. SHEN Yongxiang said that despite the measures taken by the Government to combat discrimination, racism, xenophobia and religious intolerance continued to exist. He asked why fascism was on the increase, particularly among young people. Given the complex nature of the task of eliminating discrimination, he asked whether the Government intended to adopt a national plan of action against racism, xenophobia and religious intolerance in accordance with the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. He wished to know why Austria had not ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.
23. Ms. BRAS GOMES asked why Austria had ratified so few European regional human rights instruments. She was encouraged by the Government's commitment to contribute 0.7 per cent of GNI to overseas development aid by 2015. She requested further information on the quality of the aid provided, how it was allocated, what percentage was devoted to new programmes and projects, what percentage was used for debt relief, and how rural development programmes were supported. She asked whether the Government considered that human rights were sufficiently mainstreamed into its plans for overseas development assistance. The Government had issued guidelines on Austrian engagement with international financial institutions, and she wondered whether those guidelines gave sufficient weight to the issue of compatibility between the policies of international financial institutions and human rights issues.
24. She asked what measures were being taken to rectify the underrepresentation of women in the civil service. She was surprised that health and women's issues fell within the remit of one government ministry, and that the Federal Constitution Act did not contain a general commitment to pursue a policy of equal treatment. She asked what type of coordinating structure existed for gender mainstreaming, and whether consideration had been given to the effects of government reforms on the situation of women. She would be interested to hear whether the effects of the recent pension reform on women's pensions had been investigated, and if so, what the outcome had been.
25. Mr. MARCHAN ROMERO asked how Austria's fund for the integration of migrant workers functioned. He said that the Committee had been informed that the Roma were a recognized national minority group. He wished to know what legal status other ethnic minority groups enjoyed, and whether all ethnic minorities were treated equally before the law.

26. Ms. GHOSE wished to know why Austria did not intend to establish a national human rights institution. She was concerned that the gender pay gap still existed, owing to the fact that women increasingly worked part time. She wondered why that was so, and asked what measures were being taken to rectify the situation. Since women retired at the age of 60 and men retired at the age of 65, women tended to receive lower pensions than men, despite the fact that their life expectancy was longer. She asked how that discrepancy would be addressed.

27. Mr. RIEDEL requested clarification of the Government's position on the self-executing nature of the treaty. He wished to know why the Covenant was not accorded equal status by the Constitutional Court to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Since Austria had not ratified the Revised European Social Charter but was in favour of the solidarity chapter of the draft charter of fundamental rights of the European Union, he wondered why the Government did not withdraw its reservation to the European Social Charter and apply a uniform standard to the protection of social rights. The draft charter of fundamental rights of the European Union included almost all the provisions of the Covenant, and given that it might take some time to become fully binding, and that the planned European constitutional treaty had not yet been adopted, it was a timely moment for Austria to demonstrate the importance of social rights at the European level by giving direct effect to the provisions of the Covenant. The European Human Rights Agency dealt with matters of human rights politics and policy coordination, and was therefore not an adequate substitute for a national human rights commission or ombudsman. He wished to know what action had been taken since the Constitutional Court had determined that the levying of income tax on statutory accident insurance benefits was in contravention of the Constitution.

28. Mr. DOSSI (Austria) said that Austria had not submitted any reservations to the Covenant, and the use of the term "reservations" in paragraph 3 of the State party report was misleading. Austrian domestic legislation was in line with the Covenant, and the Covenant had therefore not been given self-executing status, since that would lead to duplication within the legal system. As existing domestic legislation guaranteed the provisions of the Covenant, changes were unnecessary. Account must always be taken of international obligations in the application of domestic legislation, and any individual could invoke the Covenant before the courts.

29. A national human rights institution was not considered necessary since Austria had an elaborate system of human rights protection and human rights issues could be raised before State institutions and courts. The Austrian Ombudsman Board (Volksanwaltschaft) had a wide range of responsibilities, including human rights protection. All rights were guaranteed and the establishment of a national institution would lead to duplication of work and increased coordination requirements.

30. Mr. MAIR (Austria) said that, by 2006, Austria's overseas development aid would have reached 0.45 per cent of GNI. In May 2005, Austria and 14 other member States of the European Union had undertaken to achieve 0.51 per cent by 2010 and 0.7 per cent by 2015. Approximately 30 per cent of Austria's overseas development aid went to bilateral partners, with the remainder being channelled through multilateral institutions. Austria had seven priority

partner countries for bilateral aid, five of which were in sub-Saharan Africa. However, Austria's overseas development aid budget also included cooperation with countries in South-East Europe and the Balkans. In response to the question as to why Austria could not achieve the target of 0.7 per cent any earlier, he said that he could only emphasize how far Austria had come: in 2002, the level of its overseas development aid had been only 0.2 per cent.

31. Austria did all it could to ensure that its bilateral aid reached the most vulnerable groups. In 2003, 41 per cent of Austria's bilateral aid had gone to its partners in sub-Saharan Africa and 16 per cent to countries in Asia; by category, 31 per cent had gone to least developed countries, 18 per cent to other low-income countries, 48 per cent to lower middle-income countries and 3 per cent to upper middle-income countries. The costs of receiving asylum-seekers and students from middle-income countries were also included in Austria's aid budget. Over the previous three years Austria's bilateral aid had been increasing; in 2004 - the year that the Austrian Development Agency had begun its work - bilateral aid had increased by 30 per cent. A relatively large percentage of overseas development aid went towards debt cancellation; however, Austria was guided in that respect by the decisions of the Paris Club, which resulted in unpredictable fluctuations in levels of debt cancellation.

32. Austria's concept of rural development included not only fisheries and agriculture but also feeder roads, water supply, and support to local administrations; if those aspects were taken into account, approximately 20 per cent of Austrian bilateral aid was directed into rural development. The degree of Austria's influence within the World Bank was limited by the fact that it shared its Board representation with nine other countries. For that reason, Austria found it could more effectively exert an influence with partner countries at a local level.

33. Austria's human rights approach was based on the concept of a roof of good governance, supported by the three pillars of human rights, peace and conflict prevention, and democratization and the rule of law. All Austria's policies would be based on that symbolic structure and on all the international instruments to which Austria was a signatory.

34. Mr. BUCZOLICH (Austria) said that while it was true that the pensionable age was lower for women than for men, women were entitled to work longer if they wished to. In the long term, the pensionable age for women would be increased from 60 to 65; the change had been delayed in response to opposition from women's associations. Although the monthly pension women received might be lower than men received, even without taking into account differences in life expectancy the total amount of pension paid to women was likely to be greater than the total amount paid to men, given that women became entitled to receive a pension at an earlier age. He noted that many women were also entitled to a widow's pension. Men could choose to retire early once they reached the age of 62, subject to a reduction in their pensions.

35. Ms. NOWOTNY (Austria) said that illegal migrants were not included in the Government's figures on the situation of migrant workers in Austria; the Government could not provide any figures on the number of illegal migrant workers in the country. Austria had a system of sanctions designed to combat illegal work by punishing the employer, not the illegal worker, which Austria considered to be the most efficient way to tackle illegal work.

36. The increase in part-time work was explained by the increase in unemployment, which had meant that full-time jobs had been replaced by part-time jobs. One result was that many women who had previously been unable to work because they cared for children were now able to find part-time work. The Austrian Public Employment Service was taking measures to combat the trend, including counselling for women on training opportunities and reinsertion into the labour market; encouraging women to enter professions traditionally followed by men; encouraging women to consider the medical and caring professions, given the increasing demand for workers in those fields caused by the ageing population; and provision of day care for children.

37. Ms. BECIRAGIC (Austria) said that all asylum-seekers were automatically assigned a legal adviser when they filed their asylum application. Once the asylum-seeker's application had been processed, he or she was accommodated in one of the federal provinces, at which point the responsibility for providing legal advice to refugees passed to the individual province. In addition, asylum-seekers could return to the adviser originally assigned to them at the federal level. Regarding undocumented asylum-seekers, Austria was host to some 28,500 foreigners, most of whom were asylum-seekers, and most of those asylum-seekers were irregular migrants without documentation. She was confident that Austria's well-functioning system of monitoring by NGOs would come into play in the event that a federal law was incompatible with the Covenant; in 2003, a group of NGOs had successfully challenged the constitutionality of an asylum regulation; that was evidence that the system worked. Asylum-seekers who were making application were the responsibility of the federal Government; once their applications had been accepted, responsibility for their care passed to one of the federal provinces.

38. Mr. DOSSI (Austria) said that Austria was actively engaged in the work of the open-ended working group to consider options regarding the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Covenant. His Government was in favour of the establishment of an optional protocol and supported a prolongation of the mandate of the working group. He confirmed that Austria's non-discrimination legislation also applied to schoolteachers. He added that any sexual offence by a schoolteacher against a pupil was a criminal offence, in which their abuse of a position of authority would be an aggravating factor. Such offences would also give rise to disciplinary measures that could cost the perpetrator his or her job.

39. With regard to question 4 in the list of issues, his Government thought it unnecessary to develop a national plan of action on human rights pursuant to the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action since it was already fulfilling its human rights obligations. Austria had not ratified the regional instruments to which Committee members had referred because those instruments would not add anything to the obligations that it had already assumed as a result of its membership of the European Union. A number of other Western European countries also preferred to apply their European Union obligations rather than ratify regional instruments.

40. The incorporation of women's issues into a single Federal Ministry for Health and Women was solely a reflection of the Government's efforts to reduce the number of its ministries, and did not impact on the gender mainstreaming and coordinating role of that ministry. The Roma minority living in Austria were guaranteed equality and other minority

groups in Austria enjoyed the same rights. The Roma were distinct from other minority groups only in that, in addition to guaranteeing their equality and non-discrimination, they received active support from the Austrian Government to help them uphold their traditional way of life and languages.

41. Mr. MALINVERNI said while it was clear that Austria had an effective system of protection for human rights through the courts and the Ombudsman, he wished to point out that it was always possible to improve the system. Perhaps Austria might look at other countries which had similarly high standards but had still found it expedient to establish specific human rights institutions. He pointed out that such bodies also had an advisory function, for example with regard to the impact of proposed legislation on human rights.

42. Ms. BRAS GOMES said she was not convinced that Austria's non-ratification of regional instruments had to do with its membership of the European Union. As Council of Europe instruments, regional instruments were in fact broader in scope and different in nature from EU directives. The delegation might wish to look further into the matter to ascertain whether there was any other explanation.

43. Her concern regarding the Ministry for Health and Women was not so much the inclusion of women with health, but rather who was responsible for coordinating gender mainstreaming, given that the legislation contained no specific commitment in that respect.

44. Ms. GHOSE asked if the delegation could give more information on the terms of reference of the Ombudsman Board, which did not seem to meet the criteria of a "national human rights institution" as envisaged in the Vienna Declaration, namely a national body that was more accessible to vulnerable groups.

45. She wondered whether she had correctly understood that women's monthly pension was lower than men's. If so, that seemed to relate less to the fact that the pensionable age for women was lower than to the fact that women earned less during their working life. In that context, she found the increase in part-time work among women rather worrying and she wondered whether the State party was considering concrete measures to deal with what was essentially a problem of security for women: part-time work did not provide a secure livelihood. Some countries had adopted the flexitime system, for example, in order to enable women to work and also to look after their children.

46. Mr. DOSSI (Austria), replying to Mr. Malinverni, said the Covenant could not be directly invoked before the Austrian courts, but a constitutional challenge to a law or administrative act could legitimately advance the argument that the act violated international law, including the Covenant. The effect was therefore quite similar to a system of direct application.

47. On the question of a national human rights institution, he agreed that it would not do to be complacent. However, Austria could rightly be proud of a system in which laws could be challenged and struck down in the Constitutional Court; very few countries in the world had a constitutional court with such powers. His Government would nevertheless take the Committee's comments into account in its continuing deliberations on that issue.

48. On the question of the Ombudsman Board, he said the system offered precisely what Ms. Ghose was looking for in a national human rights institution: anyone who preferred not to go to court or who had been to court but was not satisfied with the outcome could apply to the Board, which was empowered to contact the institution concerned and advise on further action in the case.

49. The responsibility for coordinating gender mainstreaming was clearly vested in the Ministry for Health and Women, which also coordinated all other ministries' actions in that regard.

50. Mr. BUCZOLICH (Austria) said it was indeed the case that women's monthly pension was on average lower than men's and that that reflected the income gap between men and women in their working lives. However, the situation could be said to have improved to the extent that more women now received pensions than in the past, since women who might previously never have worked at all were now entering the labour market, albeit on a part-time basis. In addition, women were entitled to pay contributions for periods when they were engaged in caring for their families.

51. Ms. NOWOTNY (Austria) said she agreed that part-time work could be seen as a trap for women. On the other hand, it could also be seen as an opportunity, given that it was the only way for many women, notably those with young children, to participate in working life. Austria therefore promoted skilled and professional part-time work for women. It had introduced a right for women to work reduced hours until their children reached the age of 7, for example; and because this had created difficulties for small businesses, it had also introduced subsidies for part-time work in such enterprises. By such combinations of measures it was possible to reduce the risks associated with part-time work.

52. Mr. DOSSI (Austria) thanked Ms. Bras Gomes for her comments regarding Austria's non-ratification of regional instruments, which he would transmit to his Government. He was still of the opinion that the issue was connected with Austria's EU obligations, however: EU directives, once incorporated into domestic law, applied not only to EU citizens in Austria but to all residents, thus having the same effect as regional instruments.

Articles 6-9 of the Covenant

53. Mr. TEXIER asked for more details concerning the rise in unemployment. How did Austria compare with other countries in that regard and what trends could be observed, particularly in respect of long-term unemployment, young people and low-skilled, low-paid workers?

54. On the subject of flexibility in employment, he wondered what type of labour contracts were more common in Austria - indefinite contracts, which could be terminated only under certain conditions, or fixed-term contracts, which offered less security for employees.

55. In respect of equal pay for men and women, the report stated that complaints could be brought before the courts or before the Equal Treatment Commission but that the Commission's

decisions were not enforceable. He therefore wondered whether the labour courts had handed down many decisions in that regard and what principles were applied by the courts in questions of equal pay.

56. In its written reply to question 16 in the list of issues, the State party maintained that it was not possible to assess what was equal work and what was not. Did that mean there was no mechanism - through court action, for example - for enforcing what was, after all, a fundamental principle?

57. Referring to the written reply to question 15 in the list of issues, he noted that, as a matter of principle, wages were negotiated between employer and employee. The fact that no minimum wage was established in law was not in itself a violation of the Covenant, but he wondered whether any minimum was set under collective bargaining agreements and whether there were variations from agreement to agreement or from sector to sector in that regard.

58. On the question of trade union rights, according to his information foreign workers were not permitted to vote in workplace elections for workers' councils. He wondered whether that was correct, for, if it was, it would amount to a violation of article 8 of the Covenant. He also noted that there was no law regulating strikes. Strikes might well be uncommon, as shown in the report, but if there was no law, on what basis could a strike be ruled legal or otherwise, or the conflict resolved?

59. Mr. MALINVERNI said that, from the figures available, it appeared that the wage gap between men and women was wider in Austria than in a great many other EU member States. Some said the gap was as much as 40 per cent, others that, for work of equal value, women received on average 80 per cent of what men earned. He would appreciate more information on that subject.

60. A sizeable proportion of Austria's population, 13 per cent, had been classed as poor in 2003. The Government had given an indication of certain measures it intended to take to tackle poverty, notably raising the levels of certain social benefits. However, those were partial measures and he wondered whether they were sufficient. It was pay levels that needed to be targeted: the lowest wages in Austria were less than half the average.

61. Returning to the question of women's pensions, he noted that, following the recent pension reform, it was no longer the 15 best years that were taken into account in calculating the pension, but every year of working life. This had been reported as penalizing women, partly because they tended to work part-time, but also because they tended not to work for lengthy continuous periods. He would welcome the delegation's reaction to that point.

62. Ms. BRAS GOMES said she too would welcome the delegation's comments, on another predicted result of the pension reform, namely an increased risk of poverty for women in the next 20 years.

63. The extension of the childcare period to 36 months after the birth had proved, according to some sources, to have a negative impact on women insofar as they found fewer opportunities to re-enter the labour market after such a long career break. She wondered if the delegation had an opinion on that subject.

64. It appeared that those who did not receive sufficient support from the social security system were eligible for social assistance, but that such assistance was neither a right nor set at a uniform level across the whole country. She wondered if that was correct and, if so, whether there were any plans to move towards a needs-based support scheme such as a minimum guaranteed income.

65. She wondered whether it was correct that unemployment assistance had been reduced to a very low level, lower even than the standard rate of income support for pensioners. If so, did the delegation consider that level to be adequate?

66. Social services provision seemed to be gradually being delegated to the non-profit or private sector and she wondered how the State party ensured access for those most in need and how the quality of the service provision was monitored.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.