



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

Distr.: General
15 February 2008

Original: English

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Fortieth session

Summary record of the 815th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 17 January 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Šimonović

Contents

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the
Convention (*continued*)

Combined initial and second periodic reports of Saudi Arabia

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of this document* to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

Any corrections to the record of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention *(continued)*

Combined initial and second periodic reports of Saudi Arabia (CEDAW/C/SAU/2; CEDAW/C/SAU/Q/2 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Saudi Arabia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Al Hussein** (Saudi Arabia), introducing his country's combined initial and second periodic reports, said that the efforts of the United Nations human rights bodies, including the Committee, offered hope to humanity. The success of the Committee's work depended upon its objectivity and appreciation of cultural diversity. One of the prime challenges to human rights was selectivity, which was exploited by some for their own ends and was against human nature. All of humanity sprang from Adam and Eve, inhabited one earth and had a common future and destiny.

3. In its legislation, his country sought to preserve human dignity, eliminate all forms of discrimination and affirm the unity of mankind and cooperation between peoples for the common good, as did the international human rights bodies. Respect for human rights in Islam was based on Islamic sharia and was the duty of all men and women, although only the rights of women were the subject of discussion at present. Women were considered by the Prophet to be the sisters of men and to enjoy rights similar to theirs. In his country, women were deemed to be not separate from, but complementary to, men.

4. In its 1966 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had affirmed the dignity of individual cultures and emphasized that cultural diversity formed part of the heritage of mankind and should be respected. In Saudi Arabia, women played a key role in the family; children learned about life from the perspective of the sharia, which gave women and men equal rights, responsibility and duties. The relationship between the sexes was based on friendship and love and fulfilled the divine objective of procreation. All necessary legislation had been enacted and measures taken to ensure that balance and complementarity prevailed in social life, although shortcomings might exist as a

result of individual conduct, circumstances, traditions or customs.

5. In recent years, significant progress had been made with respect to women's human rights through reforms in numerous areas. The transformation achieved since the establishment of Saudi Arabia in 1932 was a record achievement in comparative terms. The nation's leaders were eager to raise women's status and increase their role within a clear and just Islamic philosophical framework. Emphasis had been laid upon education, as was apparent in the statistics before the Committee, since it enabled women to assume their proper positions and responsibilities and to defend their rights. The report referred to his country's achievements following its accession to the Convention but, despite those changes, the leadership had taken care to preserve the country's identity in formulating its programmes and plans. He looked forward to a direct, constructive dialogue that would achieve the common purposes of the Committee and his country.

6. **Ms. Al-Youssef** (Saudi Arabia) provided an overview of developments in the situation of women. Various pieces of draft legislation were currently under review, including a draft law on protection against domestic violence and a draft law on combating trafficking in human beings. In the political sphere, women had been appointed to positions of leadership in both the Government and the private sector and had participated in the national dialogue on the role and participation of women. In 2006, they had constituted some 34 per cent of the labour force in the government sector. Women predominated in the field of education, both as employees and as graduate students. The Government therefore sought to coordinate with the labour market in order to provide sufficient employment opportunities for women in that sphere. Women's participation in the private sector had increased threefold since 2000 and the Government was increasing the number of scholarship grants for women to study abroad.

7. The Government had made primary education compulsory for both sexes and had developed school curricula. State budget allocations for education had increased sharply since 2000; the allocation for girls was now higher than that for boys and student numbers were comparable. The number of Government and private universities had also increased, their quality had improved and their curricula had been brought into line with the requirements of the labour market. New

fields of study had been opened to women students, including law and technology, and a number of institutes for research and applied studies had been established. More women than men were currently enrolled for graduate and post-graduate degrees and a considerable number of women were being awarded foreign scholarships. The Ministry of Education was active in eradicating illiteracy. It had established free mobile adult education centres in rural areas, introduced new adult education programmes in teachers' colleges and adopted an intersectoral approach to the provision of summer education programmes for the Bedouin. Progress had also been made in the area of technical education.

8. Life expectancy had increased by 20 years since 1970 and infant, under-five and maternal mortality rates had dropped sharply during the same period. The social welfare available to families had been increased in 2006 and a greater number of social services were provided to women through civil associations.

9. **Dr. Al-Munif** (Saudi Arabia) said that until 2000, domestic violence had not been recognized as a problem and the few, isolated reports of it had focused on child abuse. Consequently, there had been little response or legislation at the Government level. Since that time, media reports on domestic violence cases had brought the issue to public attention and led to research, including on patterns of prevalence in particular social groups.

10. Since 2004, efforts had been made to address domestic violence against women and the Ministry of Social Affairs had allocated resources to the social protection committees in the 13 provinces of the Kingdom. Greater awareness had created a need for services. The National Organization for Human Rights, established in 2004, had started to address the problem. In 2005, women had established a National Family Safety Programme that had raised awareness and had led to the training of professionals in various fields and had enabled women to educate men on women's rights and on the problem of domestic violence.

11. Whereas, prior to 2000, domestic violence had been dealt with on a case-by-case basis, it was now being addressed at the community level. Most recently, the Ministry of Health had established family protection centres, linked to the social protection committees. The new judicial system, established in 2007, had introduced family courts, and women's

access to help through hospitals had increased. It was now mandatory for health workers to report cases of abuse, so statistics would soon be available. Although further work was needed, considerable progress had been made.

Articles 1 to 6

12. **Mr. Flinterman** said that the frank and informative report, responses and introductory presentations demonstrated the significant changes taking place in Saudi Arabia. In its responses to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/SAU/Q/2/Add.1), the Government stated that its general reservation to the Convention did not affect the core of that instrument and that the sharia was compatible with the obligations contained in the general principles of the Convention; the reservation was merely a precautionary measure against possible interpretations of the Convention that might contradict legal provisions in force in the kingdom. He asked whether any of the general recommendations adopted by the Committee in the past 25 years, further interpreting the obligations of States parties, could be considered to contradict the laws prevailing in Saudi Arabia. He saw no need to maintain the reservation, and hoped that the Government would consider withdrawing it.

13. **Ms. Patten** said that she was pleased to note that the Convention had become part of Saudi Arabian domestic law, having been ratified by royal decree. She sought information on court or administrative cases in which the Convention had been invoked, in particular in the context of the establishment of new courts, including family courts, and asked whether systematic training on the scope and substantive provisions of the Convention would be offered to members of the judiciary and law enforcement officials.

14. A new Labour Code had recently been enacted and draft laws on domestic violence and trafficking in human beings were under consideration. She wondered what measures for raising women's awareness of their rights under those new laws were being taken or envisaged.

15. It would be useful to know more about the literacy campaign, including in rural areas, and to learn how women would be made aware of the generously funded social services available.

16. Noting that the report had been discussed with women advisers to the Consultative Council but had

not been submitted to it, she asked whether the delegation would report to the Council on its dialogue with the Committee and present it with the concluding comments in order to involve it in their implementation.

17. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that the report made strong statements in support of the protection of women's rights; on page 42, it stated that Saudi Arabian women enjoyed full legal competence upon reaching the age of majority and legal personality in respect of the practice of all rights, such as the right to own and dispose of property and to conclude contracts. In the light of those statements, she would like to know whether women were free to exercise all professions, to pursue any area of study, to enrol in any educational institution, to travel or obtain a passport without the permission of a guardian, to make decisions concerning their health, to report cases of domestic violence to police authorities and to establish non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with contacts abroad.

18. **Ms. Maiolo** said that she would like to know whether cases of domestic violence were generally settled amicably or in the courts; in the latter case, she would appreciate data on the number of such cases, the outcomes of the trials and the sentences imposed.

19. It was not clear why men and women did not enjoy equal inheritance rights; she failed to understand why men inherited twice as much as women since women were no longer confined to the home and could work to contribute to the family budget.

20. **Ms. Shin** said that the system of male guardianship over women, regardless of their age, governed every aspect of their lives. Women could not study, seek health care, work, marry, conduct business or even use ambulance services without the consent of their male guardians. She would like to know what the legal basis for that system was and whether any law stipulated the need for guardianship. In particular, it was unclear whether women were entitled to lodge complaints about domestic violence without the consent of their guardian and what recourse they had if the guardian himself abused his authority or committed an act of violence. She asked whether the delegation saw any contradiction between the system of male guardianship and the Convention.

21. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, asked the delegation if it could provide specific examples of cases in which domestic law was

incompatible with the Convention and, if so, how such cases were handled and which law prevailed.

22. **Mr. Al-Majaji** (Saudi Arabia) said that Saudi Arabia's general reservation to the Convention referred to potential contradictions between any provision of the Convention and the norms of Islamic law, based on the Koran and Sunna. Interpretations of the law by various schools of Islamic jurisprudence were taken into account. Personal status laws were also derived from the Koran. Contradictions were considered by the courts on a case-by-case basis. His Government was in the process of establishing a high-level scholarly panel, including the various schools of jurisprudence, to codify all the provisions of Islamic law relating to personal status and to clarify the application of the sharia and the Convention.

23. **Ms. Al-Usaimi** (Saudi Arabia) said she hoped that members would visit Saudi Arabia to get a first-hand view of the progress taking place in society. The situation of women's employment had greatly changed, yet that did not prevent them from performing their religious duties. Islam encouraged women to earn money and to work; the Prophet Mohammed's wife, Khadijah, had been an entrepreneur. Work did not prevent women from caring for their families.

24. The sharia was accepted by the majority of society and the reservation to the Convention must be understood in that light; Islamic law supported the rights of women and in no way infringed on them.

25. **Mr. Al Hussein** (Saudi Arabia) said that although the report had not been submitted to the Consultative Council, the Council had taken part in preparing it. The Committee's comments and recommendations arising from the current meeting would certainly be submitted to it, as well as to other relevant bodies.

26. **Dr. Jamjoum** (Saudi Arabia) said that public education for girls had been available since 1960 and that significant progress had been accomplished since then. Most female students, particularly at universities, pursued studies in education and the humanities as was natural given the Government's efforts to meet the increased demand for teachers, particularly in rural areas. The Government had also allocated significant resources to promoting girls' education, which had exceeded the budget for boys for the past four years.

27. Women were excluded from some fields of education, such as geology. It was not a matter of

prohibition, but rather of doors being closed to them. Nevertheless, while women had had no opportunity to study the law or engineering just a few years previously, three universities had since opened their doors and scholarships had been made available so that they could pursue studies in those fields.

28. **Mr. Al Hussein** (Saudi Arabia) said that many Saudi Arabian women had travelled to Europe to study law out of a desire to study abroad.

29. **Ms. Al-Yousuf** (Saudi Arabia) said that not all Saudi Arabian women were aware of their rights. The Government had launched an awareness-raising campaign in recent years. A special television channel sought to disseminate information on the rights of women and issues concerning women were freely discussed in the media. The National Organization for Human Rights was working to increase awareness about such matters.

30. **Dr. Al-Ansari** (Saudi Arabia) said that many women, including herself, were exercising their rights fully and fulfilling various roles in Saudi Arabia. She believed that her society would meet, and in some respects go beyond, the obligations set forth in the Convention.

31. Concerning women's right of access to medical care, all primary health-care centres were readily accessible to all. Statistics showed that some 99 per cent of the population had access to health services. Women could use such services on their own and could take their own decisions on whether to have a procedure performed, including surgical procedures. The requirement of guardianship was a misconception and had no legal basis.

32. Women also had the right to start their own business. In fact, the number of women entrepreneurs was increasing steadily in a variety of professions, including jewelry design, cosmetology and others. Women could travel on their own and obtain a passport; most of the women members of the delegation had travelled with no male companions. Permission to travel was a matter of regulations, which were flexible; changes in society were paving the way for reform in that respect as well. Many women had standing permission to travel on their own. She was convinced that the Committee would be surprised and pleased by the further strides made by Saudi Arabian women by the time the delegation submitted its next report.

33. **Mr. Al-Majaji** (Saudi Arabia) said that any draft law or draft amendment to existing legislation must take into account the international conventions to which Saudi Arabia was a party. Steps were being taken to retrain judges in the light of those instruments. With respect to guardianship in the area of education, the regulation applied to children only. By law, women had the right to start their own businesses. If that right was violated, they could file a grievance with the courts. The law provided for the full right of women to lodge complaints, including against their guardians — a husband, father or any other relative — in cases of abuse. Equality of men and women before the law was guaranteed under the Basic Law of Governance. All citizens and residents of Saudi Arabia enjoyed the right of litigation.

34. **Ms. Al-Seif** (Saudi Arabia) said that women's rights were taught in schools and institutions of higher education, where women held leading positions in many fields. Women were informed of their rights even in remote rural areas, as well as in public and private enterprises. Women's meetings also increased human rights awareness.

35. **Mr. Al-Hadlaq** (Saudi Arabia) said that women had the same right as men to establish and register a charitable organization. Although such organizations were not entitled to provide services outside Saudi Arabia, they were encouraged to cooperate with international organizations in order to benefit from best practices and be represented at international forums.

36. **Ms. Chutikul** said that the concept of "permission" was key to the discussion of equal rights for men and women in Saudi Arabia. She would like to hear more about how information on the Convention and on women's rights in general was disseminated, given the illiteracy rates in some segments of society. In the next report, it would be helpful to receive information on specific cases where women had filed complaints of rights violations. Statistics on dissemination of the Convention would also be useful.

37. She had not found any information in the report or the responses to the list of issues on the national structure or mechanism for the advancement of women or its responsibilities, including whether they included coordination of activities to implement the Convention, policy formulation and monitoring and evaluation of such activities and policies.

38. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said that she had understood the delegation to say that women's rights were similar to men's, yet the Convention was about equality of rights. Clarification of the meaning of "complementarity of rights" in terms of the Convention was needed.

39. Since there was no legal basis for the concept of guardianship of men over women, she wondered if it was based in religion. If even highly educated women like the members of the delegation had to receive permission for their activities from their husbands, she was curious to know the situation for women with less education or rural women.

40. **Ms. Shin** said that she would like to know whether the Commission on Human Rights was a governmental or an independent body, whether it was the main implementing body for the Convention, and whether it could receive complaints of violations and mandate policy changes. She would also be interested to hear what issues pertaining to women's equal rights had come before the Commission and how many of its members were women. Finally, although the delegation had mentioned the establishment of charitable organizations, she wondered if there was a true concept of non-governmental organizations in Saudi Arabia.

41. **Ms. Neubauer** asked for more information about the higher national committee specializing in women's affairs, namely, its membership and how members were appointed, whether there was equal representation of men and women on the committee and how the implementation of its action plan was monitored.

42. **Mr. Al Hussein** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Commission on Human Rights was a Government body, still in its first year of operation, under the direct responsibility of the King as head of the Cabinet. Its purpose was to track and monitor human rights violations, impose sanctions and provide legal assistance to victims. In addition, it produced an annual report on violations and disseminated information on human rights. It was currently preparing a programme of work to raise awareness of the Convention, which would be implemented in the near future. The Commission, under the authority of the Cabinet, was responsible for the implementation of all international human rights instruments, including the Convention, and for review of legislation in order to harmonize it with international instruments. It was also responsible for dissemination of information about the Convention. A specific number of places on the Commission would be reserved for women.

43. **Ms. Al-Dakhil** (Saudi Arabia) said that she was a member of the Commission and had responsibility for reviewing membership applications. Because the Commission was relatively new, the next report would contain more information on its activities, including statistics.

44. **Mr. Al-Majaji** (Saudi Arabia) said that he was a member of the National Committee on Human Rights, an independent body with a specific mission to monitor government implementation of international human rights instruments and report abuses. The National Committee was one of many such NGOs.

45. A distinction should be drawn between guardianship within the family, which had a legal basis, and the concept of wardship, which several religious schools of thought interpreted in different ways although it was not covered by any legal provisions.

46. **Mr. Al Hussein** (Saudi Arabia) said that Saudi Arabia had made the greatest progress of any Arab country in eradicating illiteracy through major investment in education, yet the media gave an inaccurate picture of the situation. The Ministry of Planning had a statistical unit and could increase its efforts to gather statistics on reports of human rights violations and cases brought to court.

47. As for national mechanisms to address women's issues, responsibility lay with the relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health.

48. **Dr. Al-Ansari** (Saudi Arabia) said that she was a member of the National Society for Human Rights, an independent organization established in 2004. It had four committees, covering education, research, family issues (mainly regarding women and children) and complaints. About 25 per cent of complaints received came from women. Of its 40 members, 10 were women; three places on its Executive Council were reserved for women.

49. **The Chairperson** noted that, as an independent body established under the Paris Principles, the National Society for Human Rights could provide a separate report to the Committee.

50. **Ms. Pimentel** asked how the structural reform of the judicial system would affect women's access to justice, including in rural areas; the handling of complaints of domestic violence and marital rape; and access to police stations. Her home country, Brazil, had

created police stations reserved for women to make it easier for them to file complaints, an initiative that the Government might want to consider.

51. She welcomed the information that the Ministry of Social Affairs was drafting a law on domestic violence. More details were needed on its main provisions.

52. **Ms. Simms** said that the situation of the 1.5 million foreign domestic workers in Saudi Arabia who were not covered by the Labour Code was of concern. Certainly, some were treated well, but others were subjected to working hours and conditions that violated their human rights and dignity. She would like to know how many related cases had been brought before the labour courts, whether the Government had any statistics on violations of regulations regarding working conditions and whether any research had been conducted on the phenomenon.

53. **Ms. Gabr** said that as a citizen of an Arab country, she understood that those societies suffered from negative stereotypes affecting their image abroad, especially with regard to the role of sharia law. She would be interested to hear what the delegation saw as negative stereotypes of Saudi Arabian society and how it planned to overcome them. Perhaps NGOs established under the law on charitable organizations could be used as a tool to overcome that negative image. A clear picture of women's status in the country had yet to emerge from the discussion, however, especially relating to the concepts of guardianship and wardship.

54. **Mr. Al-Dahhan** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Ministry of Labour had promulgated a number of regulations and decrees in order to protect the rights of domestic workers. Individuals found guilty of violating those provisions by, inter alia, subjecting workers to inhumane treatment were subject to severe penalties. A draft law regulating domestic service, designed in particular to govern the employer-employee relationship, was currently under expert review and would be adopted in the near future. The Ministry of Labour would be responsible for monitoring its implementation.

55. The information cited by Ms. Simms were incorrect; there were fewer than one million domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, only 482,000 of whom were women, and male and female workers had the right to submit complaints concerning violations of their rights

and to obtain the appropriate remedies. Such complaints could be referred to the various labour committees, the provincial councils or the Board of Grievances. Pending the resolution of their cases, complainants who no longer wished to remain with their employers were entitled to seek refuge in shelters. Furthermore, domestic workers wishing to return to their countries of origin had every right to ask their employers to approach the authorities and initiate the relevant proceedings.

56. **Mr. Al-Hadlaq** (Saudi Arabia) pointed out that many domestic workers did not seek redress for violations of their rights until they had returned to their countries of origin. To ensure that such violations were properly dealt with, however, the Government encouraged complainants to approach the proper authorities in Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Labour maintained close links with foreign embassies and supplied them with information on the rights of domestic workers and on the appropriate channels for the submission of complaints.

57. **Mr. Al Hussein** (Saudi Arabia) said that although they were not legally obliged to do so, many domestic workers preferred to give their passports to their employers for safekeeping.

58. **Ms. Al-Seif** (Saudi Arabia) said that research into the situation of domestic workers in Saudi Arabia had been undertaken at the university level and that seminars on that issue were held for the benefit of the general public.

59. In response to the question posed by Ms. Pimentel, she said that the possibility of establishing a community police force had been discussed very recently. Women would certainly be permitted to participate in any such force, and female security guards could already be found at universities and shopping centres.

60. **Mr. Al Hussein** (Saudi Arabia) said he agreed that stereotypes, particularly those relating to the status of women, portrayed a negative image of Islamic societies; however, attitudes did not change overnight. In order, to facilitate that process of change and to promote a more positive image of Islam, the Government had taken a number of measures, particularly in the educational sphere, designed to raise awareness of women's rights.

61. **Ms. Ara Begum** enquired about the measures in place to protect the human rights of domestic workers.

In particular, she wished to know whether the Government had concluded any agreements or memorandums of understanding with countries of origin and whether women workers who submitted complaints concerning violations of their rights had access to shelters and legal aid. It would be useful to have more information about the draft law regulating domestic service, in particular the penalties applicable to those who violated its provisions and the mechanisms to ensure that victims could seek redress.

62. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** highlighted the potential links between domestic workers and human trafficking and welcomed the State party's acknowledgement that the latter did take place within its borders. She hoped that the draft law regulating domestic service would be adopted without delay and that appropriate mechanisms would be established to monitor its implementation.

63. **Ms. Chutikul** commended the State party for having ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. She enquired as to the principal content of the draft law on combating trafficking in human beings and wished to know whether the definition of trafficking contained therein was in line with the definition contained in the Protocol, whether the draft law contained specific provisions on victim assistance and protection and what the time frame for its adoption was. It would also be useful to learn more about the content of the national plan to combat trafficking in human beings. Lastly, referring to the smuggling of children for the purpose of begging, she asked whether the Government planned to cooperate with the appropriate authorities in the countries of origin.

64. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** urged the Government to carry out further studies in order to determine whether migrant workers came to Saudi Arabia of their own free will or whether they were the victims of trafficking. Reverting to the issue of guardianship, she observed that it would be relatively simple to abolish that discriminatory and restrictive practice since it appeared to have no legal basis.

65. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that in accordance with the Convention, the State party had an obligation to prevent violence against women. In that connection, she urged the Government to take due account of

General Recommendation No. 19 when drafting its new legislation on domestic violence. As a result of awareness-raising campaigns, the issue of domestic violence had become less taboo in many countries. Nevertheless, in order to strengthen its domestic protection regime, Saudi Arabia must ensure that women were able to report incidents of violence without the need for permission from their male guardians; that was particularly crucial in cases where the guardians themselves were the perpetrators. Lastly, she invited the State party to comment on a recent case in which a Saudi Arabian rape victim had been punished for violating Islamic law because, at the time of the rape, she had not been accompanied by her male guardian. She would be particularly grateful for clarification of the grounds for the ruling, given that the concept of guardianship had no basis in the law.

66. **Dr. Al-Usaimi** (Saudi Arabia) said that, under Islamic law, the objective of the guardianship system was to protect women and preserve their dignity. It was in no way intended to restrict their movement or prevent them from exercising their rights; thus, women who had been the victims of domestic violence did not need to seek permission in order to file complaints. In addition, women victims of domestic violence could ask to be released from the guardianship system, after which they assumed sole responsibility for themselves and their children. While in practice many women were not fully aware of their rights and responsibilities under sharia law, awareness-raising campaigns had been launched with a view to remedying that situation.

67. **Ms. Al-Ghamidi** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Ministry of Social Affairs was responsible for combating all forms of violence against women and, to that end, had established social protection committees in all regions of the country. Social workers and psychiatrists were available to assist victims, who could, if necessary, find refuge at shelters, and women who telephoned the committees to report violent incidents were entitled to legal assistance. All those services were provided free of charge and were being further developed. Although perpetrators were already subject to prosecution, under other relevant legislation, a draft law on domestic violence was under review; once adopted, it would apply to both Saudi Arabian and foreigners, including domestic workers.

68. **Dr. Al-Munif** (Saudi Arabia) said that many charitable associations were involved in efforts to combat domestic violence, primarily in the areas of

training and awareness-raising. An expert panel composed entirely of women was studying all aspects of the draft law on domestic violence.

69. **Mr. Al-Rassi** (Saudi Arabia) said that bilateral agreements had been concluded with a number of countries of origin of domestic workers, including Bangladesh, Myanmar, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, and that the Government organized regular meetings with the relevant officials. In keeping with the compassionate nature of Saudi Arabian society, domestic workers were often regarded as members of their employers' families and treated accordingly. Although there had been no serious problems in that sphere, the authorities had decided to promulgate specific regulations in order to keep pace with the rapidly evolving social situation. Trafficking in women was regarded as human trafficking and the authorities were in the final stages of devising appropriate penalties for offenders.

70. **Mr. Al-Hadlaq** (Saudi Arabia) said that domestic workers came to Saudi Arabia on a voluntary basis and could be recruited only through official agencies. During a recent meeting with representatives of the International Labour Organization, he had discussed various issues relating to the situation of those workers, including the problems that arose when they left their jobs without giving notice.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.