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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 39th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Friday, 11 November 2005, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BONOAN-DANDAN

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

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

Initial report of Uzbekistan (continued) (E/1990/5/Add.63; E/C.12/Q/UZB/1; HR/CESCR/NONE/2005/12; HRI/CORE/1/Add.129)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Mursaliyev, Mr. Obidov and Mr. Saidov (Uzbekistan) took places at the Committee table.

Articles 1-9 of the Covenant

2. Mr. MURSALIYEV (Uzbekistan) said that a high proportion of the population of Uzbekistan lived in rural areas and was dependent on the development of agriculture and related sectors. Before 2002, the main type of agricultural concern in Uzbekistan had been the collective farm. Since 2003, there had been a trend towards privatization, with the introduction of agricultural cooperatives (shirkhat) and small private farms (dekhkan), since private farms had been found to be more efficient. On agricultural cooperatives, work was organized on the basis of family groups; it was therefore not unusual for older children to be recruited to help their families with the harvest.

3. The Uzbek Labour Code stipulated that wages were determined by agreement between employers and workers, but must not be less than the minimum level determined by the State; there was no upper limit. The minimum wage had been raised significantly over the previous five years.

4. The Government did not keep statistics on equal pay for men and women. However, Uzbek law stipulated that men and women must receive equal pay for equal work. Fewer women than men worked: of the total workforce, 44 per cent were women and 56 per cent men. In 2004, 43 per cent of women had been in employment. Women were traditionally employed in education, health, culture and the arts, and the sciences; in some sectors women represented as much as 80 per cent of workers. Women employed in the State sector who had children under the age of three benefited from reduced working hours, with a maximum of 35 hours per week compared to the standard 40 hours. Women were entitled to draw a pension at the age of 54, provided that they had worked for not less than 20 years.

5. The Women's Committee of Uzbekistan provided training in a range of women's issues and business skills, designed to promote entrepreneurship among women. Every year, more than a thousand unemployed women were taught the basic principles of running a business, and many had started their own businesses. In 2004, more than 5,000 women had been employed in small and medium-sized enterprises. No less important were the seven credit unions that provided women entrepreneurs with the necessary funds. The number of women entrepreneurs had now reached 26,000. A list of the many programmes and policies for the advancement of women would be submitted to the Committee in writing.

6. Mr. SAIDOV (Uzbekistan) said that collective farms (kolkhoz and sovkhov) had been completely abolished in Uzbekistan, and more than 12,500 private farms had been established. In 2004, Russian cultural centres had been established in Tashkent and in the various regional centres, for the benefit of the 1.93 million ethnic Russians living in Uzbekistan. Education in the Russian language was available at university level in many subjects. In the past year, more than a million copies of 66 different Russian-language textbooks had been published; 85 Russian-language newspapers and 52 magazines were published in Uzbekistan.

7. Since gaining independence, Uzbekistan had ratified 11 International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, including 5 of the core conventions. The Uzbek Government was also preparing to ratify the Underground Work (Women) Convention (No. 45), the Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised) (No. 89), and the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156). Consideration was being given to the possible ratification of the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention (No. 87); the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention (No. 102); the Minimum Age Convention (No. 138); the Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents Convention (No. 174); and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182). Uzbekistan had no plans to sign the Labour Inspection Convention (No. 81).

8. Mr. OBIDOV (Uzbekistan) said that social protection for disabled persons and measures to promote their integration into society were a priority of Uzbek social policy. The right to social protection of those unable to work owing to old age or infirmity was protected in the Constitution. The benefits to which disabled persons were entitled depended on the nature of their disability, but included free medical treatment and free or discounted travel on public transport. There were more than 700,000 disabled persons in Uzbekistan, cared for in 33 medical and social establishments, including 6 sanatoriums, at which more than 30,000 disabled persons were treated each year. In 1995, a programme on the medical and social rehabilitation of disabled persons had been adopted, within the framework of which a network of 12 rehabilitation centres had been set up to provide assistance and services to disabled persons. Every year, more than 12,000 disabled persons received assistance from those centres. Cultural and sports activities were also organized for disabled artists and athletes.

9. Another aspect of social protection was social assistance for single elderly people and pensioners. Some 25,000 single elderly people received home help and benefited from free or discounted medical care and free foodstuffs.

10. A law on employment adopted in 1998 provided additional guarantees for certain vulnerable categories of the population who had difficulty competing in the labour market, including disabled persons, single parents, parents of large families or of disabled children, young people, former members of the armed or security forces and ex-convicts. Special training programmes had been organized and a number of jobs were reserved for persons in those categories.

11. Mr. SAIDOV (Uzbekistan) said that in 1999, a national plan of action for the advancement of women in Uzbek society had been drawn up. Women occupied 16 per cent of posts in the executive, 18 per cent in the legislature, and 22.7 per cent in the judiciary. Efforts to improve the situation of women and overcome negative stereotypes took the form of improving

women's understanding of the law, promoting the equal rights of women in the family and in society, and raising the awareness of State bodies of women's issues. Particular emphasis was given to enabling women to realize their full potential and to promoting women as active participants in society. Efforts were also being made to improve women's health.

12. The Government and law enforcement agencies undertook an annual review of the legal protection of the rights of women, subsequent to which measures were taken to restore the rights of women whose rights had been violated. The number of criminal prosecutions in cases of domestic violence against women had increased by 43 per cent in 2003 compared to 2002; one third of the defendants had been given custodial sentences.

13. In the years since independence, a great many laws and regulations had been adopted for the protection of women and 17 international instruments relating to women's rights had been adopted by the Uzbek Parliament. Research by a non-governmental institute had shown that women and men did not have equal rights in society. He referred the Committee to statistics compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which showed that Uzbekistan ranked 59th in the world for representation of women in national parliaments.

14. The mahalla was a uniquely Uzbek institution through which the citizens of a community were able to exercise a certain degree of self-government.

15. There were some 10,000 mahalla committees nationwide. The mahalla was a corporate body which did not form part of the State apparatus but was more akin to a non-governmental organization (NGO). Nevertheless, because mahalla committees were closer to the ground and better informed on local conditions and families' needs, they had been invested with certain State functions, notably powers enabling them to assist vulnerable members of the community by allocating social security benefits of various kinds. Intervention by the mahalla had also enabled small and medium-sized enterprises to create thousands of jobs in recent years. They were thus a linchpin of community action and a vital element in Uzbek society.

16. Women occupied 40 per cent of the senior positions in mahalla and formed a large and highly militant group within the structure, working on questions relating to education and youth in particular.

17. Various foreign foundations and organizations were closely involved in the development of the mahalla. His delegation did not agree with Western commentators' views on the conservative nature of the mahalla. They were institutions that embodied the traditions of solidarity and respect for one's elders and for authority, values rooted in the family and the community, and through which Uzbek society was gradually able to adapt to modern times.

18. Certain mahalla had recently begun actively promoting sport, for example. They also acted as conciliation bodies and had acquired great importance in cases of divorce or separation, helping to promote family unity and acting to protect the interests of women, men and, in particular, children. At the same time, there was no legal obstacle to divorce, upon application by either partner.

19. With regard to propiska, or registration of residence, he said the practice had been instituted in the Soviet era but the passport system through which registration was regulated had

been approved by Presidential decree in 1999. The right to register permanent or temporary residence was given to Uzbek citizens, foreign nationals, including nationals of CIS States, and stateless persons. The system was administered by State agencies at the local level. Temporary residence might be granted for periods of between three days and six months without the requirement to deregister in the place of permanent residence. For residence periods of more than six months, deregistration was required.

20. Ms. BRAS GOMES, referring to the written reply to question 18 in the list of issues, said she would appreciate more information on the retirement pensions for individual categories of citizens; and on the increments awarded on the day the pension was granted.

21. She said she welcomed the free courses for persons with disabilities, but she wondered what kind of occupations were available following training.

22. She had heard that tax increases had forced many small enterprises out of business, pushing their employees into unemployment. She would like to know more about the role of small businesses in the context of active policies for employment.

23. Ms. GHOSE said she would appreciate a more specific answer to her question on wage differentials between men and women.

24. Of the 17 per cent of women the delegation had stated were employed in the court system, she wondered how many were actually judges and whether female judges' pay levels were the same as those of male judges.

25. Lastly, she asked whether media independence was guaranteed under the law or the Constitution.

26. Mr. SAIDOV (Uzbekistan) said a number of laws regulating the media had been passed since independence. There was also specific legislation guaranteeing the freedom and independence of the media. Censorship had been abolished in 2001.

27. Women accounted for 20 per cent of Uzbekistan's 1,000 judges and were paid the same salary as their male colleagues.

28. More generally, there were in principle no wage differentials between men and women. Pay levels in State agencies were set in a single system of pay scales established by law.

29. Employment for women was a priority area for his Government. Presidential decrees had recently been passed with the aim of reducing the tax burden on entrepreneurs and the Government was embarking on a tax reform that would introduce a single uniform tax on small businesses, which would help women to develop their businesses further.

30. Training for persons with disabilities was aimed at helping them integrate into society. Individuals were entitled to choose any occupation, although it should be one where they would have a chance of obtaining work.

31. His delegation would ensure that information on the retirement pensions for individual categories was sent to the Committee.

32. Mr. RZEPLINSKI asked whether membership of a mahalla was compulsory and whether membership of several mahalla at the same time was permitted.

33. In his view, the institution seemed better suited to provincial or rural communities and he wondered whether mahalla really worked in major cities, where people lived cheek by jowl and might feel that such an institution violated their privacy.

34. Mr. SAIDOV (Uzbekistan) said there were many fundamental misconceptions about the mahalla in the West. There was no obligation to join a mahalla. No membership lists were kept and there was no violation of personal freedom. Certainly the system had grown up in rural areas, where solidarity was greater than in cities, but it also worked very well in urban environments, where individual apartment blocks, for example, could form their own mahalla.

35. It was a myth that the mahalla was an organ of State control: it was not a State body but a local organ of self-administration.

Articles 10-12 of the Covenant

36. Mr. RZEPLINSKI asked for some information on men's and women's access to land. To what extent were women's rights to land protected in the event of divorce, for example?

37. Access to drinking water was a problem in both urban and rural areas. The Uzbek Government could hardly be blamed for what was essentially a legacy of the Soviet era. It was nonetheless a problem - in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, for example, the poor quality of the drinking water, combined with a deterioration in health services, meant that life expectancy was now less than 50 years - and he wondered if any policy was in place to improve access to drinking water.

38. Did the delegation have any figures on the numbers of doctors who had left Uzbekistan over the past 15 years? In some smaller towns there were no doctors at all and he wondered what action the Government planned to take to give people in small towns and in rural areas effective access to health care.

39. One of the reasons for the extremely high rates of maternal mortality in Uzbekistan was, according to experts, the close spacing of pregnancies, which amounted to a problem of education. How effective was education in that regard, in the delegation's view?

40. Children aged under three and women of childbearing age were suffering from iron deficiency anaemia and he wondered what the reason was and what plans the Government had to improve that situation.

41. There had been complaints that insufficient protection was provided or compensation paid to people whose property was to be demolished to make way for new buildings. The property was often not worth a great deal, but the families nevertheless owned it and in many cases had lived there for generations. It was very important that they should be protected from eviction.

42. The CHAIRPERSON, speaking as a member of the Committee, said she would welcome an explanation of the opportunities available to women to own land, whether through transfer or inheritance, given that land was registered to households, which were most often headed by men.
43. Ms. BARAHONA RIERA said there were two aspects to the question of patriarchal culture in Uzbekistan. On the one hand, there was a secular legal order that was gradually being brought into line with international conventions and the rule of law, and attempts were being made to ensure equality of opportunity for women, but on the other hand there were religious customs and traditions, particularly in rural areas, that, while unacceptable under such a secular order, nonetheless had a real impact on the legal position of women and families. She wondered if the delegation would agree that an incongruity existed in that regard.
44. Uzbekistan had no law on domestic violence and she wondered whether there were plans to introduce legislation defining domestic violence as an offence. She suggested that it might be difficult to enforce such a law in more traditional communities.
45. Suicide and self-immolation by women must reflect certain traditions and stereotypes that she found it hard to situate in an essentially secular legal order. She would like to hear the delegation's views on that subject.
46. So long as the mahalla did not reinforce traditional roles, in her view they could be of great benefit in promoting community participation. However, the Committee had received information indicating that in many cases the mahalla did tend to reinforce traditional roles and she would like to hear the delegation's views.
47. Environmental degradation was a public health issue. She wondered whether the tragic fate of the Aral Sea had made the Government and the general public aware of the need to bring in effective environmental policies.
48. Mr. RIEDEL, also referring to the desiccation of the Aral Sea, noted that, according to the report, implementation of environmental policies had been negligible. He wondered what steps had been taken since 1991 to improve the situation. He welcomed the innovative example of ecotourism in the Aral Sea region.
49. He expressed concern with regard to the reply to question 25 in the list of issues on prison conditions, which stated that sick prisoners served their sentences alongside healthy prisoners. He wondered how prisoners with HIV/AIDS were separated from the rest of the prison population, particularly given that overcrowding increased the risk of spreading infectious diseases. According to various sources, prison conditions remained primitive. He would be interested to hear of any improvements, including in the areas of food and health.
50. The sharp decline in expenditure on public health and the changes in the health system, which presumably were due to massive privatization of the health sector, affected primarily the poorer sections of society. He would be interested to learn what was being done to remedy that situation, notably in the area of health insurance.
51. Concerning the maternal mortality indicators contained in the report, he wondered why the situation had dramatically deteriorated between 2001 and 2002 in a number of the larger

cities. He would be interested to hear what had been done to improve the situation since then. Although it was interesting to note that the maternal mortality rate had been considerably worse in 1991, for the purposes of the Committee, it was necessary to focus on the period from 2001 to 2005.

52. Mr. TIRADO MEJÍA said that the problem of the desiccation of the Aral Sea extended beyond Uzbekistan's borders. According to the Committee's general comment No. 15 on the right to water, States parties must establish that they had taken the necessary and feasible steps towards the realization of the right to water. In that context, he wondered what measures were being taken by the Government.

53. Ms. BRAS GOMES requested information on the phenomenon of street children. She would be interested to learn what services were provided, such as occupational programmes and shelters. In 2001, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had expressed concern with regard to abandoned children, noting that foster care was not sufficiently developed, with the result that children were placed in institutions. She wondered whether the situation had improved since the adoption of the plan of action to implement the recommendations of that Committee. For example, how many foster families were now registered, and had the functioning of infant homes improved?

54. She noted that the number of children enrolled in preschool establishments had decreased drastically in recent years, and the majority of 3- to 6-year olds were cared for in the home. Despite recent efforts, institutional preschool coverage was still less than 30 per cent. She would welcome more information.

55. She expressed concern at the absence of reliable data on poverty, which was essential for the Committee to be able to make worthwhile recommendations. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2005 report, income poverty was still a major problem, with over a quarter of the population living in poverty, a third of whom were in extreme poverty. She would be interested to hear what was being done to improve that situation. For example, was there a national plan to combat poverty? She would also welcome information on particularly vulnerable groups and regional variation.

56. Mr. ATANGANA, noting that there was no specific legislation dealing with violence against women, wondered whether the general measures in place had curbed the phenomenon. Had the increase in the number of criminal proceedings against perpetrators of violence against women contributed to reducing the incidence of such violence?

57. Regarding trafficking in persons, he would welcome information on case law under the recently adopted legislative measures in that area.

58. Mr. SADI asked whether health services had deteriorated following the collapse of the Soviet Union due to the exodus of doctors. He understood that doctors' wages were low, and wondered whether reports that patients resorted to bribery in order to get medical attention were true.

59. He would be interested to learn whether there was a growing drug problem due to proximity to Afghanistan. He would welcome further comment on the fact that, although the

number of people infected with HIV/AIDS was relatively low, the rate was rising rapidly. He wondered whether the liberal use of pesticides and insecticides had led to an increased rate of cancer, and would welcome information on the number and type of cancer cases.

60. He would be interested to hear how successful the campaign of reforms in the education sector had been. He wondered whether Muslim girls who wore headscarves experienced discrimination.

61. Ms. GHOSE asked whether the Government was raising awareness among law enforcement officers on the question of domestic violence, and whether a holistic approach to the problem was being adopted. She would be interested to hear about the facilities available to battered women, such as shelters and counselling.

62. As to trafficking in women and children, she would welcome more information on the Government's proposals to form special criminal investigation units to combat trafficking, and the establishment of a unit to thwart recruitment, and wondered whether a law on trafficking was envisaged. She would be interested to hear how the introduction of marriage contracts, referred to in the written replies, was related to the issue of trafficking.

63. Regarding the mahalla, she understood that they served to maintain traditional values, but she was concerned that they also tended to entrench traditional power structures. She would welcome clarification of the statement that 40 per cent of mahalla members were women, which was confusing given that membership of those associations was supposedly informal. She expressed concern with regard to the statement that mahalla acted to reconcile differences in a marriage for the sake of the family and children. She would welcome clarification of what happened if the wife was a victim of domestic violence.

64. As to drugs, Uzbekistan was apparently increasingly being used as a transit route, and she wondered how the Government was dealing with the problem.

65. Mr. OBIDOV (Uzbekistan) said that serious attention was being paid to orphans and abandoned and disabled children. Orphans were raised in children's homes which were part of the education system, although the Ministry of Health was also involved. The homes were inspected annually, and children in need of medical care were identified. There were 13 general children's homes for orphans and abandoned children, and other specialized facilities, which provided education and rehabilitation, for children with mental and physical disabilities. The SOS-Kinderdorf International association had established a children's village in Tashkent in 2000, which now housed almost 100 children.

66. Great importance was attached to the elimination of poverty in accordance with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Two studies had been conducted in cooperation with UNDP which had made recommendations for economic growth and had served as a basis for the debate on poverty. In order to improve methodology and monitoring, the State Statistical Committee conducted regular studies of household budgets. Strategies had been elaborated to improve the standard of living, and reforms were planned in all spheres of social life.

67. The health-care system had given the question of maternal mortality serious attention. A systematic study had been conducted, and plans and strategies had been elaborated in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund and other United Nations bodies.

According to statistics, the main causes of maternal mortality were haemorrhaging, toxicosis, septicaemia and extragenital diseases. Appropriate medical services, hospital equipment and training were necessary to reduce those causes and, with the cooperation of donor organizations, United Nations experts believed that Uzbekistan would be in a position to do so. A target had been set to reduce the number of pregnant women suffering from anaemia by half by 2015.

68. There were some 5,000 HIV-infected people in Uzbekistan in 2005, compared with 2,016 in 2004. Transmission was primarily through intravenous drug use, although sexual transmission was on the increase. Efforts were under way to introduce second-generation epidemiological HIV surveillance. There were 1,700 HIV-infected prisoners, who made up 32 per cent of the total infected population. Men accounted for 82 per cent of HIV cases, and the main age group affected was 25 to 34-year-olds. The Government had adopted legislation on the prevention of AIDS and initiated a programme to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. A national protocol for medical assistance for persons infected with HIV had been established, which provided for systematic treatment. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria provided assistance in support of national measures.

69. Mr. OBIDOV (Uzbekistan) said that, according to recent statistics, there were over 19,000 drugs users in Uzbekistan, 42 per cent of whom injected drugs. Trafficking in drugs from neighbouring Afghanistan was increasing. The Government was conducting a campaign to combat drug abuse, in the context of which it had established a number of mechanisms for preventing drugs from entering the country from Afghanistan; there was close cooperation with the United Nations International Drug Control Organization regional office for Central Asia.

70. Mr. SAIDOV (Uzbekistan) said that Afghanistan's heroin production had increased to 400 tonnes per year. The Government gave particular priority to combating the use of Uzbekistan as a transit country for Afghan drugs. Turning to the issue of the Aral Sea, he said for the past 15 years, the Government had been making efforts to raise awareness of the Aral Sea tragedy and its ecological effects, which had been felt not only in Central Asia, but across the whole world. The tragedy had had serious consequences on the health of the surrounding population, particularly in Karakalpakstan, with high infant and maternal mortality rates. An International Fund to Save the Aral Sea had been established, but a solution to the problem had not yet been found.

71. Other ecological problems were the management and quality of water resources, land degradation, atmospheric pollution from industry, large quantities of radioactive, chemical and other dangerous emissions, and illegal deforestation. The Government was taking a variety of measures to address environmental problems, including the adoption of legislation on ecology with a view to improving water resource management; the establishment of a system of State institutions to work on ecological issues; and a large-scale awareness-raising programme on environmental protection. A large number of NGOs were carrying out a variety of ecological programmes, particularly in Karakalpakstan. Environmental projects were being carried out in cooperation with United Nations agencies, and particular attention was being paid to ecological monitoring.

72. Although polygamy was prohibited under the Criminal Code, cases had arisen and had been punished by law. Statistics on the issue would be submitted to the Committee in writing. There had been cases of girls being abducted and trafficked for marriage, but they were few and only occurred in certain areas. The abduction of girls was a tradition that had remained from the nomadic lifestyle previously led in Central Asia. Abduction was prohibited under the Criminal Code; statistics on abductions would be submitted to the Committee in due course.

73. The Government was currently preparing to ratify ILO Convention No. 182. In 1996, a list had been drawn up of the most dangerous types of work, which could only be carried out by persons over the age of 17 years. In order to obtain specific statistics on the number of children involved in labour, the Government was cooperating closely with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and ILO in the context of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour. Labour legislation provided that persons aged 16 or above were permitted to work, and persons aged 15 could work if written consent was provided by one of their parents or legal guardians.

74. On the issue of landownership for women, he said that Islam did not have any influence on women's property rights. The dualist legal system had ended in 1928, and Islamic sharia had not been in force since that time. No person had the right to own land in Uzbekistan, since all land was the property of the State. Land rights were granted to individuals for a period of 99 years, and could be bequeathed and inherited. It could not, however, be bought or sold. Women had equal rights to men in respect of receiving land from the State.

75. Limited access to drinking water was a problem in Uzbekistan and across Central Asia. The Government was carefully considering the course of action to be taken to improve the situation, and was drafting new legislation on the basis of recommendations made by international bodies. Central Asian Governments required international assistance to improve management of the two main rivers in the region, which were used to provide drinking water and irrigation. A specific programme was being implemented, which aimed to provide drinking water to the whole population by 2010.

76. He wished to clarify that mahalla did not have membership. Of the 10,000 aksakals, or mahalla leaders, 40 per cent were women. Although mahalla were unknown to many societies, they were a national, democratic institution, which protected Uzbek citizens. The members of the Committee should not confuse the concept of the mahalla with that of institutions in other societies. Uzbekistan was against the politicization of Islam, and actively promoted spiritual development. Islam was an integral part of Uzbek culture.

77. Although there was no separate legislation on domestic violence, all violence was prohibited under criminal law. There were legislative provisions on criminal responsibility for domestic violence, and measures had recently been taken to make the issue a priority for law enforcement bodies. The number of persons brought to justice for domestic violence had increased considerably over the past year, as a result of awareness-raising measures. There was no conflict between legislation on violence and the mahalla, since the mahalla traditionally stood for peace, harmony and respect throughout society. Domestic violence would remain high on the Government's agenda.

78. On prisons, he said that the number of persons deprived of their liberty had declined from 76,000 in 2000 to 38,000 in 2005 as a result of liberalization of the penitentiary system. Prisons were not overcrowded, and were regularly visited by delegations from the International Committee of the Red Cross and journalists. Humanitarian assistance for the improvement of prison conditions had been received from several international agencies, and the Government was working closely with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria to combat the spread of HIV and tuberculosis in prisons. All prisoners carrying infectious diseases were detained in separate facilities.

79. State budget allocations to the health service had increased annually since 2001. Priority was given to funding primary health care, which currently received 46 per cent of the budget for the health-care system. Over the past five years, rural medical centres had been established and equipped with all the necessary equipment and medication to provide basic medical assistance in all rural areas. A system of private medical insurance was being developed, since private medical institutions had been established, and legislation on the issue had been adopted.

80. Although the issue of Muslim girls wearing the veil had caused some problems in the late 1990s with the development of religious education, all difficulties in that regard had been overcome.

81. Mr. SADI asked whether the fact that all land was owned by the State could be seen as contrary to the Covenant.

82. Mr. SAIDOV said that private land ownership could lead to instability and conflict, and the Government therefore did not believe that its legislation on land rights contradicted the Covenant.

83. Uzbek criminal legislation contained specific provisions on trafficking in persons, and the Government was aware of the scale of the problem, which had come to light over the past four years. A large-scale awareness-raising campaign was being carried out to reduce the number of potential victims, and to promote measures to combat the phenomenon. Legislative, administrative and organizational measures were being taken at all levels to reduce cases of trafficking in persons. Statistics on the issue would be submitted to the Committee in due course.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.