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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Seventy-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1910th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Thursday, 19 February 2009, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. DAH

CONTENTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Fifteenth to twentieth periodic reports of Pakistan

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Fifteenth to twentieth periodic reports of Pakistan (CERD/C/PAK/20)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Pakistan took places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed the delegation of Pakistan and paid tribute to Mr. Shahi, the former long-standing member of the Committee from Pakistan, who had inter alia played a leading role in developing the indicators relating to genocide. That had marked a turning point in the Committee's work and its relations with the rest of the United Nations system.

3. Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan) said that the current report had been prepared with the participation of both Government and civil society. His country had faced numerous political, security and economic challenges since the presentation of its previous report. Current challenges included terrorism, the global financial crisis and the transition from a quasi-military to a democratic Government. However, Pakistan had a vibrant Parliament, an independent judiciary and totally free media. The economy was improving and Pakistan was cooperating with the international community to defeat terrorism and extremism. Furthermore, his Government was committed to the empowerment of women, the promotion of human rights, and police, prison and judicial reform.

4. Pakistan had ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1966 and was a State party to several other human rights instruments. It had signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in 2008.

5. Pakistan's historic role as a crossroads country had created a highly diverse society where there was no distinction on grounds of race. In accordance with the tenets of Islam - the religion of 97 per cent of Pakistanis, all persons had a right to equal treatment without distinction as to caste, creed, origin, race or colour. Furthermore, the Constitution required the State to discourage parochial and sectarian prejudice and guaranteed equal rights and equal treatment before the law to all citizens, including minorities. The Constitution required the State to promote the development of disadvantaged areas and also guaranteed the right of cultural or ethnic groups to preserve their language through the establishment of institutions for that purpose. Religious minorities were governed by their own laws in matters relating to inheritance, family matters and charitable institutions.

6. While minorities represented only 3 per cent of the population, 5 per cent of seats in the National Assembly and Senate were reserved for them. Since 2002 the joint electorate system had applied to the National Assembly as well as provincial assemblies. Minorities had the right to nominate candidates in general elections and had 10 seats reserved for them in the National Assembly and 23 in the provincial assemblies. His Government intended to increase minority representation in those bodies, had declared 11 August as "Minority Day" and

announced that minority religious festivals would be celebrated officially. At the local (Tehsil) and district (Zilla) levels, women were allotted at least 33 per cent of seats, 5 per cent were reserved for minorities, and 5 per cent for peasants and workers.

7. In addition to constitutional guarantees, section 153 (A) of the Penal Code criminalized the promotion of enmity between groups on grounds of race, religion, language, caste, community or other grounds, while section 505 (2) criminalized the publication of any material that might incite conflict between groups. There were regular discussions of minority issues in Parliament. Any citizen could seek redress before the courts if they felt their rights had been violated. Legal aid was available for those unable to pay for such proceedings and human rights activists, many of whom were lawyers, likewise provided pro bono services to victims.

8. It was not only minorities who suffered from poor conditions of detention; conditions of detention were generally poor due to inadequate resources. The Ministry of Human Rights was working to improve those conditions and his Government had instructed the Ministry of Law and Justice and the Ministry of the Interior to undertake reform of the prison system. A committee had been set up in May 2008 to make recommendations in that regard. Reforms would include upgrading district jail conditions and an increase in staffing.

9. The National Commission for Child Welfare and Development had prepared training manuals for judicial, police and prison officials on the treatment of juveniles; they reflected the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as domestic legislation. Numerous institutions were working to protect minority rights: the Minorities Affairs Division, the National Commission for Minorities, the Federal Advisory Council for Minorities Affairs and the District Minority Committees. The Federal Ombudsman was charged with dealing with maladministration and corruption on the part of government officials. In November 2008, responsibility for human rights had been transferred from the Ministry of Law and Justice to the new Ministry of Human Rights. That Ministry and the Ministry of Minorities Affairs, established in 2004, were the core institutions for the protection and promotion of minority rights.

10. The National Commission for Minorities, chaired by the Minister for Minorities, included representatives from all minorities and dealt with such issues as protection of minorities, culture, financial assistance for communities affected by natural disasters, special funds for minorities and protection of the communal properties of minorities. As a result of recommendations made by the Commission, minorities were allowed to vote in the joint electorates, district interfaith harmony committees had been established, attacks on churches had been followed up with provincial authorities, 10 minority religious festivals were celebrated and a 5 per cent quota for minorities had been established for federal government jobs.

11. The Special Fund for the Uplift of Minorities subsidized small development schemes, mostly for the acquisition or maintenance of burial places, maintenance of places of religious importance and provision of basic services to minorities; it also provided financial assistance to individual members of minorities. Scholarships had been awarded to 1,360 minority students in the current year. His Government intended to double the budget of the Uplift Fund. A bill on the establishment of a national human rights commission meeting the criteria set out in the Paris Principles had been tabled in the National Assembly. That commission should be established by July 2009.

12. In 2002, a new Police Order had been adopted. It contained provisions on the protection of the rights of vulnerable persons and a code of conduct for law enforcement officials; it was aimed at depoliticizing the police and making them a people-friendly public service. In addition, a comprehensive programme of human rights and gender awareness training had been included in the curricula of police training schools, colleges and the National Police Academy.

13. His Government attached high importance to human rights education. In order to change social and cultural attitudes that could have a negative effect on human rights, school curricula were being reformed in the light of international human rights standards in consultation with the Ministry of Law and Justice and the Ministry of Human Rights and with the assistance of the Governments of Norway and Canada. In cooperation with the Governments of Norway and Switzerland a project entitled "Human rights mass awareness for education" had been implemented to incorporate children's rights into the curriculum and teacher training. The Ministry of Education had drafted the national education policy for 2009 which, among other reforms, included allowing minorities to receive religious instruction in educational institutions.

14. The curriculum of madrasas, or religious schools, which played an important role in educating the poor, was being broadened to provide students with the skills needed to find jobs and start businesses. His Government was consulting with religious scholars to bring about a gradual change in cultural attitudes. It encouraged the growth of schools run by churches and religious trusts and also focused on vocational and technical training for disadvantaged persons.

15. The Evacuee Trust Property Board, which included minority representatives and was an autonomous body of the Ministry of Minorities, was tasked with maintaining religious shrines and providing facilities for pilgrims. The presence of visitors and participants from numerous religious and ethnic groups at Muslim Sufi festivals was a visible sign of growing religious tolerance. The Ministry of Minorities provided financial assistance to disadvantaged members of minorities to help them celebrate their religious festivals. Both the President and the Prime Minister hosted open houses on the occasion of minority religious festivals, and his Government had declared some 20 national holidays for minority religious festivals.

16. Pakistan had a vibrant media sector, with 96 television and 94 radio stations and approximately 1,500 newspapers and periodicals, in more than a dozen languages. Discussions on human rights, including minority rights, and controversial social and cultural issues were common. Minority religious festivals were given broad coverage by the broadcast and print media.

17. Turning to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATAs), he recalled the legacy of British colonial rule, whereby the Pashtun tribes were granted autonomy under certain conditions incorporating their customs and traditions, balanced with the need to maintain public order. Under that system - known as the Frontier Crimes Regulation or Jirga system, an assembly of elders decided all matters in a democratic and egalitarian manner. The Government was prioritizing reforms in tribal areas and acknowledged the need for people in those areas to have access not only to the Frontier Crimes Regulation but to the country's judicial system as a whole. There was uncertainty, however, about the feasibility of replacing the Frontier Crimes Regulation, and no agreement had been reached on the nature of the new arrangement, which would have to be accepted by all the tribes. Some believed that amendments should only be introduced once the crisis in the tribal areas relating to the war on terror was over.

18. The Prime Minister had formed a ministerial committee, headed by the Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, to review the Frontier Crimes Regulation. The policy of economic and social development known as the "FATA Development Plan", and the ongoing constructive dialogue with the tribes, were expected to yield positive results. Adults had been granted the right to vote in the FATAs for the first time in 1997. The total number of registered voters for the 1997 elections had been 1.6 million, including 400,000 women. The FATAs were represented in the national Parliament, with 12 members in the National Assembly and 8 in the Senate.

19. The Government had engaged the local Balochi leaders and the people of Balochistan in a meaningful dialogue aimed at removing their legitimate grievances. The federal and the Balochistan provincial governments had taken positive steps to redress social and economic deficits in the area. In August 2008, the Federal Government had established a special committee to assess the situation in Balochistan, which had made recommendations for the amicable settlement of issues, including proposals for constitutional amendments and consideration of the distribution of resources among the four provinces. Some incarcerated Balochi leaders had been released and the cases against them withdrawn. Work was also being carried out to improve the socio-economic conditions of the people of Balochistan; the Federal Government had waived some of the debt owed by Balochistan, and the provincial government was focusing on improving water resources by building new dams and reservoirs with the aim of contributing to the food security of the region following years of drought. Major infrastructure projects had also been implemented to provide employment and generate economic activity and income.

20. The Pakistan Peoples Party had developed a coherent vision of a welfare state for Pakistan, where market forces would be balanced with safety nets for the underprivileged and the poor. Despite the context of steep price increases for oil and commodities, poverty reduction continued to be a priority for his Government, as demonstrated by its income support and poverty reduction programmes. Major investments had also been made in health and education, and minority groups were being given maximum support.

21. With the restoration of full democracy in Pakistan, the Government had focused on upholding all aspects of the Constitution and on ensuring respect for the rule of law. While a conscious effort was made to ensure protection of all minorities and enhance their rights, it was true that more needed to be done. The Government was committed to making more efforts in that area, but faced challenges with regard to capacity.

22. Mr. PETER, Country Rapporteur, outlined the historical background to the establishment in 1947 of the State of Pakistan, which had existed as West Pakistan and East Pakistan prior to the secession of East Pakistan in 1971 to form the State of Bangladesh. Such fundamental changes in territory made the issue of foreigners and refugees a particularly complex one, and he wondered in that regard whether the simplified procedure for Biharis to become citizens of India introduced in 1978 was still available. There had been considerable instability since the 1973 adoption of Pakistan's Constitution, which had frequently been suspended; that had affected fundamental constitutional principles, including independence of the judiciary, the separation of powers and the rule of law.

23. He expressed concern at the late submission of the written replies to the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room) and at the partial nature of the replies. No information had been provided on, for example: the ethnic composition of the

population and the socio-economic status of members of different ethnic groups; numbers of immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees; the situation of ethnic and linguistic groups, including indigenous communities; a comprehensive national anti-discrimination law; and implementation of article 33 of the Constitution. In that regard, he requested full and direct responses to questions 1-6, and 11, 17 and 20 of the list of issues.

24. Pakistan was, alarmingly, a party to extremely few international human rights instruments, a fact which necessarily cast doubt on its commitment to respect and guarantee human rights in its territory. He asked for a firm assurance that Pakistan fully intended to establish its national human rights commission in July 2009, as indicated in its written replies, and for more complete information in response to question 14 of the list of issues on whether the State party intended to accede to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Protocol thereto. He would also like it to comment on the agreement recently signed between the Government of Pakistan and the Taliban in Swat, in North West Frontier Province, allowing the use of sharia law.

25. Recalling the Committee's general recommendation XXIX relating to descent-based discrimination, he asked what the State party was doing to address the issue of caste-based discrimination, particularly with regard to lower-caste Hindus, or Dalits, inter alia in the areas of access to land, bonded labour and illiteracy. Information on the precise number of Dalits would be welcome. He also wished to know what the State party was doing to address problems of gender discrimination in view of the reports received of domestic violence, forced marriages and "honour killings".

26. Reports had also been received of marginalization of certain groups, including the Saraiki and Balochi peoples. The former group had been denied its own province, and autonomous powers, and lacked representation at provincial and national level. While the latter had been granted autonomous powers in theory, those powers had not been implemented in practice. He would welcome information on what was being done to improve representation of minority groups, including in the area of control over their natural resources.

27. He expressed concern that the people living in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the Provincially Administered Tribal Areas - the Pashtuns - suffered discrimination in all areas of economic and political life. In view of articles 2, 5 and 6 of the Convention, he would appreciate comments from the State party on why constitutional guarantees were not extended to the Pashtuns. There was also neglect in the area of economic and social development, as demonstrated by the alarmingly low female literacy rate of 3 per cent. Women suffered from double discrimination. He would be interested to hear what measures the State party was taking to redress those issues.

28. He noted the desire of the new President and Prime Minister of Pakistan to engage with the international community, and looked forward to a constructive, fruitful dialogue with the State party.

29. Mr. AVTONOMOV said that he would appreciate information on civil society organizations in Pakistan, particularly those that had been involved in the drawing up of the periodic report, and on how they were consulted.

30. He wished to receive further clarification on the concept of minorities, the guarantees and measures in place for their benefit and how they were defined in law in Pakistan at both the provincial and federal levels. Referring to paragraph 23 of the report, he wished to learn more about the procedures and rules for electing members of the National Assembly from minorities. He also wished to ascertain the position of the Government concerning ratification of the amendment to article 8 of the Convention.

31. Mr. DIACONU said that it was commendable that seats were reserved by law for minorities in Parliament and in the four provincial assemblies. He recalled that, in its concluding observations (CERD/C/304/Add.25) on the tenth to fourteenth periodic reports of Pakistan in 1997, the Committee had noted in its recommendations that Pakistan recognized only religious minorities under its Constitution and paragraph 93 of the current report also referred only to religious minorities. The representative of the State party had mentioned ethnic groups but, according to the report, all the provisions of existing legislation and the Constitution referred only to "minorities" and not to ethnic groups; he therefore wished to know whether the seats in Parliament and the provincial assemblies were reserved only for those religious minorities mentioned in paragraph 93 or whether they were also reserved for members of ethnic groups. He would also like more information on the representation of ethnic groups in the public services.

32. While welcoming the creation of a Ministry of Minorities Affairs, he wished to know whether the work of the Ministry and of the National Commission for Minorities covered both religious minorities and ethnic groups. The Commission had taken important decisions, such as banning the sale of communal property without the agreement of the Federal Government; that was a significant step, as it provided the means for the Government to protect land and other property belonging to ethnic and religious communities. He wished to know what practical and administrative measures the State was taking to eliminate descent-based discrimination, in particular vis-à-vis the Scheduled Castes.

33. Referring to paragraph 59 of the report, which stated that the Federal Shariat Court considered legislation to see whether it was in conformity with the precepts of the Koran and Sunna, he wished to learn whether the Court was also a criminal court. He asked what action the Pakistan authorities intended to take to bring the Federally Administered Tribal Areas within the ambit of national legislation and the Convention. Finally, how was the delegation evaluating the impact of conflicts in surrounding countries, particularly in Afghanistan, on the implementation of human rights instruments in Pakistan?

34. Mr. LINDGREN ALVES said that he was aware of the difficult situation facing Pakistan, which was suffering from the conflicts in neighbouring countries and hosting the highest number of refugees resulting from them. While expressing appreciation for the report submitted by Pakistan, he suggested that paragraphs 1-66 might usefully have been used to create a core document for presentation to the various United Nations treaty bodies.

35. Regarding the practice of the Committee, a rule should perhaps be adopted prohibiting the use of words requiring explanation; he was not familiar with the names of certain institutions in Pakistan given in the report and they had therefore been difficult to understand.

36. The report had given the impression that Pakistan was a moderate Islamic State with extensive laws and initiatives intended to ensure equality among all its citizens. Given the

emphasis on equality, he had expected the State to be secular, particularly in view of the large number of minorities present in the country. Like Mr. Diaconu, he wished to know whether only religious minorities were recognized. On the issue of education, he wished to know the difference between a madrasa and a regular State-funded Islamic school and whether the State paid for the teaching of different religions in areas where minorities predominated. The possibility to study comparative religions at university level was particularly important.

37. Paragraphs 59-61 of the report mentioned the judges of the Supreme Court and the Ulema and the role of the Federal Shariat Court in determining whether a certain provision of law was repugnant to the laws of Islam; he wished to know whether sharia law was also applied to non-Muslims. In addition, he wished to learn the difference between the law applied in Pakistan and the sharia law which he believed would be applied following a recent agreement reportedly signed between the Government and some of the tribes in the north of the country. It seemed that questions of religion were becoming increasingly problematic throughout the world: citing the case, outlined in paragraph 191 of the report, of the devout Catholic who had held the post of Chief Justice of Pakistan from 1960 to 1968 and Justice of the Supreme Court for 17 years, he asked whether such a case would be possible in law and in practice at the current time.

38. It was his understanding that one of the biggest problems in the preparatory negotiations for the Durban Review Conference had been the insistence of some Islamic countries on introducing international legislation banning blasphemy; as Pakistan had always been in the forefront of the move towards adopting that legislation, he wondered how it would affect the freedom of the media in Pakistan.

39. Mr. LAHIRI said that Pakistan had recently been the subject of the Universal Periodic Review process of the Human Rights Council and there had been general appreciation of the progress the country had made in the human rights field. Of particular note were: the change in the law in 2004 that made honour killings murder; the amendment to the Hudood ordinance; the ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the signing of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The proposed national human rights commission seemed impressive; setting up a national institution compliant with the Paris Principles would constitute genuine progress.

40. However, with regard to ICERD and the Committee, Pakistan had made relatively limited improvements. There was an apparent reluctance to take into account the Committee's request, formulated in 1997, to broaden its definition of minorities to include ethnic groups. It appeared that those Pakistanis who were not of Punjabi origin were disadvantaged to some degree. The delegation had mentioned ethnic groups in its oral presentation, but more detailed indicators would be needed, both for the Committee to make a determination on whether groups suffered discrimination and for the Government to assess the extent of the problem and take affirmative action. Paragraph 68 (b) of the report did provide information on minorities, but he found its conclusion that minorities experienced no impediments in seeking redress to be somewhat obscure. The situation of some ethnic groups, in Balochistan, for instance, where the literacy rate for women was less than 3 per cent, appeared to be quite dramatic. In addition, there had been numerous reports of the use of chemical weapons, summary executions, indiscriminate bombings and thousands of people disappearing in some areas - a situation which contrasted greatly with that in other areas of the country.

41. Another difficulty in implementing the Convention in Pakistan seemed to stem from the fragmentation of its judiciary: in some parts of the country the justice system seemed to have been outsourced, and in other parts the formal law did not apply. With the continuing violence in some parts, almost 50 per cent of the country seemed to be outside civil jurisdiction, relying on the army or on non-State elements. The question then arose as to how a State could discharge its responsibilities to report to the Committee on fulfilment of its international obligations if domestic laws did not apply in certain areas. The Committee should examine that issue and decide what action it should take.

42. The loose wording of blasphemy laws was also problematic; they were vaguely defined and required little evidence, and a case could be brought on the basis of an allegation by one person. There were numerous reports of the misuse of blasphemy laws against Christians, minority Muslim sects and Hindus and to discredit certain parties to land disputes.

43. Mr. THORNBERRY said that the delegation's response to question 1 of the list of issues seemed to embody a fairly rigid idea of equality and non-discrimination. However, those terms were nuanced and needed to be adapted to respond to differences in material circumstances. In measuring equality and non-discrimination, the characteristics of the situations affecting different ethnic groups should be taken into account. The Committee had moved strongly towards emphasizing "equality in fact" rather than uniform treatment. Provisions on special measures would not have much impact if the concept of equality was treated very rigidly. Nevertheless, it was evident from the report and from law and practice that Pakistan took a sensitive and nuanced approach in the matter of minorities and special measures.

44. In its oral presentation, the delegation had stated that there was no discrimination or distinction on grounds of race in Pakistan, but it was worth recalling that the governing concept of the Convention was not "race", but racial discrimination, which was considered on five listed grounds. The Convention did not deal with the question of religion, but article 5 referred to freedom of thought, conscience and religion among the rights to be protected; it was therefore the practice of the Committee to include questions of religion where there was a link between ethnic or national origin and religion. The references in the report appeared to be largely to religious minorities and therefore the Committee had requested disaggregated statistics so that it could determine the scope of the Convention in those circumstances. The idea of self-identification and an open approach to conducting a census, rather than pigeonholing people, were important.

45. He understood that Pakistan was not a party to ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989) but it was a party to ILO Convention No. 107 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Populations (1957). He would be interested to learn what influence the terminology concerning indigenous and tribal peoples had in the context of Pakistan and what approach the Government had taken in relation to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295) of September 2007.

46. He endorsed the questions raised by colleagues on the reports from Balochistan and other regions, some of which had been harrowing. He wished to learn more about caste-based discrimination: general recommendation XXIX invited States to consider whether there were descent-based groups subject to the jurisdiction of the country and the potential areas of discrimination. The response to the Rapporteur's question on that issue had so far been limited.

47. Turning to the question of languages, he asked what provisions were in place to ensure access to education for all ethnic and racial groups. It would be useful to have additional information on the use of different languages in the school system and on the nature of school curricula.

48. The Committee would appreciate further comment on the issue of segregation practices concerning nomadic peoples, indigenous peoples, caste groups and other minorities.

49. He commended the State party for its endeavour to marry Islamic aspects of the State and society with a situation of religious and cultural diversity. While that was clearly challenging, it was a worthy endeavour deserving of success for the benefit of the State party and the wider international community. There was a need to guard against overreaction in response to the introduction of certain aspects of sharia law; judgement should be reserved until it became clear exactly what was being introduced and for whom.

50. Mr. de GOUTTES drew attention to the significant discrepancies between some of the information in the periodic report and that received from other sources. The summary prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in accordance with paragraph 15 (c) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 (A/HRC/WG.6/2/PAK/3), contained several sections of great concern to the Committee. In particular, the State party should comment on the description of the segregation to which Scheduled Castes were subjected (para. 8) and the situation regarding the lack of religious freedom (para. 26). Reports had also indicated that sharia law was applied to non-Muslim minorities, thus denying them the right to freedom of religion or belief. In general, religious minorities, nomadic groups, indigenous populations and Scheduled Castes were reported to be socially excluded, and to suffer discrimination vis-à-vis their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and serious violations of their human rights, including many instances of violence. The delegation should clarify the situation in the light of those discrepancies and inform the Committee of the measures that had been taken to remedy the situations described.

51. Mr. PROSPER requested clarification of whether the term “minorities”, as used in the periodic report, referred to religious minorities or to other groups such as ethnic groups. It would be useful to learn whether the Government recognized that discrimination was directed against various groups within Pakistani society. If so, further information should be provided on which groups were affected and to what extent they suffered discrimination. The delegation should comment on the accuracy of reports that slavery in the form of bonded labour by some minority groups continued to be practised. If that was true, details of the steps being taken to resolve that situation would be welcome.

52. He requested information on action taken in response to the recommendations made by the Human Rights Council in the light of its 2008 Universal Periodic Review, including the recommendation to take specific and targeted measures to effectively prevent discrimination against Scheduled Castes.

53. In the light of the agreement that the Government had reached with the Taliban in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the delegation should indicate how it would meet its international obligations in those areas.

54. Mr. AMIR requested further clarification of the statistical data provided in the tables in paragraph 44 of the report, particularly the exact composition of the categories listed. It would be useful to learn more about the status of the Federal Shariat Court and its position vis-à-vis the other courts in the State party. In particular, he wished to know whether that court had primacy over the Supreme Court and other judicial institutions.

55. The Committee would welcome information on the differences between the curricula of the madrasas and public Islamic schools. It would be interesting to learn whether adults and young children were taught in the same classrooms in the madrasas.

56. He asked whether the State party was in a position to establish an independent human rights institution, and how such a body would function in relation to human rights instruments and civil society.

57. Mr. DANIELSEN asked whether there was a risk that domestic legislation might be used as an excuse for not fulfilling the State party's obligations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

58. Mr. HUANG Yong'an requested additional information on how the joint electorate mechanism guaranteed the electoral rights of minority groups. He urged the Government to consider acceding to more international human rights instruments, particularly the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

59. Mr. SICILIANOS welcomed the Prime Minister's commitments to ensure that minorities would be represented in all national institutions and to review legislation that could engender discrimination against religious minorities, as described in the statement made by the representative of Pakistan before the Human Rights Council in 2008 (A/HRC/8/42/Add.1). In that statement, the Government had also undertaken to make every effort to support the Scheduled Castes and to encourage NGOs to seek redress for the grievances of those groups. The statement also made reference to granting compensation to internally displaced persons. It would be interesting to learn whether the Government therefore recognized the right to compensation of the Scheduled Castes and internally displaced persons. He would welcome further details on the results of the work of the ministerial committee that had been established to review the Frontier Crimes Regulation.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.