



# Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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## Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Thirtieth session

### Summary record of the 697th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 8 March 2024, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Gamio Ríos (Vice-Chair)

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Consideration of reports submitted by parties to the Convention under article 35 (*continued*)

*Combined initial and second periodic reports of Bahrain (continued)*

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*Ms. Gamio Ríos (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.00 a.m.*

**Consideration of reports submitted by parties to the Convention under article 35**  
(continued)

*Combined initial and second periodic reports of Bahrain (continued)*  
(CRPD/C/BHR/1-2; CRPD/C/BHR/Q/1-2; CRPD/C/BHR/RQ/1-2)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Bahrain joined the meeting.*

*Articles 1–10 and 11–20*

2. **A representative of Bahrain**, replying to questions put at the previous meeting, said that protecting the security and stability of the country was one of the key priorities under the Government Plan 2023–2026. The Ministry of the Interior was responsible for implementing the national strategy for the management of disasters and crises and the minimization of their impact on society and the environment. A number of bodies had been established to coordinate disaster risk reduction, preparedness, management and recovery efforts, including the Civil Defence Council, the National Centre for Disaster and Crisis Management and the National Committee for Disaster Management. The executive office of the National Committee had drawn up disaster response plans that provided for specific assistance for persons with disabilities. The Ministry of the Interior had developed an SMS-based alert system that would continue to function when the Internet was down. Alerts could also be sent out through sirens. The General Directorate of Civil Defence was working with a number of ministries to identify how best to assist persons with disabilities in disasters and crises.

3. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the Government’s response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had been praised by the World Health Organization and cited as an example for other Middle Eastern countries to follow. Efforts had been made to provide persons with disabilities with information on the pandemic in writing or through audiovisual means or a sign language interpreter. Vaccines had been provided free of charge for all individuals who lived in the country, including those who did so illegally. The Government had set up mobile COVID-19 testing and treatment units for individuals who were unable to travel to medical centres. Masks and hand sanitizer had been distributed to persons with disabilities, who had also been able to attend medical appointments online, have medicines delivered to their homes and receive treatment there when necessary. Throughout the pandemic, persons with disabilities had continued to receive their monthly allowances on time.

4. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the Ministry of Social Development provided staff working in centres for persons with disabilities with training in handling emergencies. The Ministry inspected the centres’ facilities and equipment and monitored their emergency and evacuation procedures in order to verify that they were compliant with the relevant standards. In 2023, a committee had been established to manage the Ministry’s operations during emergencies and ensure that any assistance offered by the Ministry would reach priority groups, including persons with disabilities.

5. The home established by the National Bank of Bahrain provided services for children with severe and multiple disabilities aged 3 years and over. The home offered 25 residential placements; the rest of the children received day-care services only. The Ministry’s website would be edited to ensure that the information on the ages catered for by the home and the services it provided was accurate. The Ministry no longer granted licences for the establishment of new homes and had taken steps to ensure that the services provided in existing homes were regulated in line with the relevant legal framework. The purpose of such homes was not to isolate persons with disabilities from society. Requests for an individual to be placed in a home did not have to be submitted by his or her caregiver; they could be submitted by social workers, representatives of civil society or government agencies or family members who did not have care responsibilities. The Ministry offered financial and other forms of assistance aimed at enabling persons with disabilities to remain in their family environment and addressing the challenges that might otherwise have forced them to move into a home.

6. A guide on universal design had been adopted in 2017 with a view to ensuring that all public buildings met accessibility standards. Construction licences would not be granted unless buildings had been designed in compliance with those standards. Inspections were conducted once buildings had been constructed, and any buildings found to be in breach of the standards would not be connected to the electricity network. Accessibility standards were taken into account in plans for the rehabilitation and maintenance of public buildings. The version of the Green Building Manual available online contained a section on accessibility and mobility, which provided for designated parking spaces for persons with disabilities and offered guarantees that buildings would be accessible for them.

7. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the figures cited by Committee members in relation to the death penalty were inaccurate; the Government had provided the correct figures in various reports submitted to international bodies in the past. Death sentences were seldom handed down and only for the most serious crimes. Under article 72 of the Criminal Code, judges had the discretion to reduce death sentences to prison sentences in certain cases, such as those involving crimes committed by persons with disabilities, in which there were mitigating circumstances. The Government had established multiple safeguards to be applied in death penalty cases: death sentences had to be unanimously approved by all judges hearing a case, appealed by the Public Prosecution Service before the Court of Cassation and then approved by the King. Individuals on death row were housed in their own prison wing and were entitled to receive medical and social assistance and family visits.

8. The allegations that the Special Investigation Unit had failed to comply with international standards were inaccurate. The Unit carried out its work in accordance with national and international legal instruments, particularly the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the outcomes it had achieved were testament to its professionalism and commitment to upholding the rule of law. The number of complaints received by the Unit had fallen by 80 per cent, demonstrating that its efforts to tackle torture had been successful. The Unit published regular reports on its work and responded to any enquiries submitted to it. Information pertaining to its work was available on its official website in English and Arabic.

9. Persons with disabilities who wished to marry had to obtain approval from the courts in order to do so. Judges were required to ensure that the other party consented to the marriage in full knowledge of the person's condition, that the union would be in the best interest of both parties and that it would cause no harm to their well-being. Judges carefully reviewed the medical records of the person with disabilities before making their decision.

10. Persons with disabilities were able to seek redress in the courts. The Ministry of Justice had made it easier for persons with disabilities to file complaints by allowing for the deferred payment or waiver of court fees in certain disputes, providing information in Braille or through sign language interpretation and offering free legal assistance when the individual concerned was unable to afford a lawyer. All court facilities had been made accessible for persons with disabilities, and specialist staff were on hand to assist them at all times. Statements would not be taken from persons with disabilities until they had been informed of all their rights under the Code of Criminal Procedure, given access to the information relating to their case and provided with a lawyer and, where necessary, a sign language interpreter. Any statements taken before those conditions had been met would be considered null and void. In 2014, the Court of Cassation had ordered the retrial of a case in which the defendant had appealed his conviction on the grounds that the judge had failed to take his intellectual disability into account. The Court of Cassation had decided to order the retrial after finding that the judge had failed to consult a specialist to determine whether the defendant had the mental capacity to be held criminally liable for the offence.

11. It was generally recognized that persons with disabilities should enjoy full legal capacity unless their disability prevented them from expressing their free will or making sound decisions. Individuals for whom that was the case were assigned a judicial assistant to help them during legal proceedings. From 2020 to 2023, the Ministry of Justice had received 180 applications for such assistants, all of which had been accepted. The number of persons who had been deprived of the exercise of their legal capacity was very low; some 930 people were currently under the guardianship system. The work of assistants and guardians was

monitored by the Ministry of Justice in order to ensure that they acted in compliance with the relevant laws.

12. The courts were under no obligation to reduce sentences for persons with disabilities. That decision was made at the discretion of the judge, who was required to examine the nature of the individual's disability and the circumstances of the crime in order to determine whether the disability should be considered a mitigating circumstance. Should the judge find that the individual's disability had no bearing on his or her actions, the sentence would not be reduced. Decisions to the contrary could lead to impunity or encourage individuals in similar situations to commit crimes. From 2022 to 2024, the Government had run 27 programmes providing lawyers, judges, court staff and other law enforcement officials with ongoing training on the rights of persons with disabilities, including the right of women with disabilities to have access to justice.

13. The Government had developed a national system for the submission of complaints of exploitation, violence and abuse against persons with disabilities. The complaints received were categorized by age, sex and disability type and handled in line with the relevant laws and within the specified time frame. A total of 53 complaints had been received in 2023.

14. A widow was entitled to inherit the share of her husband's assets provided for under sharia law. In many cases, the share inherited by widows was greater than that received by male heirs. Women with disabilities received the full share; a woman was deprived of her share only in the event that she had murdered her husband.

15. **A representative of Bahrain** said that article 353 of the Criminal Code, under which perpetrators of rape had been exempted from punishment if they married their victim, had been repealed by Act No. 7 of 2023. The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Bahrain had described the measure as a historic legislative reform that would enhance the protection of the fundamental rights of women and girls in the country.

16. Bahraini laws stressed the importance of good relations between husband and wife and protected a woman's right not to be harmed by her husband. Marital rape was considered a form of domestic violence and was regulated by the Domestic Violence Act, No. 17 of 2015. The Act also covered sexual abuse within family settings. It was broad in scope and afforded protection to all women, including those with disabilities.

17. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the definition of disability contained in Act No. 74 of 2006 on the welfare, rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities was consistent with the definition of disability set out in the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. The Act's definition, which was set out in paragraph 39 of the report under consideration (CRPD/C/BHR/1-2), was a credit to her country as it drew particular attention to the functional challenges faced by persons with disabilities. With regard to the forced institutionalization of persons with disabilities, the country had no laws in place that prevented individuals from enjoying their right to liberty on the basis of an actual or perceived disability. Nonetheless, the Government would pursue efforts to ensure that all its laws were aligned with the Convention.

18. **A representative of Bahrain** said that he wished to reiterate his Government's commitment to limiting the number of death sentences handed down. The Government attached great importance to the role played by civil society organizations in supporting persons with disabilities. Such organizations were represented on the High Committee for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities, and he wished to thank them for their participation in the current dialogue.

19. The Government had established a number of mechanisms to handle complaints of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and provide redress to victims. The Ministry of Social Development, for instance, had created a task force of judicial officers responsible for inspecting rehabilitation centres treating persons with disabilities. The National Institution for Human Rights was competent to receive complaints, conduct field visits and make recommendations. Other mechanisms had been tasked with investigating complaints made against employees of the Ministry of the Interior, handling cases of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment perpetrated by law enforcement officers or members of the armed forces in the exercise of their duty and monitoring places of deprivation of liberty, including

psychiatric hospitals, to combat such treatment. All the mechanisms were independent and impartial, published regular reports on their work and acted in accordance with the relevant international standards.

20. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the Ministry of Health was working to provide free services for the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS. Testing services for sexually transmitted infections were already available free of charge. Women had access to comprehensive reproductive health services. The Ministry was seeking to increase awareness of health-related issues by using sign language interpreters and audiovisual materials to disseminate information. Health education was part of the school curriculum, and specific workshops were organized for persons with disabilities.

21. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the Government took allegations of torture seriously. Bahraini law guaranteed the punishment of any individual who committed acts of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. The National Action Charter established that no human being should be subjected to physical or psychological torture under any circumstances. Any confessions found to have been obtained under torture would be declared null and void. The Government cooperated with special procedure mandate holders and provided detailed responses to their enquiries. It was committed to addressing any complaints made by individuals in detention facilities and had established a number of bodies to investigate such complaints and coordinate the necessary response. Persons deprived of their liberty, including those with disabilities, were afforded full access to health services and medicines. Their health was regularly monitored, and they received treatment in specialized clinics when necessary.

22. Freedom of opinion and expression was guaranteed under the Constitution. The independence of journalists was provided for by law, and journalists had the right to obtain and publish information provided that they did so in line with the relevant legal framework. Attempts to restrict flows of information were prohibited. It was compulsory for the Bahrain Journalists' Association to be notified prior to the dismissal of a journalist from his or her post.

23. Bahrain was not a party to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and did not grant refugee status. The Minister of Foreign Affairs had, however, signed a memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees regarding the exchange of information on refugees and asylum-seekers. Bahraini labour laws were applied to migrant workers. The Government would be able to provide the Committee with statistics on the number of migrant workers with disabilities in writing after the dialogue.

24. **A representative of Bahrain** said that all his country's laws sought to preserve the Bahraini family unit, which was one of the cornerstones of society. Families formed through the marriage of a Bahraini woman to a foreigner were no exception. A committee composed of representatives from the Supreme Council for Women, the Royal Court and the Ministry of the Interior was responsible for handling Bahraini citizenship applications submitted by the children of Bahraini women who were married to foreigners. Some 4,000 applications had been approved in the past 10 years. Such children were granted entry visas and residency permits free of charge and were entitled to Bahraini travel documents. In the case of other government, health and education services, they paid the same fees as children with two Bahraini parents. They were also eligible for the tuition fee waivers granted to children from low-income families. Act No. 74 of 2006 provided that children with disabilities born to a Bahraini mother and a foreign father were entitled to receive the same benefits and support services as citizens. Under Decision No. 59 of 2008, children with a Bahraini mother and foreign father had the right to receive alimony payments provided that they were permanent residents of Bahrain. While foreign husbands of Bahraini women did not have the right to obtain Bahraini citizenship automatically through marriage, they were entitled to apply for naturalization.

25. The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Social Development had recently renewed an agreement under which the latter had committed to funding driving lessons for persons with disabilities and the maintenance of the adapted vehicles to be used during those lessons. The lessons were delivered by the General Directorate of Traffic, and a total of five

adapted vehicles had been made available. Approximately 960 persons with disabilities had learned to drive under the programme since the agreement had been signed in 2010.

26. **A representative of Bahrain** said that persons with disabilities had assumed key leadership positions within a number of civil society organizations and played a crucial role in implementing the National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Representatives of civil society contributed to the formulation of disability-related policies and strategies and reasonable accommodation measures through their membership of the High Committee for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities. The Government had established direct communication channels with civil society organizations, which used those channels to draw attention to the needs of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities were also able to submit proposals to the Government through the “Tawasul” system. The Government had made counselling services available to all individuals, including persons with disabilities, and had set up a helpline through which individuals could gain rapid access to such services. It offered individual and family counselling sessions and ran family education programmes.

27. The Constitution guaranteed equal rights for women with disabilities. The Supreme Council for Women proposed amendments to laws that were relevant to women and offered its opinion on draft laws and regulations. A number of measures had been taken to advance the status of women and raise awareness of the needs of women with disabilities, including the implementation of a harmonized framework for the provision of family counselling services and the establishment of a support centre for women. The Ministry of Social Development was in the process of launching a programme aimed at preparing girls to join the labour market. Women with disabilities who worked were entitled to extra days of paid leave.

28. The rights of children with disabilities were protected under the Children’s Act. The National Committee for Childhood was composed of representatives from the Government, the private sector and civil society. The Child Protection Centre had been set up to provide social and psychological support services for children. Children were able to receive support through a 24-hour hotline, the staff of which had been trained in dealing with children with disabilities. The Act on restorative justice for children had been implemented in 2021, and the National Strategy for Childhood had been updated for the period 2022–2027. The purpose of the Strategy was to enhance programmes and projects aimed at guaranteeing children’s rights and strengthening the legal protection afforded to children.

29. Persons with disabilities were entitled to a monthly allowance, the amount of which was doubled for persons with severe disabilities. The amount was also doubled for all individuals during the month of Ramadan. Prosthetic devices and cochlear implants were exempt from tax and customs duties. The Government had taken into account the various types and degrees of disability when designing housing units intended to support the independent living of persons with disabilities. Such persons were able to make their own choices regarding where they wished to live.

30. **Mr. Al-Azzeh** (Country Rapporteur) said that he hoped that the State party would coordinate closely with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations to agree on a definition of disability that reflected the human rights model of disability in line with the Convention.

31. It was troubling that the death penalty was cited as a main penalty in 23 articles of the Criminal Code and that, for a number of offences involving aggravating circumstances, judges could impose the death penalty at their discretion. He also wished to clarify that article 12 of the Convention did not imply that disability should be considered a mitigating circumstance. Rather, persons with disabilities should be supported in obtaining full access to criminal justice through the provision of the necessary accommodations, and the judiciary should treat persons with disabilities on an equal basis with other people, whether they were a detainee, victim, defendant or plaintiff.

32. The decision of the State party not to ratify conventions on migrants and refugees, such as the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, did not absolve it from its responsibility to protect and support migrants or refugees with disabilities. He would welcome information on the level

of access to different services of migrant workers and foreign residents with disabilities and their children.

*Articles 21–33*

33. **Ms. Aldana Salguero** said that she would like to clarify whether the State party's reference to measures concerning entrepreneurship pertained to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the formal job sector or the informal economy. She also wished to know whether data disaggregated by gender was available on persons with disabilities who had benefited from such measures, and, if so, whether that data included persons with less common disabilities and persons with disabilities living in remote areas. She wondered whether the measures included micro-entrepreneurship programmes and, if so, whether seed money was granted and whether it had to be reimbursed.

34. **Ms. Thongkuay** said that it would be useful to hear what action was taken when women and girls with disabilities reported rape and what measures were in place to ensure that women and girls with disabilities could take perpetrators of marital rape to court. Data on reported cases of domestic violence and the court rulings on such cases would be welcome. Regarding her earlier question on the Nationality Act, she was particularly interested in further details on women's right to pass their citizenship to their children and husbands and the steps taken to withdraw the State's reservations to article 9 (2) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She wondered whether the State party would consider amending the Labour Code to include the characteristics of sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and age under the prohibited grounds for discrimination.

35. **Mr. Morris** said that he would be grateful if the delegation could elaborate on the intended meaning of the statement made in the State party's reply to paragraph 20 (a) of the Committee's list of issues, which specified that students with disabilities would be included in State-run schools "where possible", thus implying that inclusive education was not being treated as a right of persons with disabilities. The allowance paid to teachers in special education also suggested that there was an emphasis on special education rather than inclusive education. He wished to learn what measures were in place to incentivize teachers in mainstream schools to attend training sessions on working with students with disabilities.

36. It would be of interest to obtain information on the number of students with disabilities who transitioned to higher education and the support provided to them, including reasonable accommodation. He would also like to know what measures would be taken to enable persons with disabilities to vote without having to declare their choice orally; how many persons with disabilities had run for public office and how many had been successful; and what reasonable accommodation was in place to support such individuals after their election. Lastly, he would appreciate an indication of the time frame within which the State party planned to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled.

37. **Ms. Fefoame** said that she would welcome information on the steps that had been taken to repeal or amend article 40 of the Family Code to ensure that women, including women with disabilities, could not be forced by their husbands to have children and could freely decide on the number and spacing of their children. It would also be useful to know what measures were in place to ensure comprehensive data collection, disaggregated by disability, gender and nationality, on the use of health services by persons with disabilities across health centres, as there had been reports of differential treatment of expat workers compared to Bahraini nationals.

38. **Ms. Kayess** said that she would appreciate a response from the delegation on whether the action plan of the Bahraini National Institute for Human Rights to respond to the recommendations of the subcommittee of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions would address the independence of the Institute; serious human rights violations in places of detention, including the role of the Office of the Ombudsman in monitoring places of detention; and the cooperation of the Institute with civil society organizations, in particular organizations representing persons with disabilities and human rights defenders in

the State party. Did the action plan provide for the designation of an independent monitoring mechanism in accordance with the Convention?

39. **Ms. Fitoussi** said that she would be curious to hear how the State party ensured that students with disabilities living in rural areas had the same access to educational opportunities as their urban counterparts. She would welcome further details on the resources allocated by the State to ensure that educational services for children with disabilities, especially those attending rehabilitation centres, had been maintained during the COVID-19 pandemic. She wondered what assistance was given to families and caregivers to ensure that children with disabilities received quality education in mainstream schools.

40. The Committee would be grateful for information on the accessibility of health and fertility clinics intended for women and girls, and on the ways in which persons with disabilities were involved in the training provided to medical staff in hospitals.

41. **Ms. Dondovdorj** said that she wished to receive updated statistics on the number of children with disabilities who were out of school, disaggregated by age and type of disability. It would also be of interest to know what measures the State party had taken to encourage parents with disabilities to send their children to school and to teach them about the concept of inclusive education. She wondered how the State party would ensure that all persons with disabilities were provided with rehabilitation services according to their needs, particularly in cases where they could not afford to pay for such services themselves.

42. **Mr. Makni** said that he would like to know whether there was a mechanism for consulting persons with disabilities in the development of public policies, and whether there was a special budget to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, including for the provision of reasonable accommodation in the workplace.

43. **Ms. Boresli** (Country Rapporteur) said that, while the Committee welcomed the fact that a representative of civil society was attending the dialogue, it was regrettable that none of the 17 civil society organizations working in the field of disability in the State party had attended or submitted a report to the Committee. She would be grateful if the delegation could comment on reports that the National Institute for Human Rights had failed to take action in response to disability-related issues reported by individuals and civil society organizations in the press and on social media, and that the general public and even civil society organizations with which it was supposed to cooperate were unaware of the Institute's functions.

44. **Mr. Al-Azzeh** said that he would appreciate clarification of the concept of "health fitness" and of article 11 of Act No. 74. He wished to establish whether, in accordance with that provision, the Government maintained a list specifying the jobs or functions that persons with disabilities were allowed to carry out and, if so, which jobs were not permitted.

*The meeting was suspended at 11.55 a.m. and resumed at 12.10 p.m.*

45. **A representative of Bahrain** said that a hotline for sign language interpretation was available through the e-Government website to allow persons with hearing impairments to communicate with public and private institutions. Deaf persons could submit complaints through the "Tawasul" system using sign language interpretation via Skype. Persons with disabilities also presented some programmes on disability issues on public and private audiovisual media. Bahraini media covered numerous conferences and events on issues relating to disability, providing sign language interpretation and subtitling. There was a unified sign language dictionary, and Braille was used in government programmes. People were encouraged to learn sign language in the workplace and in educational institutions.

46. **A representative of Bahrain** said that "health fitness" referred to the physical condition, eyesight and mental state of a candidate for public employment. Such criteria were used to ensure that the candidate was able to perform the work to be assigned to him or her and achieve the level of productivity required.

47. Sexual assault against a spouse with disabilities was regarded as a serious offence in Bahrain. Reported cases of sexual assault were dealt with by the Public Prosecution Service and Public Security Forces as a matter of urgency. Victims were immediately referred to health centres or shelters for victims of domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Act provided for family counselling, psychological, social and health-care services and legal

assistance in such cases. A 24-hour hotline had been set up to receive reports and complaints. Victims and witnesses were heard in separate, appropriate rooms during judicial proceedings to preserve the confidentiality of information and statements made.

48. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the right to participation in political and public life was guaranteed by the Constitution. In particular, article 1 stated that citizens, both men and women, were entitled to participate in public affairs and enjoy political rights, including the rights to vote and to stand for election. Under the law, referendums and elections were held by direct, secret, universal suffrage. Voters who were unable to read or write, who were blind or who had other special needs and could not, therefore, mark the ballot paper, could express their choice orally. Voter privacy was ensured throughout the entire electoral process. A number of persons with disabilities had stood for office in recent elections, including the person who currently headed the Committee on Services of the Council of Representatives.

49. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the commitment of Bahrain to inclusive education had made it a leading country in the region and in the world in terms of education for all, a principle enshrined in the Constitution and the Education Act. His Government had provided public schools with the necessary qualified teaching staff, special curricula, educational tools and infrastructure to ensure that education was inclusive. Students with disabilities were afforded scholarships, regardless of their academic level, and free transport services. The Directorate of Special Education had been established in 2006 to ensure that the necessary services for students with disabilities were provided in schools.

50. For example, teaching staff had been trained to deal with students with hearing disabilities, including the development of speech and listening skills for children with cochlear implants. Children who were blind or had visual impairments were taught Braille and provided with computers adapted to their needs. There were specialized professionals to teach students with Down syndrome and students with intellectual disabilities. Children with autism had also been incorporated into the mainstream public educational system. Inclusive education was an integral part of teacher training at all levels of education. Mandatory training programmes had been designed for teaching and administrative staff alike. Educational programmes were monitored and evaluated by specialists at the Ministry of Education on a regular basis.

51. Concerning the question raised about the number of children who were out of school, it should be pointed out that education was mandatory for children between 6 and 14 year of age. The failure by a parent or guardian to enrol a child in school, including a child with disabilities, or the prolonged absence of a child from school without a valid excuse were criminally punishable offences. To date, there had been 22 such cases that had been dealt with by the Public Prosecution Service. Unlike in other countries, the education process had not been disrupted in Bahrain during the COVID-19 pandemic: the Government had seen to it that all children, including children with disabilities, continued to receive an education through distance learning.

52. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the Constitution guaranteed the protection of the right to privacy, including the inviolability of the home and freedom of communication. The law on personal data protection provided safeguards against the unlawful processing of personal data, such as the medical data of persons with disabilities. It also provided for criminal penalties of imprisonment and heavy fines for violations. A number of decrees to implement the law had been issued by the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Endowments, which set out the rights and duties of persons handling sensitive personal data and established complaints mechanisms, methods of investigation and compensation schemes for victims. The Ministry of Social Development ensured that any information concerning assistance for persons with disabilities was confidential. Under several articles of the Criminal Code, the penalties were increased for unlawful disclosure of information involving persons with disabilities.

53. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the discussions currently being held at the national level on ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled were an important opportunity for Bahrain to highlight the objectives of the Treaty. Bahrain had taken many steps to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, including a legal

requirement for companies with 50 or more employees to ensure that 2 per cent of their workforce was made up of persons with disabilities. The Government had an office that matched persons with disabilities with employers. Employers were offered monetary incentives to take on persons with disabilities. Training programmes and support for small business projects, including low-interest loans and grants, had also been offered to persons with disabilities with a view to their economic empowerment. More than 200 persons with disabilities had benefited from a government unemployment insurance scheme. In the private sector, 1,086 persons with disabilities had obtained employment in the previous two years. The Government had recently been working to identify jobs in the public sector for which persons with disabilities would be prioritized. As a result, some 300 persons had gained employment, including 131 with physical disabilities, 62 with visual disabilities, 85 with hearing disabilities, 17 with intellectual disabilities and 5 with multiple disabilities.

54. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the Act on the National Institution for Human Rights, No. 26 of 2014, had been amended to bring the national human rights institution into line with the Paris Principles. The Institution was thus given a mandate to conduct announced and unannounced visits to monitor human rights conditions in places of detention, the workplace, and health and educational centres. It was also mandated to hold meetings and joint activities with civil society, non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders and to be in direct contact with anyone who claimed to be subjected to any form of human rights violation. The Act also provided that an annual report on the human rights situation in Bahrain was to be submitted to the Board of Commissioners, and to the King, the Council of Ministers, the Shura Council, the Council of Representatives and the public. A royal decree on the appointment of commissioners at the national human rights institution had also been issued with a view to enhancing its independence and impartiality.

55. In closing, his delegation was grateful for the opportunity to participate in the constructive dialogue with the Committee. The discussions held and proposals put forward would serve as useful guidelines for a comprehensive review of all areas related to the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. Building on what had been achieved thus far in the area of protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, his Government would continue to work in a spirit of community partnership to improve procedures for the care of persons with disabilities, in line with the principles and purposes set forth in the Convention, and raise the level of basic services, in areas such as education, health, rehabilitation, employment and political participation.

56. **Mr. Al-Azzeh** said that the Committee appreciated the extensive answers to the questions it had posed. However, it regretted the absence of persons with disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities in the dialogue, and indeed the absence of reports from civil society organizations, specifically organizations of persons with disabilities, which the Committee was accustomed to receiving. It trusted that, henceforth, the State party would involve persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in all matters related to their interests. The Committee had received reports of the entrenchment of a medical approach to disability in the State party and the effects that such an approach had on the rights of persons with disabilities, especially in the areas of health and employment. It regretted the predominance of so-called ableism. It expressed the hope that new laws and policies would bring about a meaningful change in such entrenched ways of thinking and institutional practices, to achieve justice, fairness and non-discrimination for persons with disabilities.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*