



**Meeting of the States Parties
to the Convention on the
Rights of the Child**

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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Forty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1167th MEETING (Chamber A)

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 13 September 2006, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. LEE

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS BY STATES PARTIES (item 4 on the agenda)
(*continued*)

Second periodic report of Oman [(CRC/C/OMN/2); list of items to be dealt with (CRC/C/OMN/Q/2); written replies by the State party to the list of items to be dealt with (CRC/C/OMN/Q/2/Add.1)] (*continued*)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the Omani delegation resumed their places at the Committee table.*

2. Mr. SIDDIQUI wished for clarification on the extent of poverty among children living in low-income families, including the children of foreigners settled in Oman, and on the regional disparities in terms of living standards, for example between urban and rural areas. He also wished to know whether there were any religious schools and, if so, whether their curricula were approved by the relevant authorities.

3. The CHAIRPERSON wished to obtain further information about independent monitoring mechanisms. She asked whether the new law had enabled the age of criminal liability to be raised. In the State party's report (paragraph 480), it emerged that a child aged between 13 and 15 years who had committed a crime was liable to be sentenced to imprisonment. She noted with concern the rate of malnutrition, which was high considering the GNP and led to a high mortality rate among children under 5 years of age. She wished to know what progress had been made with the bill concerning disabled children, and whether the Government intended to implement a national policy in this respect in the near future. She also hoped for data on the efforts made to integrate disabled children into state schools. Referring to tables 1 and 2 of the State party's report, she asked why disabled children were sent to special needs institutions abroad and why the number of children placed in those schools had increased regularly since 2003. Finally, she wished to know whether Oman had adopted, or planned to adopt, the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.

4. Mrs. JAAFAR (Oman) stated that, contrary to what had been said, the Ministry of Health's budget had increased in the past two years.

5. The mortality rate among young people had dropped considerably over a short period, from 6 ‰ inhabitants in 1995 to 2.5 ‰ inhabitants in 2005. Among the under-25s, 20 % of deaths were due to road accidents. To combat that phenomenon, partly linked to speeding and to risky behaviour, the Government had recently taken measures, particularly legislative measures.

6. At the end of 2005, 1,453 HIV-positive persons had been recorded in Oman (1,060 men and 393 women). 8.5% of the total number were children under the age of 15, and 16.9% were 15-20-year-olds. In view of the increased number of cases of contamination, especially from the age of 15 onwards, the Ministry of Health had given priority to young people in its 2001-2005 five-year plan. Information sessions, focussed on the illness and means of transmission, had been organised in schools, and awareness-raising campaigns had been launched. Young people should, therefore, be informed of the risks of transmission of the virus. In 2003, a training centre for young people had been opened. Finally, a free telephone information

helpline, accessible 24 hours a day, had been set up with the cooperation of UNICEF.

7. Excision remained a widespread phenomenon. The Ministries of Social Affairs, Youth Affairs, Education and Health, as well as the various relevant committees, took that issue very seriously. The overall health survey devoted a whole section to excision, the aim being to assess the extent of the problem: how many little girls were mutilated, where, how and by whom? When this information was known, an awareness-raising campaign would be launched, accompanied by a strategy involving all parties.

8. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether, in parallel to the awareness-raising campaign, the Sultanate intended to promulgate a law prohibiting excision.

9. Mrs. JAAFAR (Oman) considered that it was a practice based on religious and traditional values, which was difficult to combat by simple prohibition. Society needed to become aware of the gravity of the problem and exert pressure on the legislative and judicial authorities. That would also save the Ministry of Health from entering into conflict with other Government bodies.

10. Mr. KOTRANE insisted on the importance of raising the whole population's awareness of the gravity of the problem, especially women and religious leaders. He stressed that this practice was not based on religion and that it was necessary to pass a law.

11. Mr. AL BUSAIDI (Oman) considered that it was easy to promulgate a law, but difficult to implement it. According to him, excision no longer took place in hospitals, but in families; and it was difficult to know what was going on in homes. Therefore, it was first and foremost families that needed to be made aware of the dangers of excision.

12. Mr. AL BALUSHI (Oman) was astonished by the remark made about a reduction in the Ministry of Education's budget. On the contrary, that budget was on the increase.

13. The school drop-out rate remained too high. The Ministry had implemented a new policy aiming to improve the quality of teaching, so as to interest more pupils. School textbooks had been revised and adapted to children's needs. There had been profound reflection on the notion of basic education, bringing about a change in the traditional point of view on the issue. Teachers had received training. Final examinations, which normally took place at the end of the school year, had been abolished. Thus the drop-out rate, which was 6.3% for boys and 4% for girls during the year 2002-2003, had decreased. Today it was less than 1% for girls. That improvement was also connected to the work done with teachers and civil society, and with the adoption of the resolution raising the age of marriage.

14. Disabled children had hitherto been sent to neighbouring countries, for the Sultanate had no special needs institutions. Recently, Oman had stepped up its efforts to provide for these children, particularly by building special needs establishments, thanks to the help of civil society organisations. All those establishments, which were private, were situated in the capital, Muscat, and were able to accommodate the majority of disabled children, except in certain specific cases. Besides that, disabled children were now partially integrated into state

schools. In some subjects, they of course received assistance from special needs teachers.

15. A survey undertaken in 1999 with the support of UNICEF had demonstrated that the learning difficulties that some children suffered from, and which could induce them to drop out of school, could have diverse causes: psychological problems, pronunciation defects, dyslexia, hearing deficiencies, etc. 10 experimental classes had been opened in 10 regions to respond to the special needs of some 400 children with learning difficulties.

16. Even if school was not compulsory for the moment, the State was stepping up its efforts to guarantee education for all, if necessary by means of mobile classes. That had meant that the proportion of country children attending school had risen from fewer than 30% 10 years ago to nearly 80% today. In the same vein, single classes had been opened in mountain villages to enable children living in remote regions to attend school.

17. Education in human rights had been introduced into school curricula with the help of UNICEF. Teachers had received specialised training for this.

18. Both in private and in state schools, pupils' councils and parents' councils enabled pupils and their parents to participate in the life of the establishment and make their points of view known to its administration. Corporal punishment and all other forms of violence were strictly forbidden at school; detecting signs of it was an important task for social workers practising in the school environment.

19. Some foreigners residing temporarily on Omani soil chose to place their children in international schools, which were relatively expensive, so that they could subsequently readjust to the curriculum of their country of origin; but any child of school age could, regardless of nationality, attend Omani state schools, which were free of charge and of excellent quality.

20. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether the State party intended to make schooling compulsory for all and whether this issue was discussed in Omani society.

21. Mr. AL BALUSHI (Oman) replied that discussion on that subject was only just beginning. The Ministry of Education had already worked on various solutions for attaining the principle of compulsory schooling, but it also had to think about enforcement decrees and sanctions to be imposed in the event of non-compliance, to cite but one example, and to be vigilant that counter-productive measures were not introduced, which would necessarily take a certain amount of time. To be effective, the introduction of compulsory schooling had to be accompanied by other measures, like a ban on working before the age at which compulsory schooling ended. He said that deliberations were in progress on that subject and that he was hopeful that legislation would be passed in the near future.

22. Mrs. JAAFAR (Oman), proceeding to health-related issues, explained that the serious problem of malnutrition was difficult to resolve. Despite efforts undertaken as long ago as the nineteen-eighties, the authorities had for a long time found it difficult to understand the causes of it. The launching of the Sixth Five-Year Plan had afforded the opportunity to set up a department specialising in nutrition, as well as a committee of experts responsible for formulating opinions. Many surveys had had to be conducted in order to better understand this phenomenon. The outcome was that it was often between the ages of one and three years, during the transition

from breastfeeding to solid food, that children showed the most deficiencies. It similarly emerged that numerous women suffered from anaemia during their pregnancies, for which reason anaemia screening among pregnant women had been introduced, along with administering vitamins if necessary, which had very positive results. Some flours were enriched with folic acid and iron. Surveys showed that the information campaigns of the past five years had succeeded in reducing reticence and that the population was increasingly aware of the usefulness of consuming enriched products.

23. A pilot programme of so-called “integrated management of childhood illnesses”, consisting in weighing and systematically examining babies, had yielded excellent results, and should be extended to the whole country. Since 1997, all the country’s hospitals had been labelled “baby-friendly”. Breastfeeding was encouraged and UNICEF had launched an initiative to that effect in the country. To promote breastfeeding, women were entitled to 45 days of paid maternity leave compared to two months beforehand.

24. Mr. KOTRANE noted with satisfaction that the Sultanate had signed the ILO’s Maternity Protection Convention (No. 103), and he encouraged it to put into effect its clause providing for 12 weeks of maternity leave.

25. The CHAIRPERSON expressed astonishment that maternity leave had been altered from two months to 45 days.

26. Mr. SIDDIQUI asked whether there were any nurseries and day-care centres.

27. Mr. AL BUSAIDI (Oman) said there were some nurseries, which were unfortunately private, and therefore had to be paid for. Apart from a pilot experiment, they were all situated in the capital, Muscat, where traditions were less tenacious and women less suspicious at the idea of entrusting their children to a third party.

28. Mrs. AL ZRIA (Oman) specified that foreign children could be admitted to nurseries, just like Omani children, and that these establishments were governed by an ethical charter.

29. Mr. KRAPPMANN, supported by Mr. KOTRANE, asked whether Oman intended to set up a pre-school education system which would take care of children from the age of one year onwards and would provide them with early-learning activities from the age of two years, in accordance with the recommendations of the final outcome document of the Assembly General’s Special Session on children, entitled “A World Fit for Children”.

30. Mr. AL BUSAIDI (Oman) said that parents who wished their children to attend school before the age of six could place them in private establishments, in schools inspired by the Montessori system, which took children aged between three and six years and used creative and play activities as a basis for promoting the child’s intellectual development.

31. Mrs. AL HARITHI (Oman) specified that only 10% of children of pre-school age were fortunate enough to benefit from this type of education because parents were not always even aware of the existence of these schools or did not have the means to pay the entrance fees. A survey currently being conducted by the relevant authorities aimed to build up a fuller picture of the education situation in the country, especially of parents’ expectations.

32. Oman did not have any statistics on violence suffered by children, but was aware that it was necessary to assess the extent of that phenomenon and pass a law to prevent physical and psychological mistreatment and to expressly prohibit violence within the family. In cooperation with UNICEF, the Sultanate intended to conduct a survey on the subject, on the evidence of the special telephone helpline for children, which would enter into service in October 2006. This emergency line would enable children to report any mistreatment they had suffered and receive advice on the procedure to follow in order to get help.

33. Mr. AL BUSAIDI (Oman) pointed out that, to combat violence within the family, various professions, such as teachers and health workers, were encouraged to cooperate and to inform the relevant authorities if they thought a child under their responsibility was being mistreated. Consequently, an emergency doctor detecting signs of physical violence on a child was obliged, with or without the parents' agreement, to have that child examined by an expert in forensic medicine. Similarly, teachers noticing obvious signs of mistreatment – lack of concentration, visible trauma – were obliged to inform the authorities so that an investigation could be carried out by a social worker. Once the child had been questioned, the investigation could be pursued informally within the family, in order to counsel the parents and help them to rectify the situation.

34. Mr. KOTRANE insisted on the necessity, for the State party, to set up a rigorous legal system and to take the necessary measures to ensure that the participants – doctors, school heads, social workers – were legally bound to produce a report, so that these children would be properly protected.

35. Mr. AL BUSAIDI (Oman) said that the complaints and detection system was still in its infancy, but he had no doubt that things would improve once children were aware of the existence of the emergency telephone helpline and started making use of it.

36. Mrs. AL ZRIA (Oman) said that Oman had set up reception centres where children of the same age-group were accommodated in the same dormitory under the supervision of a housemistress who was attentive to providing for all their needs. Whenever possible, children would maintain links with their families, and could even rejoin the family home if the authorities responsible for the placement deemed it appropriate.

37. Mr. AL BUSAIDI (Oman) added that the relevant authorities encouraged recourse to the kafalah for orphans, placing the child either in a family which would bring him or her up as one of their own children, providing for all his or her needs, or else in a family which would provide board and lodging while another family undertook to pay all the costs pertaining to his or her upbringing.

38. Poverty was not restricted to rural regions and did not affect solely migrant workers, who were remunerated for their work on a par with Omanis. Wages were fixed according to the family situation of the employee, which explained why Omani workers who were family breadwinners received higher wages than unmarried migrant workers. The disparity in earnings between Omanis and migrant workers was also due to the different functions each occupied, and to their skill levels, and in no case to their nationality.

39. Mr. AL SAADI (Oman) said that, in the event of mistreatment of a child, the Criminal Code provided for the Public Prosecutor to start public proceedings directly on the child's behalf.

40. Following the concluding remarks formulated by the Committee after its consideration of the initial report by the State party, Oman had set up a committee with special responsibility for the issue of child jockeys, which had advocated raising to 18 the minimum age for practising that sport.

41. Mr. Al Saadi acknowledged that his country had still not adopted legislation to give effect to the provisions of the Convention, but stated that that instrument was a source of constant inspiration in defining measures taken for the benefit of children.

42. Although it was a transit country for migrant workers, Oman was not affected by the scourge of sexual exploitation. It had nevertheless ratified the Convention on the Suppression and Prevention of Trafficking in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, and had set up committees to monitor their application.

43. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO asked whether the law concerning the minimum age for child jockeys was accompanied by measures for its application and whether it was aimed solely at new recruits, or also at children who were already engaged in that occupation.

44. The CHAIRPERSON, referring to paragraph 494 of the report on child jockeys, expressed concern for the health of 17-year-old adolescents who weighed only 22 kilos, and asked whether parents should not be alerted to the dangers their children were exposed to.

45. Mr. AL BUSAIDI (Oman) specified that, in the Sultanate, children who took part in camel races were not foreign children who were victims of trafficking, as was the case in other countries in that region, but Omanis, who were the sons of camel drivers or herd owners. They were selected on the basis of their aptitude and were obliged to go on a diet because, the lighter they were, the better were their performances, and this had serious repercussions on their health. To remedy this problem and to completely ban the participation of children in those races, the minimum age for jockeys had been raised and the Government intended to apply sanctions against anyone who contravened the rules.

46. As far as sexual exploitation of children was concerned, Mr Al Busaidi recalled that prostitution was illegal and that persons infringing the law, whether they were Omanis or foreigners, were liable to be prosecuted. Although forms of sexual exploitation of children probably existed in the country, no such case had been reported to date.

47. Mr. AL SAADI (Oman) pointed out that children worked in the fishery and agriculture sectors to help their parents. The Government was trying to combat that phenomenon, but it was not in a position to intervene in all cases. The situation should improve once the minimum age for admission to employment had been raised.

48. Criminal legislation was on the point of being supplemented by a juvenile law bill, which would be adopted very shortly. The new text provided for the setting-up of institutions, the appointing of magistrates specifically responsible for minors, and the replacement of prison sentences by other sanctions not involving loss of liberty.

At present, there was no justice system for minors, but, when a child was interviewed by representatives of the justice system, provision was made for his or her parents, or a counsel, to attend the interrogation and the hearings. Finally, to combat and prevent drug dependency among young people and adults, a National Committee on Drugs and Psychotropic Substances had been set up.

49. Mrs. ORTIZ wished to know whether the curriculum of the law faculties had been altered yet to include a lesson on the Convention.

50. Mrs. ANDERSON asked why an Omani mother could not transmit her nationality to her child.

51. Mr. AL BUSAIDI (Oman) said that the curriculum of the law faculties did not yet provide for instruction specifically on the Convention and that, for the moment, study of that instrument depended on the lecturer's choice. With regard to transmission of her nationality by the mother, the Omani delegation had contacted the relevant authorities but had obtained no explanation on that subject. Any child born in the Sultanate obtained his or her father's nationality, whether the father was Omani or not, and it was only when the identity of the child's father was unknown that the child could take the mother's nationality.

52. Mrs. ORTIZ remarked that a child ought to be able to obtain his or her mother's nationality if he or she was born and lived in the Sultanate and if all the family was Omani. If the father was foreign, the child automatically became foreign and therefore did not have the same rights as Omani children.

53. Mr. KOTRANE pointed out in this connection that several countries in the region had already amended their legislation so that a mother could transmit her nationality to her children, the aim being for them to benefit from the same rights as Omani children.

54. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether there was an independent, impartial mechanism in the State party to receive and consider complaints made by children.

55. Mr. AL BUSAIDI (Oman) said that there was not yet any institution of that type.

56. Mr. KOTRANE said that, in its concluding remarks, the Committee would probably mention in the category of positive aspects the importance attached by the State party to education and the good results obtained with regard to infant mortality. Among the subjects giving rise to concern, the Committee might deem it useful to raise the issues of malnutrition and the shortage of day-care centres, and, among its recommendations, it would probably urge the Omani Government to ensure that law faculty curricula provided instruction about the Convention, to adopt the juvenile law bill as soon as possible, and to intensify the fight against economic and sexual exploitation of children.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.