



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
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Summary record of the 580th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 14 August 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Abaka

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

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

Fourth and fifth periodic reports of Yemen
(CEDAW/C/YEM/4 and 5; CEDAW/PSWG/2002/EXC/CRP.1/Add.11 and CRP.2/Add.2)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Kaid (Yemen) and Mr. Al-Shahab (Yemen) took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Kaid** (Yemen), introducing the fourth and fifth periodic reports of Yemen (CEDAW/C/YEM/4 and 5), said that Yemen had made great strides over the past 30 years, particularly since unification in 1990: a democratic, multiparty political system had been established and, with the granting of the right to freedom of expression, many civil society organizations had emerged, including groups devoted to promoting women's issues.

3. In accordance with the Constitution, the State guaranteed equal opportunity in the political, social and cultural spheres for all citizens. Citizens included both men and women. Her Government had adopted a range of measures aimed at eliminating discrimination against women, promoting their development and enhancing their status, notably the formulation of a national policy for women. It had recently expanded the membership of the National Committee on Women, the institutional mechanism overseeing the implementation of the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action to include representatives of all ministries and other government organs, as well as of civil society. The National Committee had undertaken a review of Yemeni laws, including the Criminal Code, and submitted proposals for the amendment of provisions that discriminated against women. Gender issues had been taken into account in the National Population Policy for 2001-2025.

4. Under article 30 of the Constitution, the State was obliged to protect the welfare of mothers and children and to care for adolescents and young people. To that end, her Government had established the Social Welfare Fund, which made monthly payments to widows and female heads of household among others. Other initiatives taken to address the needs of vulnerable groups had included the enactment of the

Law on the Care and Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons.

5. Under Yemeni electoral law, women had the right to vote in elections and public referendums and were eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies on equal terms with men. In the local elections held in February 2001, 35 women had been elected to district and governorate assemblies. Nevertheless, there remained social and cultural obstacles to women's participation in political and public life. Women accounted for fewer than 15 per cent of members of political parties and were not adequately represented in the parties' decision-making structures; the situation was the same with regard to women's participation in trade unions. There was only one woman Minister, the Minister of State for Human Rights; 97 women were directors-general of government agencies, compared with over 2,000 men. Detailed data on women's representation in the diplomatic corps were contained in the fifth periodic report (CEDAW/C/YEM/5). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), though growing in number, tended to be confined to urban areas.

6. Under article 3, paragraph 1, of the Nationality Law, Yemeni nationality was conferred on persons born to fathers who were citizens of Yemen. That provision gave rise to problems for children who were born to Yemeni mothers married to foreign nationals and who were not entitled to their mothers' nationality. Accordingly, the Council of Ministers had approved an amendment enabling divorced women and widows to transmit their nationality to their children.

7. Currently, only 35 per cent of primary school pupils and 26 per cent of secondary school pupils were girls. There was a high dropout rate for girls at the secondary level, particularly in rural areas, where parents refused to allow their daughters to attend co-educational schools. About 24 per cent of university students were women, although they were concentrated in the humanities, and only a limited number of women were pursuing vocational training courses. Increasing the enrolment ratio for girls was a priority for her Government because education was a cornerstone of development. It had built a large number of new schools, but was struggling to keep pace with the rate of population growth, which was currently 3.5 per cent per year. In order to tackle the high illiteracy rate, especially among rural women, her Government had established special literacy centres, as well as

promoting the use of schools as adult education centres.

8. The high maternal mortality rate was attributable, in part, to the lack of access to antenatal care in remote rural areas and the low number of attended births. In addition, the majority of medical personnel were men, which deterred women from seeking treatment. The high fertility rate of 5.8 live births per woman reflected the inadequacy of family planning services; contraceptive coverage was only 21 per cent. Female genital mutilation was not widely performed, except in coastal regions. Her Government, however, was deeply concerned about the practice and had prohibited it in all public health-care facilities.

9. Yemen, which was a least developed country, had ranked 133rd out of 160 countries in the *Human Development Report 2001*. Gross domestic product per capita was less than \$300 per year, and about 23 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line owing, in part, to the impact of economic restructuring begun in the mid-1990s. In order to address that situation, her Government was implementing poverty alleviation, job creation and human resources development programmes, including initiatives targeting women. The Small Business Development Agency and the Social Development Fund provided loans and technical assistance to support income-generating activities.

10. Almost 75 per cent of the population lived in rural areas. The average Yemeni rural woman spent 16 hours per day on agricultural tasks and housework. Women produced food for their families, while men grew cash crops. As a result of that division of labour, women were excluded from the money economy and their work was not valued. In order to enhance the status of rural women, her Government had established a Department for the Development of Rural Women within the Ministry of Agriculture.

11. The Law on Personal Status, as amended in 1998, contained a number of provisions that discriminated against women, including in matters relating to marriage. Women's NGOs were campaigning for the amendment of those provisions. The Islamic Shariah did guarantee women's inheritance and property rights.

12. Her Government recognized the importance of raising awareness of the Convention so as to ensure that women were fully informed of their rights. Accordingly, it had organized a number of symposiums

on the Convention and had reached a preliminary agreement with several women's NGOs concerning its distribution to Yemeni women. The National Committee on Women regarded the Convention not only as a blueprint for its programmes, but also as a benchmark against which the progress made in enhancing the status of Yemeni women could be measured.

13. **The Chairperson** said that the interesting and detailed oral presentation had provided a clear picture of the situation of Yemeni women. She noted with satisfaction the Government's efforts to improve compliance with article 9 of the Convention.

Articles 1 to 6

14. **Ms. Gabr** said that, having acceded to the Convention, the State party should ensure that the instrument was incorporated in domestic legislation. The Committee was aware of the specificities of Yemeni society, understood the effort required to improve the situation of women and welcomed the progress made towards that goal over the past two decades. Noting that women's low status was an obstacle to development, she asked how the Government planned to integrate the advancement of women in development policy. Concerning the National Committee on Women, she asked what specific action it was taking to secure the amendment of laws that discriminated against women, whether women's NGOs were involved in those efforts, and whether there were any initiatives to educate civil society about the need for legislative reform. It would be interesting to know how the State party raised awareness of women's issues in rural areas, where much of the population was illiterate. Regarding rural women, more information was needed about the specific problems they faced and the government programmes targeting them.

15. **Ms. Achmad** commended the Women's National Committee for its efforts and asked how the national machinery addressed the problems of rural, poor, illiterate, disabled, older and refugee women. It was important not only to establish specific committees to address each of those issues, but also to combat gender stereotypes and traditional practices harmful to women at all levels of education, including parental education, and in the media. The national machinery must be sustainable; she asked what plans there were to improve its organizational structure and functioning

and how a working relationship with the central and local governments, NGOs and religious and community leaders was ensured. It was also important to undertake legal reforms and to enforce gender mainstreaming policies and programmes.

16. **Ms. Açar** said that, while legal reforms were needed, equality before the law was merely a starting point. The Constitution did not distinguish between men and women, but the Law of Personal Status was non-egalitarian and inconsistent with both the Constitution and the Convention. Yemen was not alone in facing that problem; many countries had constitutions which had little impact on women's everyday lives. Laws were engines for social change and development, particularly in the private sphere. The Government's efforts to promote women's advancement in public life were commendable, but experience throughout the world had shown that without a parallel change in family life, particularly for married women, only a token number of women would reach decision-making posts and the Convention would not be fully implemented.

17. Laws must also be enforced. She was concerned at the passive attitude demonstrated by the statement that there were no proposals to amend article 40 of the Law of Personal Status because it did not cause any widespread social problem and that, in any case, it was on its way to extinction owing to the spread of education, the entry of women to the workplace and the existence of advocacy programmes (CEDAW/PSWG/2002/EXC/CRP.2/Add.2, para. 10). The Government should take a more proactive approach to implementation of the Convention in all areas that affected women's lives.

18. The high dropout rate for girls as a result of discriminatory social practices was a major barrier to national development and gender equality. The solution lay in the development of clear advocacy programmes and in a determined effort to change gender stereotypes, implement existing laws and build the necessary coalitions for public acceptance of new legislation. She requested information on the level of cooperation between the Government and NGOs and on campaigns designed to achieve those goals.

19. **Ms. Shin** said that, as a citizen of the Republic of Korea, she understood the problems of a divided country and hoped that Yemen would now be able to devote its efforts to development rather than wasting

scarce resources on unnecessary defence spending. She welcomed the Government's frankness in acknowledging discrimination against women, which was the first step towards ending it.

20. She was concerned at article 232 of the Criminal Code, under which a husband who caught his wife or a female relative in the act of adultery and killed her and her partner was not charged with murder; at article 52 of that Code, which set a woman's "blood money" at half that of a man; and at the highly discriminatory provisions of the Law of Personal Status and of the amendments thereto. It would also be advisable to amend the Social Insurance Law, which allowed women to retire at an earlier age than men, and the Nationality Law.

21. The replies to the questions raised in the list of issues stated that violence against women was not perceived as a problem and that relevant studies and surveys were still very limited (CEDAW/PSWG/2002/EXC/CRP.2/Add.2, para. 19). However, all such violence, and particularly domestic violence, constituted discrimination against women. She hoped that the Government would address the issue by conducting research, developing policies and programmes, enacting legislation and providing awareness training for the police, the judiciary and the public; the Committee's General Recommendation No. 19 outlined a holistic approach to the problem of violence against women.

22. The prevalence of rape, honour killings and female genital mutilation was also disturbing. The Ministry of Health had prohibited performance of the latter procedure at government health facilities; it would be useful to know the penalty for violation of that prohibition and the number of prosecutions and convictions under the new decree.

23. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that stereotypical gender images and values were the chief barrier to the elimination of discrimination against women in Yemen. There were serious discrepancies between the Constitution and the laws. Legislative amendments did not always go far enough: for example, divorced wives and widows of foreigners could now transmit their nationality to their children, but other women could not. She also wondered what action had been taken on the proposed amendments to the Law of Personal Status.

24. Some discriminatory provisions had not even been challenged; men and women were said to have equal rights under the Constitution, but that was not so in the case of divorce or adultery. The Government also maintained that there was no essential contradiction in article 40 of the Law of Personal Status, under which a wife was not allowed to leave her domicile without her husband's authorization. But such a provision was incompatible with the principle of equality in marriage, with the basic human right of freedom of movement and with a woman's right to organize her life as she saw fit. Early marriage, which could lead to early and repeated pregnancies, and polygamy were also practices which discriminated against women.

25. The argument that there was no need to change the law because it was not causing widespread social problems was unacceptable; the law also had a pedagogical and pioneering function and unjust legislation was unacceptable, regardless of whether it had been appealed against. Similarly, the position that men's and women's rights differed because their duties also differed ignored the fact that rights were inherent whereas duties were socially imposed; in the case of a conflict between them, rights must prevail. Generally speaking, the Government seemed resistant to change. For example, the fifth report stated that a woman was not restricted to a role as a mother and housekeeper (CEDAW/C/YEM/5, p. 21); however, motherhood, like fatherhood, was a sex-specific role whereas housekeeping could be performed by both men and women.

26. **Ms. Kaid** (Yemen) said that the nation's NGOs had existed only since the early 1990s; thus, they tended to be weak, particularly in rural areas, to lack structure and capacities and to have poorly defined goals. The Government was working to create a climate that would promote their activities as a means to economic and social development, particularly in light of the global trend towards privatization and the worldwide economic slowdown.

27. The Women's National Committee had reviewed 57 laws from the point of view of conformity with the Convention and had made a number of recommendations, on the basis of which the Government had prepared various bills. As a result, several laws, including the Nationality Law and the Law of Personal Status, had been amended. However, traditional attitudes and customs often evoked resistance to implementation of the Convention. Public

understanding of women's problems was greater than in the past; the Government was working to gain the support of NGOs and of civil society in general, to promote women's election to office and to ensure gender mainstreaming in sectoral and other projects and programmes, some of which would benefit rural women.

28. Women's participation in civil society, government and political life had greatly increased, but much remained to be done. The goal was not to elect a token number of women but to make real progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention. Decision makers had been asked to hold information sessions to encourage women to run for office.

29. Men's and women's illiteracy was a major barrier to development in rural areas. Campaigns and studies were being carried out in order to raise awareness of the importance of keeping girls in school so that they would later be able to hold jobs and take decisions for themselves and their families. The goal was to ensure that by 2015 80 per cent of girls completed their basic education.

30. With regard to the age of retirement, she said that many women retired earlier than men, which was not necessarily a bad thing, as they might indeed prefer to retire at or around age 55.

31. The topic of domestic violence clearly required further study. It would appear that traditional customs and attitudes inhibited women from going to the police; in any case, the phenomenon existed but was not widespread because of the traditional mutual respect between men and women. The National Committee was currently collaborating with 11 other organizations on a programme sponsored by Oxfam to combat all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence. While currently unable to analyse the problem in greater depth owing to the lack of adequate statistical data, the National Committee was concerned about it and was undertaking studies to arrive at a better understanding of its nature and extent. Women had the right to repudiate their husbands under Shariah law and request divorce if they were dissatisfied with the conditions of their married lives.

32. While the practice of female circumcision was not widespread, it was objectionable even if practised on a small scale. In addition to measures already taken by the State to combat female circumcision, the

National Committee was undertaking awareness-raising campaigns to educate the public about its negative effects, and anticipated that the phenomenon would eventually disappear. She also stated that rape did not exist in Yemeni society.

33. With regard to the Nationality Law, the competent authorities had raised the possibility of applying the principle of reciprocity in cases where Yemeni women married nationals of other Arab countries, whereby they would be able to transmit their nationality to their children if their husbands agreed. The needed changes in attitude among decision makers in that regard were occurring gradually as society came to accept them.

34. The National Committee had been trying to eliminate from the Penal Code the inequality between men and women with regard to the punishment for adultery. Adultery remained a crime under Shariah law, but it was necessary to raise men's awareness of the inequity of applying harsher punishments for it to women than to men.

35. With regard to early marriage, she said that the average marriage age for women in Yemen was 20, while for men it was 22. Earlier marriage occurred in rural areas but was not widespread even there. With awareness-raising campaigns to educate the public on the dangers of early marriage, the practice would gradually decrease. Family-planning programmes and other activities of the Ministry of Health encouraged wider spacing between births; breastfeeding was also seen as a contributing factor to wider spacing and was therefore being encouraged in the same context.

36. The difficulty of changing the traditional roles assigned to men and women meant that such change could only come about gradually. Efforts were needed to change society at the structural level, with the aid of the media, educational programmes and communication with neighbouring societies.

Articles 7 to 9

37. **Ms. Gaspard** asked what was being done to encourage women to exercise their right to vote. Women's participation in the political process was a precondition for their enjoyment of the full range of rights, and yet only 27 per cent of those registered to vote in recent elections had been women. Further, she asked whether the explanation for the low number of women candidates for electoral office at all levels, and

for the low proportion of women candidates actually elected to office, lay in an ingrained resistance among men to vote for women candidates. It appeared that only proactive measures in the form of quotas would ensure the presence of women on the electoral rolls in sufficient numbers to protect their interests.

38. **Ms. Kaid** (Yemen) said that the Yemeni Constitution did not prevent women from participating in political life and that the Electoral Law guaranteed the equality of men's and women's rights to political participation. Rather, the obstacles to women's full participation lay in traditional attitudes; there was indeed some resistance on the part of men to women in decision-making roles. The National Committee was undertaking awareness-raising campaigns and extending various types of assistance to women candidates, but there were still very few women participating in political activity even in the urban areas, while such participation was almost non-existent in rural areas. The National Committee was also in contact with the leaders of all the major political parties to urge their assistance in encouraging women to vote and run for office. The Government was trying to recruit, promote or appoint more women to decision-making positions in accordance with their qualifications and expertise, to establish quotas for the proportion of women in those positions despite social opposition, especially in rural areas, and to encourage as many women as possible to participate in the democratic process as candidates for political office.

Articles 10 to 14

39. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** noted that quota programmes for female participation in political activity and public office had indeed been successful in a number of other countries. She asked how much time would be required to effect ratification of the Optional Protocol, and also requested that appropriate measures should be taken to secure the Government's ratification of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention. She welcomed the scope of legislative reform recently undertaken, and requested more detail in the Government's next report on the specific laws affected.

40. She also noted that the temporary special measures mentioned in article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention entailed preferences for women in order to correct past or current inequalities and to accelerate the establishment of de facto equality, and that a quota of

15 to 20 per cent of women on local councils would be appropriate in that regard. She inquired as to the current state of implementation of the Government's plans for the education of girls and women, whether numerical goals had been set, and whether international aid had been requested in that area. Finally, she asked about the Government's position on honour killings; expressing the view that under no circumstances should adultery warrant a death penalty, she urged the Government to undertake awareness-raising and legislative reform with regard to that issue.

41. **Ms. Feng Cui** welcomed the Government's new approach regarding agricultural and food policies, and inquired whether the relevant requirements of the Convention had been taken into account during formulation of those policies. She also requested more specific information with regard to the nature of Government's medium- and long-term goals, as well as guidance on how best to assess whether or not strategic goals had been attained. She noted that, while there were no legal obstacles to the full enjoyment by women of their rights, numerous obstacles stemming from cultural and traditional factors existed with regard to women's access to credit, health care, divorce and so on, and she asked what measures were being taken to address them. Finally, she asked for further information on the government departments concerned with the welfare of rural women.

42. **Ms. Abaka**, speaking in her personal capacity, noted that the sanctioning of a minimum marriage age of 15 had serious health implications for the females involved, in that their reproductive systems were often not mature enough to carry a foetus to term and were thus vulnerable to potentially life-threatening miscarriages and other complications of pregnancy. She also urged the Government not to view HIV/AIDS merely as a health issue but to consider its broader gender and developmental aspects; she suggested the formation of a national HIV commission comprising all stakeholders, including senior finance, planning and defence officials. She stressed the contribution of early marriage to high rates of maternal and infant mortality, and recommended that appropriate measures should be taken to raise the age of marriage and outlaw female genital mutilation as soon as possible.

43. **Ms. Achmad** welcomed the thoroughness of the Government's analysis of the situation of rural women, and asked whether women's studies centres or specialized research institutions existed in Yemen to

assist in the advancement of women. In light of the great amount of time rural women were required to work, often using primitive tools, she asked whether any efforts were being made to apply appropriate technologies to ease the burden on those women, or to assist them to control their own earnings. She also asked what measures were being taken to promote the sharing of domestic responsibilities among women and men in rural areas, and to assist rural female heads of household. Finally, she asked whether the Government was receiving assistance from any United Nations bodies in its programmes for rural women.

44. **Ms. Hazelle** asked for specific examples of the implementation and outcome of education programmes mentioned in the reports and responses to the list of issues and questions, as she was concerned by information conveyed in the oral presentation to the effect that parents were removing young girls from schools after grades 4 or 5 because of cultural and social objections to co-education. She was particularly interested in receiving further information on government action to address that problem, and in knowing whether public awareness programmes had been set up to prevent such action on the part of parents. She noted that the structure of the educational system itself created serious obstacles to the education of girls. Although the Government recognized the importance of education in breaking the cycle of poverty, was it doing enough to sensitize the public or to devise specific plans to establish alternative schools in order to ensure the continued education of girls?

45. **Ms. Manalo** said that she fully appreciated the steps taken towards the empowerment of women in Yemen. However, she was not convinced that political will had been strong, consistent or pervasive enough, because she did not gather from the periodic reports that the Yemeni Government considered the protection of the human rights of women a priority of the highest order in nation-building. The Committee would have welcomed evidence of the Government's intention to allocate greater funding and resources for programmes devoted to the improvement of women.

46. Expressing concern over reports that a constitutional provision on non-discrimination had been withdrawn, she suggested that Yemen should embark on an intense campaign to raise awareness on the content of the Convention and on the implications of its implementation. Yemen had sought to explain the situation of women by invoking cultural stereotypes

and established sex roles, but the lifting of those barriers lay at the heart of the Convention, explicitly in article 5. She therefore expressed the hope that the next report would present a detailed national plan of action showing how Yemen was using the tools of education, the media and civil society to banish stereotypes and to protect the rights of women. The development and implementation of a legal framework, within a specific period of time, was essential. She further suggested that the Yemeni Government should consider adapting its programme execution and implementation of legal reforms to accelerate the changes it deemed desirable.

47. **Ms. González** said that the foundation of discrimination against Yemeni women was their low status within the family structure. As long as inequality existed, it would be very difficult for Yemeni society, which assigned unequal status to men and women, to change its approach. She was concerned that, under the Shariah, ideas which perpetuated the overt violation of women's human rights were flourishing. Yet even Governments which observed Shariah law had adopted political and legislative measures which prohibited discrimination against women.

48. It was also worrisome that the Penal Code of Yemen permitted male family members to kill women in case of "in flagrante delicto". If it were determined that an adulterer should be strictly punished, penalties should be applied equally to men and women.

49. With regard to provisions under the Law of Personal Status on inheritance rights, she asked for clarification on the share of inheritance to which surviving wives and children were entitled, in particular in cases of polygamy.

50. **Ms. Kaid** (Yemen) said that the electoral law would need to be amended in order to introduce the concept of quotas for greater participation by women in political life. However, such changes would take time. Even developed countries often failed to achieve 30 per cent representation of women in their Governments, so it would be understandable if Yemen were not able to achieve that goal in a short time. With reference to the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, a request had been submitted to the National Committee on Women with a full explanation of the conditions necessary for the implementation of the provisions of the Optional Protocol. Although no specific deadline had been set for signature, accession was imminent.

51. In the area of education, the Government had adopted temporary special measures through its poverty alleviation strategy by providing incentives, in cooperation with the World Food Programme. Food assistance had been granted to families which kept their girl children enrolled.

52. Yemen had been the beneficiary of assistance from various international donors including the governments of European countries and several international non-governmental organizations, all of which stressed gender mainstreaming in the implementation of programmes.

53. No specific surveys had been conducted in prisons on the extent of honour killings, neither could her delegation provide specific data in that regard, but the problem was not believed to be widespread.

54. The Government had encountered resistance to its efforts to raise the legal age of marriage. It continued to work with civil society to establish pressure groups to raise awareness of the risks of early marriages. The Government attached great importance to the fight against the spread of the HIV/AIDS virus. There had been 800 cases, half of them involving foreigners. With the support of the United Nations Population Fund, the Government was in the process of developing a national strategy on HIV/AIDS.

55. Research on women's issues was ongoing and the Government recognized that effective policies could not be established without detailed studies. One such survey had been conducted on the well-being of women prisoners and it had been determined, and corroborated by independent observers from the Netherlands and Denmark, that the situation of women prisoners had vastly improved. Another survey, relating to education and women in rural areas, was also under way.

56. A 16-hour workday for women in rural areas was not stipulated by law but, given the nature of life in remote areas, it was accepted as normal practice for women to work rather long hours. Strategies aimed at improving infrastructure in rural areas should significantly improve the daily lives of local populations and were to be incorporated into the five-year development policy on poverty eradication. Women in rural areas were most often involved in physically demanding work and had few opportunities to gain expertise or develop new skills. It was hoped that massive public information campaigns would

ultimately improve that situation and encourage women to broaden their horizons. The strategy on poverty eradication was also expected to focus attention on households headed by women.

57. Yemen received bilateral and multilateral support for rural development particularly in the governorates and priority was given to the regions of greatest need. Yemen had most recently held talks with the World Bank for increased credit grants for rural women.

58. Yemen recognized that the high dropout rate among girls at the secondary level was a serious problem. Several international studies had concluded that the dearth of women teachers in schools and co-education were important contributing factors. Much importance was attached to the continued education of girls. In addition to feminizing the system of education, the Government believed it was important, particularly where customs were deeply rooted, to reassure families that there were benefits to be derived from keeping girls in school.

59. In reaction to the comment on the lack of proactive government measures to promote women, she pointed out that among the countries of the Arabian peninsula Yemen was the only one with a woman in the Cabinet and women of ambassadorial rank. The Government earnestly tried to live up to its obligations under the Convention. Further evidence of that commitment at the political level was the involvement of the Prime Minister in the promotion of human rights and the improvement of the status of women. The Government had embraced a long-term vision of progress and had begun to set in motion a series of programmes to that end. Poverty eradication, setting of quotas for women in decision-making positions and in the electoral process, and the creation of an institutional context for development in government and non-governmental organizations were the main priorities.

60. Islamic Shariah did not prohibit or restrict women from working. Under the Shariah, women occupied a place of honour and were granted the right to participate in society. Historically, women had actively built and defended their societies alongside men and it was a misinterpretation of Islam to construe that the Shariah opposed the work and violated the rights of women. In the case of adultery, men and women were punished equally.

61. **Mr. Al-Shahab** (Yemen) said that under the Shariah the rules and precepts for sharing an inheritance were dictated by God. It was not the case that men automatically received larger shares of an inheritance than women. The Shariah entailed legal precepts which precisely determined the rights of men and women. In general, men were given a greater share because under the Shariah men had the right and obligation to support their entire families, whereas women did not have such a duty. Women were entitled to retain their share without having to make expenditures on behalf of the household. Men had a further obligation to provide for female siblings. However, there were cases in which men and women received equal shares of an inheritance: for example, sons and daughters received equal shares of assets bequeathed by their deceased mother and there were cases in which women were entitled to greater shares than men.

62. With respect to public information, the Government had initiated an intense programme on several aspects of human rights and health issues, adopting various strategies to conveying the message.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.