



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

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

**Summary record of the 998th meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 4 October 2011, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Pimentel

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

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

*Initial report of Oman (CEDAW/C/OMN/1, CEDAW/C/OMN/Q/1 and Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Oman took places at the Committee table.*
2. *Prior to the introduction of the initial report of Oman, a film showing the advances made by women in Oman was projected.*
3. **Mr. Al-Kalbani** (Oman), introducing the initial report of Oman (CEDAW/C/OMN/1), said that the composition of his delegation, including Government officials and members of civil society, reflected Oman's commitment to implementing the Convention fully. The international instruments that Oman had ratified had precedence in domestic law under the Basic Law of the State. Oman had ratified three other core international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. Moreover, in the light of recommendations made during the universal review process in January 2011, it was considering acceding to other treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. It was also reviewing its reservations to the treaties, as it had done with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its position concerning ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
4. A law had been enacted to empower and protect the rights of women, which took a development approach based on the Beijing Platform for Action and Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. The Government wished to make further improvements to its legislation on the promotion of the status of women, both nationals and non-nationals residing in the Sultanate, and ensure that they fully enjoyed their rights. It thus looked forward to the Committee's concluding comments and recommendations for that purpose.
5. Oman's political will to bring about social development was demonstrated by a widely covered symposium that sought to raise awareness about various gender issues relating directly to the Convention, held in the Sultanate in 2009 under the auspices of the Sultan of Oman. The event had resulted in a number of recommendations for the promotion of women's rights. In addition, 17 October had been designated as Omani Women's Day.
6. Turning to national human rights institutions, he said that an independent National Human Rights Commission had been established, which the Sultan had pledged would be in keeping with the Paris Principles. More than a quarter of its members were women and it included a department that dealt with women's rights, human trafficking and domestic violence. Furthermore, the status of the national committee to monitor the implementation of the Convention had been raised; it was directly under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development.
7. The Government had also set up women's associations in more provinces, subsidies for them had been increased and a helpline had been established. State support for women's associations had more than doubled in recent years. Oman had also made great strides in collecting statistical data disaggregated by gender. A committee for women and children had been established under the State Council. With respect to legislative reform, the law had been amended so that women no longer needed the consent of a guardian to obtain a

passport. Women had access to sharia courts and enjoyed the right to appeal any Supreme Court decision to the Sultan directly.

8. Concerning equal opportunity and affirmative action, there had been an increase in the number of grants for women to start up businesses. Women currently accounted for more than a quarter of the labour force according to the 2010 census. The share of women in science and health care was more than 50 per cent. While they were not well represented in technical fields such as engineering, women accounted for more than 60 per cent of new appointees to civil service posts and were increasingly employed in the non-agricultural sectors.

9. In 2011, a law had been enacted enabling women entrepreneurs to work at home without having to register their activities. In addition, public funds had been allotted to rural women for animal husbandry and honey making, among other ventures, and trade fairs had been organized to sell their goods. Furthermore, the Labour Code had been amended to promote the rights of women, including paid maternity leave.

10. The Government had extended higher education grants to young women. While further efforts were needed, the level of illiteracy among girls had declined considerably in recent years. Specialized employment and vocational training centres for women with disabilities had recently been set up in three provinces.

11. Training had been provided to increase the number of women who participated in parliamentary elections. Some 75 per cent of women who would be standing for parliament in the forthcoming elections had benefited from subsidies. Efforts had also been made to involve civil society more closely in the electoral process. To date, there were two Omani women who had been appointed to high-level diplomatic posts, as Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York and Head of the Permanent Delegation of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

12. In conclusion, he explained that the initial report had been submitted late because the Sultan had been eager to present the most thorough report possible. He hoped that the forthcoming periodic reports would be submitted by 2013.

#### *Articles 1 to 6*

13. **Ms. Acar**, commending the State party for the additional information provided, particularly on its efforts to raise awareness about the Convention, the introduction of gender-disaggregated data and the issuance of Royal Decree No. 55/2010, said that a fundamental principle underlying the Convention was *de jure* and *de facto* gender equality. The standard set by the Convention was not simply equality of opportunity but equality of results as well. Equal rights and non-discrimination must apply to the public and private spheres alike. Despite the ratification of the Convention, Omani law did not contain a definition of or even refer to discrimination against women. She asked whether the State party intended to amend the Basic Law and other laws in order to bring them into line with the Convention, including through an explicit prohibition of discrimination against women and the protection of equal rights in private life.

14. **Ms. Šimonović**, noting that in the light of the universal periodic review the State party was reviewing its position regarding the Optional Protocol to the Convention, asked whether the delegation could give a more precise indication of the likelihood of ratification and the possible time frame.

15. She also requested more information about civil society involvement in the reporting process. Expressing concern about the lack of shadow reports submitted by national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), she urged the State party to broaden the scope of

NGO cooperation and consultation when preparing its next report. Information about the National Human Rights Commission's role in reporting would also be appreciated.

16. Commending the Government's decision to withdraw some of its reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, she enquired whether a similar course of action was envisaged in relation to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and, if so, within what time frame. The need for the general reservation to all provisions of the Convention that were not in accordance with the provisions of sharia law was particularly questionable, especially in view of the legal obfuscation to which it gave rise.

17. **Ms. Popescu** said that it was important to emphasize the central role that parliament should assume in implementing the Committee's recommendations, withdrawing and narrowing the scope of reservations, reviewing existing laws and drafting new ones. Recalling that the Human Rights Council had called for a number of discriminatory provisions in the Labour Code and Personal Status Code to be repealed, and for specific legislation criminalizing domestic violence and sexual harassment to be enacted, she asked the delegation for an update on progress made along those lines.

18. She was concerned about the statement in paragraph 10 of the replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/OMN/Q/1/Add.1) that the Convention had not had a direct effect on domestic legislation and had not been invoked before the sharia courts, despite the fact that it was part of the domestic legal order. That situation highlighted a need to enhance training for law enforcement officials and members of the judiciary and to focus future action on raising awareness among NGOs, Government agencies and women themselves.

19. **Mr. Al-Nabhani** (Oman) explained that, pursuant to the Basic Law of the State, the Convention was part of domestic law and no legislation contrary to its provisions could be promulgated. The definition of discrimination contained in the Convention was thus also part of national legislation; however, if it was essential for such legislation to contain an explicit definition, an appropriate amendment could be introduced.

20. He confirmed that the State party was reviewing its position regarding ratification of the Optional Protocol, although any individual in Oman who considered that his or her rights under the Convention had been violated had in any case right of recourse to the domestic courts under the Basic Law.

21. There was nothing in the Basic Law to prevent civil society organizations from communicating with international treaty bodies and therefore no obstacle to the submission of NGO shadow reports.

22. The recommendations made during the universal periodic review had prompted the establishment of ad hoc committees to review the provisions of domestic legislation and those of the Convention and to consider whether the provisions subject to reservations were genuinely counter to sharia law. The State party was committed to a prompt conclusion of that review, which would encompass, inter alia, domestic legislation concerning women and employment.

23. **Mr. Al-Mukhaini** (Oman) said that he could confirm civil society's involvement in drafting the initial report and the wider consultation process, although Oman's version of the Arab Spring, which had taken place between February and May 2011, had diverted attention from the reporting process. The Government was committed to enhancing citizen participation in decision-making and he was optimistic that the independent expertise that civil society brought to the table would thenceforth be taken more seriously.

24. The reservations to the Convention were based on the Basic Law and any provisions that ran counter to sharia law were considered unconstitutional. That situation would be unchanged in practice even if Oman's reservations to the Convention were withdrawn.

25. **Ms. Al-Ghamariya** (Oman) said that civil society organizations were making great efforts to advance the cause of women. They had adopted numerous measures to that end and were supported by a sizeable base of female volunteers, who worked to make women aware of their legal rights, secure greater benefits, rights and safeguards, and provided general guidance on the practical implementation of the law. Conscious of the continuing obstacles in the latter area, the organizations had asked the Government to convene explanatory seminars and issue interpretive regulations for members of the judiciary and other law enforcement officials.

26. **Mr. Al-Ibri** (Oman) said that judges and other judicial officials were kept abreast of developments in legislation. The texts of international instruments were widely circulated following their ratification, and seminars and workshops were organized when new legislation was enacted. His Ministry would nevertheless welcome any international assistance offered in that area.

27. **Ms. Al-Roqishiy** (Oman) said that no specific preventive or protective mechanisms were in place for female victims of domestic violence and that such violence was not a widespread problem. However, support centres were operated in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Development, a complaints mechanism was available for reporting all family-related concerns, including domestic violence, and every effort was made to ensure the social reintegration of victims. Moreover, although the Criminal Code had no specific provisions expressly dealing with domestic violence, it criminalized all actions that undermined human dignity. In addition, there were special courts that dealt with issues relating to women, marriage and the family. Lastly, the State party was considering revising public policy on women's status to take account of recent social developments within the framework of a broader review of legislation and institutional mechanisms for monitoring society and the family.

28. **Ms. Zou Xiaojiao** said that the initial report's lack of information on any national action plan or national institution dedicated to ensuring women's full development and advancement caused her concern. She asked whether there were any action plans or institutions in Oman that dealt specifically with women's issues. She sought details of the mandate and functions of such institutions and the financial and human resources available to them, as appropriate.

29. She welcomed the establishment of the national committee to monitor implementation of the Convention, but said that more information about its precise role was needed. For example, was it a permanent body and how did it fulfil its monitoring function?

30. **Ms. Neubauer** asked what the State party was doing to create an enabling environment that would accelerate implementation of the Convention, noting that the content of the report and the replies to the list of issues revealed shortcomings in the State party's understanding of its obligations, which suggested that technical assistance might be beneficial.

31. She agreed on the need for more information about the national committee for monitoring implementation of the Convention, asking in particular whether civil society was represented in addition to the National Human Rights Commission and relevant ministries, and whether the ministry officials were vested with sufficient decision-making power to influence their respective ministries.

32. While the introduction of gender-responsive budgeting was a positive development, the report indicated that gender mainstreaming was limited. She emphasized that a combination of specific, complementing policies was essential to improve women's social status, and that gender mainstreaming meant integrating gender equality principles in all areas and sectors. In that connection, she urged the State party to consider establishing a national mechanism for the promotion of women that conformed to the international

standards set in the Beijing Platform for Action, in contrast to the national committee to monitor implementation of the Convention.

33. **Ms. Ameline** asked whether institutional mechanisms engaged in organized dialogue with religious bodies in order to assess the compatibility of the rights protected under the Convention with sharia law, as was the case in other Islamic countries. She also sought clarification regarding institutional capacity for taking the initiative; the Sultan's role in the effort to advance women's status was clear, but the role and responsibilities of the Consultative Council, the State Council and the national committee to monitor implementation of the Convention were less evident. It would also be useful to know whether the Sultan or the Council of Ministers was empowered to propose the appointment of women in order to increase female participation in parliamentary and other institutional bodies and whether the mass media was used to raise public awareness of women's issues.

34. **Mr. Al-Kalbani** (Oman) said that Omani women had occupied high-level positions for some time: for example, his predecessor had been a woman. As Head of the Council of Ministers, the Sultan enjoyed overall responsibility for policy determination; he was committed to the goal of female advancement and, given women's centrality to development, was fully engaged in the push to expand their economic and political participation.

35. Elections to the Consultative Council were scheduled to take place the following week and his Ministry had been working with women's organizations and civil society to achieve an increase in female representation. Omani elections differed from those of other countries in that there were no political parties and men and women stood as independent candidates. Government and civil society support was therefore essential to a successful candidacy.

36. **Mr. Al-Mukhaini** (Oman) said that when no female candidate had been successful in past elections, the Sultan had intervened to appoint women in order to ensure their full involvement in the legislative process.

37. Responding to queries on the national committee for monitoring implementation of the Convention, he said that, as an independent expert, he had been entrusted with the task of conducting a study into how the committee would ensure compliance with the provisions of the Convention. The outcome of the study had been a workplan for the committee that established, inter alia, the level of financial and human resources it required.

38. **Mr. Al-Nabhani** (Oman), regarding the role of the lower house of parliament, said that all bills were submitted to the Consultative Council for review before they were promulgated. The Sultan had issued a decree establishing a committee to amend the Basic Law in order to increase the Council's powers. However, the work of the committee had not yet been completed.

39. **Ms. Al-Shukairia** (Oman) said that the development of rural women was espoused by both civil society and Government institutions, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Ministry of Health and the State Council. Furthermore, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries had addressed the empowerment of rural women and included the provisions set out in article 14 of the Convention in its 2006–2011 development plan.

40. **Mr. Al-Kalbani** (Oman) said that 87 women candidates would be running in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. The Government was making considerable, concerted efforts to help more women to be elected. He did not have specific figures on the level of public funding for the empowerment of women, as all Government bodies had been involved in those efforts. Nevertheless, women accounted for a large share of all civil service appointments in the current year and Government positions in general.

41. Turning to the question of women in higher education, the number of women in some fields of study, such as engineering and computer science, was lower than that of men, as women tended to choose different specializations. In some sectors of employment, such as the oil industry, the desert climate precluded women from working in the fields. With temperatures often rising well above 50° C, health concerns arose that must be taken into account. Lastly, women tended to perform professional rather than manual occupations, such as chauffeurs or messengers.

42. There was still a need to increase public awareness about the Convention. The Government would need to make further efforts to change the mindset of men and women alike so that women were better represented in public life. Indeed, women themselves tended to vote for men. The forthcoming elections would of course be decided by the voters and the Government could not impose candidates on them. Nevertheless, it was working with civil society to urge women and men to vote for women candidates, who were well qualified to promote women's rights and draft legislation on women.

43. **Ms. Acar** reiterated her question as to whether the Government intended to amend the Basic Law to bring it into line with the Convention and asked whether Omani women were entitled to cite the Convention in domestic courts in order to assert their rights. If so, she would appreciate information on those matters.

44. **Mr. Bruun** said that the general reservation to the Convention was indeed broad, as it covered all provisions of the Convention that were not in keeping with sharia law and Omani domestic legislation in force. Such a reservation was contrary to article 28, paragraph 2, of the Convention, as it seemed to be incompatible with its object and purpose. He requested the delegation to provide examples of articles aside from articles 9, 15 and 16 that were not compatible with sharia law and noted that other States in which sharia law was practised did not find it necessary to make a similar general reservation.

45. **Ms. Šimonović** said that it was unclear what the general reservation covered. Clarification was also needed concerning the statement by the delegation that some provisions would be unconstitutional even if the general reservation was lifted. It would also be useful to have more details about the national machinery for the implementation of the Convention, including the role of the national committee established for that purpose.

46. **Ms. Neubauer** said that she, too, would like further details of the mandate of the national committee and the competence of its members. More information was needed on the way in which it monitored implementation of the Convention. She asked whether it made recommendations for policies and measures and whether its members were senior-level officials within their respective ministries. She would be interested in hearing more about the coordination mechanism for the various State bodies involved in implementing the Convention. Gender mainstreaming was not possible without an effective coordination mechanism.

47. **Ms. Popescu** asked what specific steps Oman was taking and whether it had established a time frame for the withdrawal of its reservations to the Convention. She also wondered whether the State party would be amending the Personal Status Act pursuant to withdrawing its reservation to article 16.

48. **Mr. Al-Mukhaini** (Oman) said that the Convention could not be considered as incompatible with sharia law. Otherwise Oman would not have acceded thereto. There was no incompatibility between most of the provisions of the Convention and sharia law. The Government would review its reservations, including the general reservation, as it had done with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. There was no time frame for the withdrawal of reservations, but the Government would be working with the national committee to monitor implementation of the Convention to achieve that end as quickly as

possible. There were no plans to amend the Personal Status Act, since it was based on sharia law and did not violate in any way the rights of women.

49. **Mr. Al-Kalbani** (Oman) said that the national committee to monitor implementation of the Convention did not have the authority to withdraw reservations, because that fell to parliament and must be accepted by the population as a whole. The committee would require time and effort to convince both houses of parliament to approve the withdrawal of the reservations. There was also a need for men and women in Oman to work together with a view to eliminating discrimination against women in society.

50. **Mr. Al-Mukhaini** (Oman), supported by **Mr. Al-Ibri** (Oman), said that women could indeed invoke the Convention in court, but he could not cite any cases in which it had been invoked. Nevertheless, he always encouraged women in Oman to do so in relevant court cases.

51. **Ms. Awori**, after referring to paragraph 26 of the replies to the list of issues concerning temporary special measures, asked whether there were any women currently sitting on the Consultative Council. She emphasized that, as their name suggested, temporary special measures were temporary, in contrast to policies and laws, and were to be discontinued when equality was achieved. Although the indicators that had been provided by the delegation concerning equality, education, employment and public service were commendable, more could be done. Since, according to current reports, there were no women judges in the judiciary, that was one area where temporary special measures could be applied. She asked what temporary special measures the State party planned to adopt to bring about more equality in the judiciary, education and public and private life.

52. **Ms. Popescu** said that the temporary special measures referred to in article 4 were aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women. Referring to the forthcoming parliamentary elections, she noted the large number of women standing for election and wondered about their chances of winning. Quotas or other kinds of temporary special measures might increase the chances of having more women in the political arena. In 2007, no woman had been elected to the lower house of parliament, which was a step backwards, since two women had been elected in 2003. She asked whether any temporary special measures were planned to redress that setback.

53. She enquired whether the extension of maternity leave for civil servants mentioned in the replies had taken effect, whether the Civil Service Act had been amended accordingly and whether there were plans to amend the Labour Code so that other women could benefit from such leave.

54. **Ms. Gabr**, welcoming the progress made in advancing the status of women in Oman, said that involving tribal groups and religious institutions in promoting women's rights during the forthcoming elections could result in a higher number of women being elected. The withdrawal of the State party's reservations to the Convention, including to article 15, paragraph 4, would benefit both men and women.

55. **Ms. Patten** said that there was a lack of information about violence against women in the report. Understanding and studying the causes and effects of violence against women and girls was a first step in overcoming gender-based violence. She asked whether the State party intended to adopt specific legislation on such violence occurring in both the public and private domains. She wished to know what steps had been taken to raise public awareness about the issue and break any taboo surrounding it. She enquired about the existence of preventive and protection measures, such as shelters and support services for victims or women at risk of violence and asked whether judges, law enforcement officials and others had received training to deal with gender-based violence.

56. **Ms. Bareiro-Bobadilla** said that she looked forward to seeing the recommendations to be made by the Committee disseminated as widely as the Convention and the report. Given the level of illiteracy, particularly among women, perhaps they could be disseminated through various media such as the radio. She commended the State party's efforts to promote the political and economic participation of women in Oman.

57. However, bringing about a change in the mindset of men and women was a greater challenge, since it covered areas such as traditional practices, the concept of the superiority of one sex over another, stereotypes and harmful practices. One survey conducted indicated that 75 per cent of women were in favour of female genital mutilation – a very high percentage in respect of what the Committee considered to be one of the worst practices worldwide affecting the rights and lives of women. The issue of stereotypes must also be addressed. One interesting approach might be to work closely with independent women's associations. They in turn could get together and discuss their rights, basing themselves on the Convention.

58. Another question that must be addressed was the involvement of men in family responsibilities. It was not enough for women to participate in public life. There must also be some redistribution of their duties at home and in private life. She would welcome hearing about any initiatives that had been taken in that respect: the care of children, the sick, persons with disabilities or elders should not be the sole responsibility of women.

59. **Mr. Al-Kalbani** (Oman) said that as Oman was a small country with a population of approximately 3 million, communication was relatively easy. It was also a young State that had only recently begun to address the important issues of political participation, access to public office and legislative development. Various bodies had been established to that end, including organizations that combated corruption and other illegal activities; however, promulgating laws and passing decisions that dealt with male and female roles remained a challenge. The Government's solution was to impart training in the law in general and sharia law, so as to ensure that the legal authorities had the knowledge and expertise needed to allow them to fully assume their responsibilities.

60. There were currently 15 women on the State Council, all of whom were very active in legislative development and implementation. Elections to the Consultative Council scheduled for the following week would determine the overall level of female representation in parliament in the years ahead.

61. The Government was carrying out research to determine the level and type of social support that should be made available to Omani women and hoped to implement a strategy for advancing their status in the near future. It was also doing everything in its power to ensure that women could hold positions of responsibility and be involved in public life.

62. **Mr. Al-Mukhaini** (Oman) said that a recent study had found that around a fifth of women's contributions to parliament related to issues traditionally viewed as female, but that the majority of contributions related to broader political or economic issues.

63. Civil society organizations had made a number of proposals to the Government concerning training for women and the creation of an enabling environment for their advancement, for example, by providing childcare. The proposals included the introduction of quotas to increase female representation on elected bodies, but that particular proposal had met with near unanimous rejection among female stakeholders. He would nonetheless continue his efforts to promote the quota system.

64. Methodological errors had diminished the value of a recent Government study on domestic violence and had prevented civil society from accepting the conclusions that misrepresented the scale of the problem. The Ministry of Social Development had asked for a new study to be conducted.

65. **Ms. Al-Ghamariya** (Oman) said that women made up around a quarter of the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Concerning the low representation of women on the Consultative Council, she said that, after studying the various options for increasing female representation, the Ministry of Social Development had concluded that a quota system was unacceptable because women preferred to win on merit. Seminars organized to examine the possible causes of their failure to win votes had attributed the blame to insufficient resources and ineffective campaigning. However, initiatives subsequently launched by women's organizations had had some success in garnering the required financial and media support, particularly for campaigns in rural areas.

66. **Mr. Al-Ibri** (Oman) said that 21 appeal court judges and 40 senior treasury officials were women and that several women had passed the bar examinations held earlier in 2011.

67. **Mr. Al-Nabhani** (Oman) said that a recent review of labour legislation had resulted in a number of decisions that should make it possible to introduce maternity leave for a period of one year.

68. Although Oman had entered reservations to article 15 of the Convention regarding freedom of movement and free choice of residence, there was nothing in Omani legislation to prevent women from moving freely around the country and travelling abroad. Recent legislative amendments had also lifted the requirement to seek a guardian's permission to obtain a passport. The reservation to article 15 was based on provisions of the Personal Status Code that required women who entered into marriage of their own free will to live with their husbands in the marital home unless they were at risk of harm; the principles that it sought to protect were related to honouring contracts and not to freedom of movement.

69. **Ms. Al-Ibriya** (Oman) said that the Government had prohibited female genital mutilation without the authorization of a licensed physician in all public and private medical institutions and that, as a result, the procedure was rarely practised. Its elimination had also been a focus of training courses aimed at preventing violence against women and young girls that had been organized with support from the United Nations Children's Fund.

70. **Ms. Al-Roqishiy** (Oman) said that the Omani Criminal Code did not establish specific penalties for domestic violence offences because all articles relating to violent offences applied equally to men and women. However, a review of the Criminal Code was under way that should lead to the enactment of provisions more closely aligned with those of the Convention.

71. **Mr. Al-Hinai** (Oman) said that the Ministry of Social Development had specific departments dedicated to family and women's issues and that all those departments were involved in drafting plans and devising measures for dealing with domestic violence. Pamphlets designed to raise awareness of the problem and the possible avenues of recourse had been distributed, and refuge and support were available for female victims.

72. **Ms. Gabr**, noting that Oman had adopted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (the Palermo Protocol) and had enacted specific anti-trafficking legislation, said that she would like information about the national mechanism responsible for implementation. Information on the National Human Rights Commission's role in tackling trafficking problems would also be appreciated, as well as details of its members, and whether they included women.

73. The State party had referred to specific legislation protecting the rights of domestic workers but had made no mention of any mechanisms providing protection against forced labour and violence in the workplace. Did any such mechanisms exist? She would also like to know of any shelters and refuges for the victims of trafficking. Lastly, she asked whether

the Government had adopted any bilateral measures with a view to the adoption of a regional strategy for cooperation among Arab nations to combat trafficking.

74. **Ms. Ameline** asked whether Omani legislation made a clear distinction between trafficking and migration, whether legal or illegal, noting that the two phenomena were to a great extent interlinked and that many migrant workers also fell victim to abuse and exploitation. She asked whether the State party had any plans to review article 20 of the Labour Code, which the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children had identified as a probable cause of inequality. Similarly, would the penalties applied to those responsible for trafficking and exploitation, including the international agencies at the core of the problem be reviewed? Information on the scale of the problem and details of any statistical databases compiled to support the anti-trafficking effort would also be appreciated. Lastly, she asked what preventive and victim support measures had been adopted to tackle prostitution – a related problem of increasing magnitude.

75. **Ms. Al-Roqishiy** (Oman) confirmed that anti-trafficking legislation had been adopted by Royal Decree in 2008. The legislation established deterrent penalties and its provisions were in line with the Palermo Protocol.

76. **Mr. Al-Nabhani** (Oman) said that a National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking composed of representatives of relevant ministries had been established. The Committee had organized seminars and awareness-raising campaigns. Tougher penalties and sentences had been introduced for trafficking-related offences.

77. The rights of domestic workers were protected under Ministry of Labour regulations introduced in 2004 and the agencies responsible for the organization and recruitment of workers had introduced model contracts that required employers to provide food, housing, medical care and an appropriate wage.

78. The Labour Code had been amended on several occasions to keep pace with changing market needs, optimize conditions for foreign workers and increase penalties for abusive employers. A specific department had been established within the Ministry of Labour to deal with the labour-related concerns of foreign workers and provide a channel for complaints. All foreign workers had the right of recourse to that complaints mechanism and were allowed to initiate judicial proceedings if their complaint was not resolved within two weeks.

79. **Ms. Al-Ibriya** (Oman) said that copies of documents containing all the information on the National Human Rights Commission and the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking requested in the course of the meeting were at the Committee's disposal.

80. **Ms. Bareiro-Bobadilla** asked for more information about measures in place to engineer the change in culture necessary to elevate women's position in society and combat entrenched attitudes, inter alia, regarding childcare responsibilities and female genital mutilation. State institutions, private companies and extended family networks all had a role to play in bringing about that change. Training was also central to combating negative stereotypes. For example, while the Government's efforts to outlaw female genital mutilation were commendable, in that area as in others, further work above and beyond the law was needed to ensure full compliance with the Convention.

81. **Ms. Jahan**, referring to a legal case mentioned in the replies to the list of issues in which prostitution charges had been brought against victims of trafficking, asked the delegation to clarify what legal safeguards were available to female victims of trafficking who were forced into prostitution and to explain how the Government protected them against further persecution in application of domestic laws criminalizing prostitution.

82. **Ms. Popescu** asked whether the Civil Service Act had already been amended to allow for the possibility of paid maternity leave and whether the Labour Code would be

amended accordingly. Noting that more than 50 per cent of all new civil servants recruited in 2010 were women, she asked how that huge increase in female representation had been achieved. Was it a reflection of targeted hiring or a special measure to address significant gender imbalances in the civil service? If the State party had already employed temporary special measures, she would welcome an explanation of the rationale behind such action.

83. **Ms. Gabr** asked for the information about the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking and the National Human Rights Commission to be made available to Committee members during the meeting. She would also like more detailed information about the roles and functions of the women working in the Public Prosecution Office. Lastly, she urged the State party to withdraw its reservation to article 15, paragraph (b), of the Convention.

84. **Ms. Acar** asked the delegation whether there were female judges and prosecutors working in the Omani judiciary. Although female genital mutilation had been outlawed in hospitals, it was clearly still practised elsewhere. She sought assurance that the State party was continuing its efforts to eliminate that extreme example of gender-based violence.

85. **Mr. Al-Kalbani** (Oman) said that the names of all members of the National Human Rights Commission, around a quarter of whom were women, were listed in the brochure available in the meeting room.

86. **Ms. Al-Roqishiy** (Oman) said that there were 22 women working as legal advisers in the Public Prosecution Office at a level equivalent to that of judges. There were no regulatory impediments to women becoming judges; a number of female candidates had recently sat the entrance examinations, the results of which would be announced shortly.

87. Prostitution was a criminal offence under the Criminal Code. However, where women involved in prostitution were found to be victims of trafficking, as defined in the Palermo Protocol, they were treated as victims not criminals and received the requisite care and support. They were also informed, if necessary through an interpreter, of the safeguards and guarantees available to them under Omani law.

88. Female genital mutilation was prohibited by law and the penalties for those who performed the procedure were severe: doctors, for example, would have their medical licences revoked.

89. Under current labour legislation, working women were entitled to up to 50 days' maternity leave. In certain companies, paid leave of up to 60 days was available and the Civil Service Act would shortly be reformed to introduce a standard 60-day entitlement across all sectors.

90. **Mr. Al-Nabhani** (Oman) said that the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking was composed of representatives of the Public Prosecution Office and all principal ministries, as well as a legal adviser and a member of the Omani police force.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*