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Summary record of the 6th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 14 February 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Lemus de Vásquez (Vice-Chair)

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Ms. Lemus de Vásquez (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports (*continued*)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant
(*continued*)

Second periodic report of Mauritania (continued) (E/C.12/MRT/2;
E/C.12/MRT/Q/2; E/C.12/MRT/RQ/2)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Mauritania joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair** invited the delegation of Mauritania to continue replying to the questions put by Committee members the previous day.
3. **A representative of Mauritania** said that social security was administered in a three-tier system. The National Health Insurance Fund covered the formal labour sector, which included civil servants, parliamentarians, the armed forces and security forces, and the personnel of national companies, or around 15 per cent of the active population. Contributions were compulsory and withheld at source. Since 2021, some 100,000 poor households had been incorporated in the Fund free of charge, guaranteeing them the same benefits as persons covered by the first scheme. Lastly, in 2023, the National Health Solidarity Fund had been introduced to cover the informal sector, which included fishers, farmers and pastoral populations. More than 43,000 individuals were currently insured and the goal was to cover around 1.5 million by the end of 2025.
4. Health insurance covered all services such as outpatient and inpatient care and medication, as well as medical evacuation abroad.
5. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the ultimate goal was universal coverage by 2030.
6. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Government was working with its technical and financial partners, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), on a study to identify ways and means of moving from an informal to a formal economy. Disaggregated statistics on unemployment would be forwarded to the Committee.
7. A number of projects and initiatives were in place to support employment, in particular for women entrepreneurs. Funding was available for cooperatives working on the transformation of local products; there were around 1,600 apprenticeships; and local employment offices had been opened in industrial areas where unemployment was a problem. Training courses, including courses on finance, were offered to young people who preferred self-employment and wished to start their own businesses.
8. Domestic work, like all employment contractual relationships, was covered by the Labour Code and also regulated under a special decree that protected domestic workers by providing a framework for working hours, labour conditions and pay.
9. A study conducted in 2022 had identified specific measures to tackle malnutrition. As a result, some 3,400 nutrition centres had been set up across the country with the support of various actors, such as the Ministry of Health and the Food Security Commission. In addition, in 2023, over 750 outpatient recovery centres had been created, which to date had treated around 93,600 children suffering from moderate malnourishment. Whereas previously the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had funded malnutrition initiatives, the State now shouldered 50 per cent of the financial burden for those centres. The Government had also started taking a more preventive approach, through campaigns to raise awareness of nutrition and support for income-generating activities to boost the revenue of mothers with children suffering from malnutrition.
10. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the National Agency for Refugee Assistance and Reintegration, set up to administer the return of refugees from Senegal, had launched numerous initiatives on their behalf, including infrastructure projects and grants of land for housing construction.

11. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Government was committed to combating child labour, not only by ratifying the relevant international conventions but also through legislative, judicial and institutional measures. The second phase of the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labour, 2022–2026, which was being implemented with ILO support, paid particular attention to the social protection of children and was constructed around several areas of action. Appropriate national mechanisms had been created to combat child labour, in accordance with the relevant legal framework; measures were being taken to strengthen the technical and operational capacity of stakeholders, including all relevant government actors; awareness-raising campaigns had been conducted across the country; direct action had been taken to prevent the worst forms of child labour in the most notorious areas of exploitation; and coordination around the action plan had been strengthened through appropriate partnerships bringing together ministries, ILO and UNICEF, among others. The National Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Civil Society had carried out a survey of child labour in the capital in 2021, which had revealed that the vast majority of a sample of 400 children engaged in child labour were boys.

12. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, with regard to the legislative and penal response to child exploitation, slavery and trafficking in persons, the statistics that had been provided to the Committee covered several important cases. In 2023, for example, a group of more than 50 children had been imported into the country for the purposes of exploitation in begging. The perpetrators had been sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment and the children reunited with their families in a neighbouring State. Another two cases had involved exploitation of children in the workplace.

13. As to the judicial system more generally, in 2019, the Government had produced a National Strategy for Access to Justice with the aim of providing quality services that were within the financial and geographical reach of the general population. Legal aid offices, funded by the State in an amount of around 107 million ouguiyas (UM), had been established in all courts. Nationwide consultations on "The justice we want" had been organized in January 2023, involving all sectors of society, including civil society and private individuals. As a result, a strategic road map for the reform and development of the justice system had been drafted: the topics covered included the status of judicial personnel, access to justice, the rights of the parties in litigation, reform of the criminal justice and penal systems, digitization of the judicial system, and the refurbishment and construction of prisons. In addition, a committee on the reform of the justice system, chaired by the President of the Republic, had been created, along with an interministerial committee bringing together concerned government departments. A workshop had recently been held on revision of the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure.

14. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, on the subject of child labour, an interministerial committee chaired by the Prime Minister had been established to oversee implementation of a plan of action for children deprived of family support.

15. **A representative of Mauritania** said that all forms of violence against children, including in schools, were prohibited in law. The Civil Status Code set the age of marriage at 18. Mauritania was in the vanguard of campaigns in Africa to raise awareness of the harm that could be done by early marriage and had set up a multisectoral committee to support the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage. It also had a national strategy based on three lines of action: the adoption of legislation to protect children; coverage of the issue in schools; and awareness-raising campaigns for interested parties and stakeholders.

16. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Government's approach to the eradication of female genital mutilation rested on the creation of partnerships and respect for the values of the community. Holistic, non-coercive and non-judgmental in nature, it had several components. To begin with, communities were made aware of the risks and consequences associated with female genital mutilation and guided towards a collective decision to abandon the practice. Subsequently, the community made an explicit declaration of intent to desist and a focus on child protection was fostered. The Government itself was fully committed to promoting the eradication of female genital mutilation at all levels; its partnership with public authorities, civil society, women's cooperatives and international agencies had been strengthened; mechanisms had been put in place at the community level to combat the practice; and the most influential Muslim leaders and legal experts had issued

a national fatwa declaring their commitment to the eradication of female genital mutilation. As a result of the combination of strategies and approaches – based on geographical regions, communities and human rights education – the taboos surrounding the practice had been broken. Between 2015 and 2019, around 600 community declarations had been made, involving some 450,000 people; and demographic and health surveys in the country had shown that the overall prevalence of female genital mutilation among girls aged up to 14 had fallen from 52 per cent in 2015 to 44.5 per cent in 2020, with a drop of between 18 per cent and 19 per cent in certain regions.

17. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the cumulative financing of health services between 2018 and 2021 had amounted to UM 46.2 billion or nearly 4 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), while the State budget allocation for health in 2024 was 10 per cent. Most of that allocation was used to fund basic health services, which were provided in accordance with the National Programme for Health Development 2022–2030 through 29 regional hospitals, 123 departmental health centres and 823 local centres that offered services related to nutrition, mother and child health and vaccinations, among others. The strategies in the National Programme were regularly monitored and evaluated by the Ministry of Health, which also published a statistical yearbook based on indicators in the National Action Plan, using information drawn from all the country’s health centres.

18. Along with the various insurance funds previously described, the priority programme of the President of the Republic also provided for treatment for victims of traffic accidents, obstetric treatment for pregnant women, free medication for diseases such as malaria, hepatitis, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, and nutritional supplements and vaccinations.

19. In line with the Government’s commitment to reproductive, maternal and child health services, a number of strategies and initiatives had been put in place to reduce maternal, neonatal and child morbidity and mortality. The proportion of women aged between 15 and 49 using contraceptive methods of any kind was constantly increasing: in 2015, it had stood at over 17 per cent and it was currently put at over 31 per cent. Usage depended on income levels, standard of education and empowerment, as well as service accessibility: prevalence was 19 per cent in rural areas and 43 per cent in urban areas.

20. **A representative of Mauritania** said that several measures had been taken to help protect the victims of slavery. The National Human Rights Commission had recently been entitled to bring criminal indemnification proceedings in cases involving slavery. In addition, a new body, the National Instance to Combat Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling, created in 2021, had various instruments at its disposal, including a national mechanism for registration and guidance of victims of trafficking and the Aid and Support Fund for Victims of Slavery. In 2023, working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Fund had disbursed aid in the amount of some UM 33 million, UM 12.8 million of which had taken the form of support for income-generating activities. The Fund’s budget had been increased by over 60 per cent for the year 2024. In addition, a toll-free hotline had been set up to report cases of trafficking.

21. In 2023, the rate of access to water and sanitation had been just over 72 per cent, as compared with 68 per cent in 2019. In the wake of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Government had provided assistance in that regard to 100,000 households. Further information on that topic would be forwarded in writing.

22. **Ms. Rossi** (Country Task Force) said that she would appreciate information on the numbers of children currently involved in child labour, on whether any evaluation of the measures to eradicate child labour had been carried out, and on the effectiveness of those measures. She would also appreciate answers to her questions at the meeting the previous day regarding revision of the laws criminalizing abortion.

23. She would be interested to hear how the State party set about gathering data for its statistics. Was there a special agency responsible for data collection? Did the State party receive international cooperation to help with data collection?

24. She would like the delegation to say more about its strategic plans for combating HIV/AIDS and the stigmatization of persons living with HIV/AIDS. She wondered what the

prevalence rate was, how many people had access to antiretroviral drugs and whether treatment was free of charge.

25. Although, according to the information provided at the previous meeting, the State party had regulations in place to minimize the impact of mining and extraction projects on water supply, wildlife and local populations, the Committee had heard reports that the law was not always enforced. She would like to know what measures were in place to ensure that the regulatory framework was applied in practice.

26. She would be interested to know whether the State party had conducted any mental health surveys. She would like to hear about any measures taken to ensure that persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities were not routinely institutionalized, and about the availability of community-based services and other support services. Lastly, in the light of the known negative effects of the criminalization of drug use, she would like to know whether the State party intended to reform its legislation, in particular with regard to the death penalty that was imposed for certain crimes. Had any measures been put in place to reduce the harm caused by narcotics abuse?

27. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, between 2016 and 2018, local child protection services had identified around 730 children who had been forced to work in industries such as car maintenance and car washing, carpentry, agriculture, fishing and dyeing in the Nouakchott area.

28. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the problem of child labour in Mauritania was related to poverty. It often took the form of work on family smallholdings, for example, unlike in other parts of the world where children were exploited in mining or other hazardous jobs. Since parents were obliged to send their children to school up to the age of 15 and the children could not legally be employed during that time, the problem was not widespread; however, statistics were difficult to obtain.

29. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the National Statistics Agency, formerly the National Statistics Office, gathered data and produced statistics for the country. In 2020, it had carried out the four-yearly household survey, which investigated poverty levels, and in 2023 it had conducted the ten-yearly population census. In addition, the social register and door-to-door household surveys made it possible to identify, for example, poor households, households with persons with disabilities, and persons with particular needs, such as pregnant women or children in certain age groups, which in turn permitted more effective, targeted action on behalf of those groups. Lastly, each ministry produced data and statistics in its own field of operations.

30. **A representative of Mauritania** said that a full picture of the prevalence and types of disability would emerge from the recent census.

31. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the therapeutic interruption of pregnancy was subject to specialist medical prescription, issued only where continuation of the pregnancy would put the mother's life at risk. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS was generally low, at around 0.2 per cent of the population, thanks to awareness-raising campaigns and to the increasing number of people with access to retroviral therapies, which now stood at over 4,200, as compared with 1,830 in 2012. All treatment of HIV/AIDS was free of charge.

32. **A representative of Mauritania** said that an interministerial committee chaired by the Prime Minister had been established to coordinate efforts to combat narcotics and drug addiction. Further, as part of reform of the justice system, an action plan was in place for the review of legislation on narcotics and psychotropic drugs. The Government was working in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in drafting programmes to combat drug abuse and address its consequences.

33. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Government had set up a central office under the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family to take responsibility for all persons with disabilities of any kind. A multisectoral council, chaired by the Prime Minister, was responsible for coordination of the various ministries working in the area of disability, in cooperation with several organizations of persons with disabilities. In addition, a joint committee had been set up, bringing together the Federation of National Associations of Persons with Disabilities and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family.

34. A special training centre for the advancement of children with disabilities helped ensure that all such children were able to attend school. A national strategy to support persons with disabilities had been drafted. The Government purchased technical equipment and apparatus for persons with disabilities every year and made available UM 90 million a year to support around 50 associations for persons with disabilities, including mental disability. A monthly cash transfer programme was in place to support 900 children with disabilities across the country; with support from UNICEF, one-off cash transfers had been made to 15,000 families; more than 600 income-generating activities had been funded using State subsidies; while the health and social security systems covered at least 3,000 persons with disabilities.

35. In terms of legislation and regulation, a number of ordinances set out the definition of persons with disabilities and the various measures to be taken, and regulated accessibility to public buildings and public transport, including adaptation of means of communication and information. In accordance with the quotas set for the employment of persons with disabilities, the Government had a special recruitment procedure, as a result of which some 5,000 persons with disabilities had obtained employment in the State sector.

36. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the law provided for heavy fines or prison sentences for the disposal of waste in public places and for the handling or sale of toxic waste or radioactive products illegally imported from abroad. As to taxation, income tax was progressive, ranging from 0 per cent to 33 per cent depending on a person's income bracket. Social and pension contributions were deductible, as were certain professional expenses. The country's total debt stood at UM 167.2 million, of which 87 per cent was external debt and 12 per cent domestic debt. In 2020, debt had amounted to 58 per cent of GDP and in 2023, 49 per cent.

37. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, as part of efforts to combat narcotics, an action plan was to be rolled out in 2024, providing for an awareness-raising campaign, introduction of the issue into the school curriculum, the strengthening of border controls and police dog squads, and support for addicts in rehabilitation centres.

38. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** (Country Task Force) said that he would appreciate receiving information on the percentage of schoolchildren who had benefited from the opening of 73 new preschool learning centres, and confirmation that the services provided were free of charge and not subject to discrimination. He would welcome any available disaggregated data, particularly by gender, regarding those centres. He wondered what measures had been taken to improve the education system and what results had been achieved. It would also be useful to have gender-disaggregated data on enrolment at all levels of education. He was interested to learn about programmes to tackle adult illiteracy and would appreciate receiving statistics on the proportions of women and men who were illiterate. Were there specific programmes aimed at tackling illiteracy among women? As the State party's periodic report had mentioned budgetary limits and challenges with regard to access to education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, he would be grateful for any information on measures taken by the Government to combat its effects.

39. Sanitation measures were crucial to reducing the school dropout rate among girls. He would therefore welcome information from the delegation on any programmes established to ensure adequate sanitation in all schools. He asked what steps the State party had taken to facilitate or increase female participation in the fields of science and technology, in terms of both education and career opportunities. Noting the intention of the State party to implement new programmes on minority languages in the education system, he wondered whether the delegation could provide information on how the three minority languages would be incorporated in the curriculum.

40. One of the core principles of academic freedom was the autonomy of teaching and research institutions. He would like to know how the State party applied that principle, particularly with regard to ensuring universities' independence and self-regulation.

The meeting was suspended at 4.30 p.m. and resumed at 4.45 p.m.

41. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the President had set the goal of enrolling 100,000 children in preschool education by the end of 2024, which was being implemented

through a strategic development plan that placed emphasis on social equity. One landmark achievement to date had been the signature of a partnership agreement between several parties, including the Ministry of Social Welfare, Children and the Family, the Ministry of Education and Reform of the Education System, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Traditional Teaching, and the Food Security Commission. Two pilot initiatives had been launched in 154 primary schools and 150 *mahadras* (traditional teaching schools). Six kindergartens had been opened in Nouakchott and provided with equipment and teaching staff. The preschool syllabus had been revised to incorporate new requirements in terms of supporting young children. Fees had been paid directly to private kindergartens by the Government for around 12,000 children from vulnerable families. In 2023, over 45,000 children had been registered in kindergartens, which represented almost 46 per cent of the target and five times the number enrolled in 2019. The 43 public kindergartens were being modernized, and preparatory classes in schools and *mahadras* were being equipped with educational materials. The syllabus had been printed so that it could be used for the training of preschool teachers, 60 of whom had been recruited in 2024.

42. **A representative of Mauritania** said that educational reform was in its second year of implementation. Measures had been taken to ensure the protection of children's rights, including the provision of food support to 380 schools, 1,412 *mahadras* and 3,300 imams. Three hundred and ninety-five schools had received updated syllabuses. At the primary and secondary education level, teachers had received training and upskilling support, and schools were receiving additional teaching equipment.

43. Reforms to education legislation had enabled the creation of a national institute for the teaching of national languages and the implementation of a pilot project to mainstream national languages in the education system. An authority responsible for the school syllabus and updating of the education information technology system had also been established; an application had been developed which enabled teachers to communicate directly with the administration; and a review of teacher training programmes in primary education had been conducted. A review of human resource capacities was also being carried out.

44. A dedicated fund for infrastructure and equipment had been set up in 2023, through which existing schools had been rehabilitated and new ones built, translating into 1,350 new classrooms. New schools had been provided with 210,000 desks since 2019. In 2024, 2,100 new classrooms would be created, with a further 1,145 classrooms under consideration.

45. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the situation for girls in schools had improved significantly in recent years through the promotion of the rights of women and girls, the creation of a so-called republican school system, the enactment of several laws and the adoption of various strategies and action plans. The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women was built on several pillars, the second of which was to guarantee basic education to all girls. Measures to that end included improving girls' access to scientific and technical education, and developing incentives to attract girls to attend school and complete their education. Campaigns had been conducted to make women heads of households more aware of educational issues, and a girls' school enrolment programme had been designed and implemented. Vocational guidance was also provided, to encourage girls to study in the scientific and technical branches.

46. The Action Plan for Rural Women included a goal to increase access to education by optimizing the supply of education in rural areas, supporting girls' enrolment in school and providing literacy programmes. The Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project, financed by the World Bank, focused on implementing measures to encourage girls to remain in school.

47. Buses were also being provided for girls in rural areas to travel to and from school, while sanitation measures, including the provision of separate toilets for boys and girls, also helped encourage girls' attendance. Awards had been set up to recognize girls who had achieved excellence in secondary schools and further education.

48. **A representative of Mauritania** said that 58 per cent of women and 74 per cent of men aged between 15 and 49 were considered literate. The literacy rate for both sexes was much higher in urban than rural areas. Access and equity regarding literacy had been improved through programmes that were tailored to meet the needs of beneficiaries; women

and teenagers who were not enrolled in the school system were the primary beneficiaries. A target of 20,000 learners had been set for 2030; to date, 5,000 had benefited. The initiative was being carried out through a partnership with the formal school system, which had the appropriate facilities, and local NGOs. The literacy programme was directly coupled with the programme for combating poverty in general. Disaggregated outcome statistics would be provided in writing.

49. **A representative of Mauritania** said that improving the quality of education and expanding the schooling of girls were the main objectives of the republican school project. Early education programmes targeting pupils in remote wilayas (governates) had been implemented nationwide and a monitoring system had been introduced, carried out by education authorities and parent teacher associations. Teaching staff had been provided with 1.2 million textbooks and 2,700 digital tablets. Eight thousand lessons had been provided for pupils preparing for secondary school leaving examinations, and measures had been taken to improve access to centres of excellence for children from poor families. A school television programme had been launched, and regional, national and international competitions were used to discover talented pupils.

50. Between 2019 and the end of 2023, the primary school completion rate had risen from 80 per cent to 88 per cent, while the proportion of pupils obtaining the secondary school certificate (*brevet*) had increased from 32 per cent to 38 per cent, and of those gaining the baccalaureate from 17 per cent to 28 per cent. In the same period, the proportion of pupils enrolled in junior and senior secondary education had risen from 40 per cent to 50 per cent and from 31 per cent to 39 per cent, respectively. The average annual growth rate in pupil numbers, at 5 per cent across the reporting period, was almost identical for boys and girls. The annual increase in the secondary school enrolment rate of girls over the period (10 per cent) had been greater than that of boys (6 per cent). In general terms, gender parity had been achieved in terms of access to education.

51. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion (Taazour) had built 98 fully equipped new schools, incorporating 653 classrooms and around 13,000 desks. Locations for the establishment of new schools were based on data on vulnerable sectors drawn from the national census. Almost 55,000 pupils from the poorest areas had accordingly gained access to education.

52. In coordination with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Children and the Family, Taazour had begun work on building 53 preschool or childcare centres, using the same principles to identify where they would be located, focusing on areas where there was a high density of poorer children.

53. In 2023, the President of the Republic had decided to grant children from poor households access to centres of academic excellence, and the Ministry of Education had accordingly set the grade threshold for admission to such institutions at 10 for pupils from that group, compared with 12 for the rest of the population. They were provided with digital tablets and given additional classes to enable them to pursue their education. A quota, of which 50 per cent was allocated to women, had also been introduced for persons from poorer households who had obtained science baccalaureates and intended to pursue studies in the health sector. They received a grant that was three times higher than that for a regular student.

54. A survey of the impact of COVID-19, including on education, indicated that 78 per cent of participating households had had at least one child attending school in the school year 2019/20. Figures also showed that almost 20 per cent of households had children who had been in contact with the school system either in person or remotely. In urban areas, 25 per cent of children had attended classes remotely, compared with 14 per cent in rural areas. Almost half of the participating households had children who had completed lessons at home, while pupils had followed educational curricula through television in 30 per cent of households, through social media in 17 per cent and via the radio 13 per cent. The Ministry of Education had deployed all available media to ensure that pupils could continue their schooling.

55. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the primary school enrolment rate for girls was 102 per cent of the rate for boys, with 35 per cent of girls enrolled in junior secondary

education, compared to 37 per cent of boys, and 40 per cent of girls enrolled in senior secondary schools, compared to 42 per cent of boys.

56. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the percentage of girls in higher education had risen to 38 per cent the previous year and had shown an average annual growth rate of 6 per cent since 2019.

57. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that, given that apostasy, sacrilege and blasphemy were crimes punishable by the death penalty under the Mauritanian Criminal Code, he wished to know how the authorities guaranteed freedom of religion and belief, which was a part of the right to cultural choice discussed in paragraph 7 of the Committee's general comment No. 21 (2009) on the right of everyone to take part in cultural life. He wondered whether that legislation would punish persons who were agnostic or atheists or who chose to have no religion, whether such persons would be subject to criminal prosecution, and whether their right to appeal any sentence was guaranteed. It would be helpful to understand how the State ensured that the legislation in force did not lead to discrimination against persons practising other religions or beliefs.

58. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** said that he would appreciate it if the delegation could comment further in response to his questions about the use of minority languages in education – particularly in terms of the Government's aspirations and the challenges it faced in that area and of how children from minority backgrounds would benefit from the new education system – and about academic freedom at university.

59. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to draw attention to articles 13–15 of the Covenant, and particularly the importance of mainstreaming a balanced and inclusive approach to human rights into teaching at all levels of education, beyond the confines of university faculties and law schools. He also wished to highlight that, in acceding to the Covenant, Mauritania had also committed to its elements on civil and political rights. He expressed the hope that the State party would adopt a balanced and inclusive rights-based approach when drawing up its curricula. The Middle East needed a stronger rights-based culture, and Mauritania had a role to play in making an Arab contribution to development of the human rights architecture, including conventions and other instruments.

60. **A representative of Mauritania** said that Mauritania was paying significant attention to the mainstreaming of human rights in education. The Government was in the process of setting up three-monthly human rights days in primary schools and was also looking into how to incorporate human rights into teacher training.

61. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, in submitting four periodic reports to the treaty bodies of the United Nations, as well as a report to the Human Rights Council during the third universal periodic review cycle, Mauritania had demonstrated political will to comply with its international commitments and ensure that respect for human rights was as widespread as possible in the country. While it was important to ratify international human rights treaties and ensure their enactment in national legislation, it was even more important for populations to take on board the substance of such legislation, and the teaching of human rights was therefore extremely important. There were plans for human rights to be incorporated into the training of those involved in law enforcement, such as judges and the police force. He also wished to point out that there was a dedicated ad hoc committee for the implementation of treaty body recommendations in Mauritania.

62. **A representative of Mauritania** said that Mauritania saw human rights as interdependent and attached great importance to them. Activities to raise awareness of human rights were carried on at all levels, including seminars for young people at universities and in schools organized by a department of the National Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Civil Society. There was also a human rights unit at the University of Nouakchott Al Aasriya.

63. **A representative of Mauritania** said that Mauritania was an Islamic country governed by sharia. Article 1 of the Constitution stated that Islam was the religion of the people and the State. The death penalty was reserved for the most serious crimes and could be appealed in courts of second instance. Mauritania had one of the oldest moratoria on executions, and death penalties could not be carried out until the outcome of an administrative

appeal to the court of last resort had been reached. The law also offered alternative measures, such as pardons and commutations, in some circumstances. Furthermore, the Supreme Court had ruled that all persons facing penalties involving corporal punishment should be immediately released if they provided sufficient guarantees.

64. **A representative of Mauritania** said that academic freedom was governed by Act No. 2017-048, which set the rules and standards to be respected by higher education institutions, teachers, researchers and students. It also set out the conditions for access to higher education, teacher training methods for higher education, and monitoring and quality control mechanisms for higher education. The Act was intended to improve the quality of education and promote access to quality education for all Mauritanian citizens.

65. **A representative of Mauritania** said that one of the main challenges for the teaching of national languages was ensuring that there were enough teachers. To that end, the Government had set up a teacher training centre.

66. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, to improve the quality of education, the Government, in collaboration with the General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion (Taazour), had recently begun building social housing for teachers, especially in remote, inland parts of the country, where teachers often found it difficult to stay year-round. In application of the policy known as social promotion, training was also provided for poor households to explain their rights and how to exercise social and economic rights.

67. The National Agency for Statistics and Demographic and Economic Analysis (ANSADE), through its four-yearly household living conditions survey, had found in 2019–2020 that the poverty rate had fallen from 31 per cent in 2014 to 28.9 per cent. The poverty rate varied by region, standing at 41 per cent in rural areas and 14.4 per cent in urban areas. Extreme poverty had fallen from 16.6 per cent in 2014 to 12.8 per cent; it stood at 20.6 per cent in rural areas and 4.5 per cent in urban areas. Inequality in household living standards had also been reduced, with the share of the population in the richest quintile falling from 41.2 per cent to 39.7 per cent and the country's Gini coefficient index having fallen between 2014 and 2018.

68. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu** (Country Rapporteur), thanking the delegation for its responses, said that the country's commitment to incorporate human rights into education was encouraging and that she hoped the Committee's concluding observations would help make a difference on the ground for the people of Mauritania.

69. **A representative of Mauritania**, thanking the Committee for its interventions, said that its concluding observations would be disseminated, implemented in policies and programmes, and incorporated into the work of bodies tasked with following up on the recommendations of treaty bodies. He also welcomed the support of the Committee and the international community for the country's policies, strategies and action plans on the promotion and protection of human rights.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.