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Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 19 October 2015, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Seetulsingh (Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of Mr. Salvioli, Mr. Seetulsingh (Vice-Chairperson) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant

Second periodic report of Greece (CCPR/C/GRC/2; CCPR/C/GRC/Q/2 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Greece took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Papaioannou** (Greece), introducing the second periodic report of Greece (CCPR/C/GRC/2), said that a large number of government ministries had been involved in drafting the periodic report, which also contained information from the National Commission for Human Rights and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

3. For six years, Greece had been suffering a severe economic crisis. Following negotiations with the competent national institutions, the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, a raft of extreme austerity measures had been adopted in an attempt to tackle the crisis. According to the latest survey conducted by the Hellenic Statistical Authority, in 2013, 36 per cent of the population were at risk of poverty or social exclusion; the country's gross domestic product had fallen by 25 per cent; and the general and youth unemployment rates had reached 26.5 per cent and 52.4 per cent, respectively. In 2015, the National Commission for Human Rights had stressed the importance of conducting human rights impact assessments prior to adopting measures that could affect the enjoyment of fundamental rights and had reiterated that austerity measures served to strengthen extremist elements, increase intolerance and undermine democratic institutions. The newly re-elected Government would strive to protect the rights of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable segments of society, while implementing the most recent financial assistance agreement. In March 2015, a law had been adopted to guarantee persons and families living in extreme poverty access to basic goods and services through the provision of free electricity, rental allowances and food stamps. While the Government was making every effort to give effect to the provisions of the Covenant, drastic budget cuts and other financial constraints would inevitably affect the enjoyment of civil and political rights in the country.

4. The migration and refugee crisis that had unfolded in recent months was one of the most pressing challenges for European countries, including Greece. The country's position at the external border of the European Union and its proximity to some of the main countries of origin and transit for irregular migration placed it under strong migratory pressure. The scale of the phenomenon had reached unprecedented levels, as demonstrated by the fact that 394,658 migrants had entered Greece over the first nine months of 2015, as against only 31,273 over the first nine months of 2014. Most of the migrants were originally from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Afghanistan and it was estimated that between 75 per cent and 80 per cent of them were refugees. The Hellenic Coast Guard had been sparing no effort to save human lives at sea and the inhabitants of Greek islands such as Lesbos and other volunteers had been engaging in acts of solidarity in support of newly arrived migrants. Moreover, Greece had been praised by the international community for its robust response to the refugee crisis. However, the country's capacity to receive new migrants was now overstretched. The Government had nonetheless managed to construct temporary accommodation for a number of refugees in the Athens area. It was striving to provide new migrants and refugees with appropriate accommodation but it did not have sufficient means at its disposal.

5. Significant progress had been made with reception and asylum as a result of the implementation of the National Action Plan on Asylum and Immigration. A new asylum service operated by civilian personnel and a new appeals authority had been set up. Furthermore, asylum procedures had been accelerated and the recognition rate of refugees and the number of beneficiaries of subsidiary protection had increased. A number of preliminary reception centres had been established and a new system for registering, assessing and determining the identity and the country of origin of third country nationals had been introduced. The centres provided unaccompanied minors with medical treatment and psychological support and referred them to a prosecutor so that they could be assigned a guardian and placed in an open accommodation centre. However, there were insufficient reception centres to meet demand and the system whereby guardians were appointed, which had been found to be inefficient, was under review. Migrants awaiting expulsion could be held in pre-removal detention centres. Following a change in government policy, detention was only resorted to in a limited number of cases and could not exceed 6 months in length. Alternative measures to detention had also been introduced. No country could deal with such an international humanitarian crisis alone. It was only through international cooperation and burden sharing that a solution ensuring respect for the rights of all migrants and refugees could be reached.

6. There had been an alarming increase in violent racist attacks against foreigners during the period 2012-2013. Extremist organizations had taken advantage of the disillusionment of the segments of society adversely affected by the economic crisis, the fear associated with a sharp increase in irregular migration and the anger felt by many against the country's political system to further their agenda, particularly through hate speech and acts of violence. Following the murder of a young Greek anti-fascist by members of the Golden Dawn party in 2013, the Government had stepped up its efforts to eradicate extreme acts of violence. Several members of Golden Dawn were currently being tried for offences that included membership of a criminal organization.

7. In 2014, anti-racism legislation had been updated and strengthened to punish public incitement to acts that could result in discrimination, hatred or violence against individuals or groups of individuals by reason of their race, colour, religion, descent, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability; the establishment of or participation in an organization that systematically sought to commit such acts; and the malicious denial or trivialization of genocide. The updated legislation also provided victims with special protection to encourage the reporting of racist crimes and prescribed harsher penalties for perpetrators. Furthermore, Parliament could suspend State funding to political parties whose leaders or elected officials were suspected of and provisionally detained for racist offences. Two new police units and 68 new offices had been set up for the purpose of investigating acts of racist violence and two prosecutors specializing in racist crime had been appointed. Data collection on racist crime, human trafficking and domestic violence had greatly improved. The Racist Violence Recording Network had developed new methods of recording such crimes. Identifying and punishing racist violence, especially when it coincided with police violence, remained a challenge, as did tackling hate speech. The Government planned to introduce a monitoring mechanism to address the latter phenomenon. The fight against racism could only be won by addressing the social conditions that formed the breeding ground for racist behaviour and by fostering greater tolerance and acceptance of diversity through education.

8. **Mr. Shany** said that the Committee welcomed the State party's efforts to improve the human rights situation in its national territory, notwithstanding the economic crisis and the strong migratory pressure that it was facing.

9. Noting that the provisions of the Covenant had been incorporated into the domestic legal order and could be invoked before the courts, he requested examples of recent cases in which the Covenant and, more specifically, the Views of the Committee had been invoked to provide a remedy or to circumvent contrary provisions of law in domestic legislation. Referring to paragraph 129 of the State party's replies to the list of issues, he asked whether the Supreme Court had taken paragraph 13 of the Committee's 2005 concluding observations (CCPR/CO/83/GRC) into consideration before ruling that depriving debtors of their liberty for failing to pay a debt when they were capable of doing so did not contravene article 11 of the Covenant. He asked whether Act No. 2462/1997 on the ratification of the Covenant granted courts the power to impose criminal penalties for actions or omissions that violated its provisions.

10. He requested additional information on the current procedure for implementing the Views adopted by the Committee under the Optional Protocol to the Covenant. He also wished to know which State institution was responsible for monitoring the implementation of Views. Noting that, according to the State party's written replies to the list of issues, criminal cases could not be reopened even when the Committee had found the closure of the proceedings to be in violation of the Covenant, he asked whether decisions not to prosecute, final convictions and acquittals could be reviewed on the basis of a ruling from an international court. Did article 525, section 5, of the Code of Criminal Procedure, as amended by Act No. 2865/2000, also apply to the Committee's Views?

11. Turning to communication No. 1799/2008 (*Georgopoulos et al. v. Greece*), he asked whether referring the author to the municipal authorities to seek a remedy was consistent with the obligation of the State itself to provide such a remedy and whether that referral was feasible in view of the five-year statute of limitations that applied to tort cases and the reported lengthy delays in court proceedings. The Committee harboured serious doubts over whether the author would be able to obtain an effective remedy through that channel. While the Committee's Views could not dictate the outcome of a specific set of criminal proceedings, in the *Georgopoulos* case the local court had not only absolved the alleged perpetrators of criminal responsibility but had rejected the Committee's position that the evictions were unlawful, thus denying the author access to any form of reparation. In the light of the above, he invited the delegation to explain how the outcome of the *Georgopoulos* case could be considered a faithful implementation of the Committee's Views.

12. Lastly, he asked whether the National Commission for Human Rights now possessed the necessary financial resources to function effectively and independently; what difficulties it was facing as a result of the introduction of austerity measures; and what measures the State party had taken to overcome those difficulties.

13. **Ms. Waterval** said that the absence of statistical data on the participation and representation of women in political and public life made it all but impossible for the Committee to assess the impact of the measures taken in that regard. She asked how many women were currently serving as government ministers or governors and how many women occupied director-level positions in the health sector and in public utility companies. She also wished to know whether Act No. 2839/2000, which had introduced a compulsory gender quota in councils, public bodies and local authorities, had led to an increase in women's representation and participation in political and public life; whether its impact was subject to evaluation; and whether there were any obstacles to its effective implementation.

14. Noting that, under article 3, paragraph 2, of Act No. 4030/2011, it was mandatory to submit an accessibility plan to obtain a building licence, she asked whether there was a mechanism in place to monitor compliance with that requirement.

The Committee was concerned about the disproportionate impact of the current economic crisis and the resulting austerity measures on women, children and persons with disabilities, and about the widening gender pay gap. She asked what steps the State party had taken to anticipate and offset the impact of the austerity measures on the most vulnerable segments of Greek society and whether the State party planned to extend the programme entitled “Reconciling work and family life 2014-2015”. What results had the special four-year employment promotion programme yielded and had its impact been assessed? How had the integrated social inclusion interventions improved the situation of the most vulnerable groups in Greek society? She would welcome statistical data on the number of persons with disabilities living in the State party and on the number of such persons in employment. The Committee had received reports that, despite the introduction of special transport arrangements, a large proportion of children with disabilities were still unable to attend school. She requested the delegation to comment.

15. She would also welcome information on the National Programme for Substantive Gender Equality, including the reason why it had been extended, and whether it would be evaluated, modified and relaunched after it had ended and whether another programme would take its place.

16. She asked whether Act No. 3896/2010 protected women with disabilities and requested information on methods of restraining persons with mental disabilities; the Committee had received information that excessive restraint was widely used in the country, including cages for children with mental disabilities, and had recently contributed to the deaths of patients in a fire at the Dafni Psychiatric Hospital.

17. **Sir Nigel Rodley** said that he would welcome clarification of the amendments to Act No. 927/1979, in particular with regard to the removal of article 2, in view of reports that the law no longer covered some forms of hate speech. He asked whether the newly established police departments and prosecutors tasked with investigating acts of racial violence could also investigate hate crimes committed on grounds of gender identity.

18. While he commended the efforts made to tackle police violence, he requested clarification of the State party’s assertion that complaints made by foreign citizens were given priority. He enquired whether the office responsible for handling alleged instances of abuse by the police and prison staff had been allocated the necessary resources and invited the delegation to comment on reports from civil society that prosecutors were reluctant to proceed with cases of abuse by the police, even when effective investigations had been carried out. Lastly, he would welcome more specific information on investigations into violence perpetrated by law-enforcement and prison officials and on the results of any prosecutions.

19. **Mr. Bouzid** said that, despite the commendable efforts to combat racism and xenophobia and to ensure that all crimes were thoroughly investigated, there were reports that racist attacks against foreigners persisted and that hate speech was widely used by the media and public figures. Furthermore, 60 per cent of victims of racism — largely refugees and asylum seekers — were under international protection measures and most racist attacks were carried out by organized groups and involved beatings, stabbings and attacks on property. The Committee had also been informed that most victims did not report racism for fear of abuse by police and there were shortcomings in the investigation and prosecution of racist crimes. He asked what legislation served as the basis for the proceedings in cases of hate crime and hate speech mentioned in paragraph 46 of the replies to the list of issues and whether the Government would consider reinstating article 2 of Act No. 927/1979 so as to explicitly penalize hate speech and hate crimes. He also wondered whether the Government would be willing to allow civil society organizations to act as litigants in hate crime cases.

20. He asked how the State party had reached the conclusion that the decrease in trafficking in persons in the country was due to the fact that perpetrators were using different routes. While Greece had ratified several international and European agreements to combat trafficking, more effective enforcement of them was needed. There were reports that procedures relating to trafficking in children and Roma were lax and that actual cases of trafficking were much higher than the Government's estimates. There had been 600 complaints since 2006 and he wished to know what the status of the investigations into them was, and what reparation for victims was available. Furthermore, according to some reports, migrants were often employed illegally in conditions similar to servitude or worse, particularly in the agricultural sector. In one case, indeed, an employer had fired shots at 35 migrant workers. Yet employers often went unpunished because they were prominent figures with political connections. How did the Government intend to address that problem?

21. **Mr. Politi** said that statistics on the extent of the application of Act No. 3463/2006, under which municipalities could cede ownership of municipal property to Roma, would be useful. The Committee was concerned that the exclusion of Roma children from mainstream schools remained common and that segregated Roma schools were often located far from Roma communities. He requested information on evictions of Roma, often as a result of discrimination against them with regard to property rights. Additionally, Roma were frequently evicted without being placed in alternative housing, or were housed in remote areas that lacked proper infrastructure, all without being consulted. In some cases, families had been settled for decades prior to their eviction and relocation. He asked what measures had been adopted to end the practice of ethnic profiling by the police, which often targeted Roma, and requested specific statistics on polygamy and the age of marriage among Roma communities.

22. He asked why the number of women victims of domestic violence had not decreased significantly despite the introduction of new legislation and what acts of violence were now punished that had not been covered previously. He requested confirmation that, according to the Criminal Code, rape and sexual violence constituted breaches of sexual dignity, rather than torture, and that the National Action Plan on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women had not been extended beyond 2013. He sought the delegation's comments on reports that women victims of violence were often denied effective access to justice. He would welcome more detailed information on the number of complaints and investigations into such cases, on the resulting prosecutions and sentences, and on the compensation, shelters and services provided for victims. Lastly, he requested information on the mediation procedure for domestic violence cases and on training programmes for police officers, judges and prosecutors relating to domestic violence legislation.

23. **Ms. Cleveland** asked how migrants were made aware of the mechanisms to report racism and xenophobia and how many benefited from special temporary residence protection.

24. **The Chairperson** asked whether the procedure for authors of communications to exercise their rights as identified in the Committee's Views might be made more efficient; currently, authors were required to file a new suit against the State for civil damages.

The meeting was suspended at 4.20 p.m. and resumed at 4.45 p.m.

25. **Mr. Kastanas** (Greece) said that the Greek authorities were of the view that States parties to the Optional Protocol had an obligation of means rather than an obligation of result. By providing authors of communications with legal avenues for reparation, and by giving all due consideration to the Views of the Committee, the State met those obligations. Compensation for damages could be sought in the

country's administrative courts on the strength of the findings of the Committee. However, no one had yet sought compensation on such grounds; questioning the efficacy of a procedure that had not yet been tested therefore struck him as slightly premature. In any event, anyone who believed that he or she was entitled to compensation for damages from the State could submit a request for a settlement or a conciliatory resolution of the dispute to the Legal Council of the State, a body responsible for settling disputes against the State, among other functions. The Legal Council was not competent to settle claims against local authorities.

26. Greek legislation did not provide for the reopening of domestic court cases after the Committee adopted its Views on individual communications. The delivery of the Committee's Views might lead to a decision to delete a particular criminal case from the archives, but a final decision by the courts could not be overturned.

27. **Ms. Rossidi** (Greece) said that Greek courts of all instances had referred consistently to the Covenant. Guidelines for judges and prosecutors also made frequent mention of its provisions. A recent advisory opinion of the public prosecutor of the Supreme Court had encouraged prosecutors at appeals courts to identify any prosecutions that were incompatible with the provisions of the Covenant. International human rights instruments had been invoked in the domestic courts more frequently in the past 30 years, not least because human rights treaty law was currently covered in the training of all members of the judiciary. The Committee's concluding observations on the country's second periodic report would be translated into Greek and disseminated widely.

28. **Mr. Papaioannou** (Greece) said that, although there was sporadic racist violence in Greece, it was no longer perpetrated by organized militias, as it had been some three years before. Politicians and religious figures sometimes engaged in hate speech, but as a rule they were condemned by their colleagues. Perhaps the greatest concern in that regard was that people had come to view hate speech as ordinary discourse. The steps taken to combat the phenomenon included monitoring hate speech and planning online campaigns to combat its use among young people. The legislative framework in that regard was satisfactory, but institutional responses needed to be strengthened.

29. Right-wing extremists had first come to public notice in Greece in the 1970s, but for years their presence had been a marginal phenomenon. The rise of Golden Dawn was a new development and it was causing the authorities to reconsider how a democracy should react when its enemies gained public support and questioned its fundamental rules. It might be necessary, for instance, to amend the Constitution, under which it was currently not possible to ban political parties. State funding of Golden Dawn had been withdrawn and the ongoing trial of several of its leaders, including 17 members of Parliament, was one of the largest trials in Greek history.

30. **Ms. Rossidi** (Greece) said that Parliament had recently strengthened the country's anti-racism legislation. Under article 81 (a) of the Criminal Code, the commission of an offence on the grounds of the victim's race was an aggravating circumstance. In addition, the penalties for offences committed on the grounds of the victim's racial, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation or gender identity and disability had been stiffened. It was thus possible for law-enforcement officials, prosecutors and judges to take racist motivations into consideration at all stages of criminal proceedings.

31. The drafters of the recent amendments to Act No. 927/1979 had noted explicitly that the amendments had taken the provisions of the Covenant into account. As every effort to combat racism and xenophobia entailed a potential threat to freedom of expression, one of the drafters' stated aims had been to prevent the imposition of criminal penalties for acts that did not lead to the victimization of persons or groups of

persons for their inherent characteristics. Instead, penalties were to be imposed for acts that posed a clear and present danger.

32. As part of the amendments, article 2 of the Act, which had criminalized insulting persons on the grounds of their racial or national origins, had been deemed too vague and had therefore been removed. Under the Criminal Code, however, hate speech could still be penalized, as the commission of such offences as defamation on the grounds of the victim's racial origin constituted aggravating circumstances. The Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights was monitoring the effectiveness of the amended legislation, but as it was relatively new the Ministry had not yet reached any definitive conclusions.

33. **Mr. Papaioannou** (Greece), acknowledging that Greek officials had often enjoyed impunity for human rights violations, said that the country's ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the establishment of a national mechanism for the prevention of torture would contribute greatly to correcting the structural flaws that had enabled impunity. The office responsible for handling alleged instances of abuse by the police and prison staff had been established by law in 2011, but, because funds were lacking, it was still not in place. In October 2015, the Delta squad, a police motorbike unit used in urban areas, had been disbanded. Any proceedings instituted against the members of the squad would continue.

34. **Ms. Kourti** (Greece) said that for financial reasons the staffing of the office responsible for collecting, recording, evaluating and forwarding for investigation to the competent services or authorities all complaints regarding torture or affronts to human dignity had not been possible. The investigation of complaints made by foreign nationals was given priority.

35. **Ms. Rossidi** (Greece) said that the new anti-racism legislation covered offences committed on the grounds of the victim's sexual orientation and gender identity, so the police were required to investigate allegations of any such offences. In 2014, one prisoner had allegedly been tortured to death by prison officials. The criminal proceedings against the 17 officials allegedly involved were ongoing. Since 2010, a number of prison officials had been the subject of disciplinary proceedings. Some of those cases were still pending.

36. **Ms. Pappa** (Greece) said that the Greek authorities were aware of the difficult living conditions of the Roma population and that there was no State policy of forced evictions. Past evictions for trespassing or for public health reasons had been misrepresented in an attempt to create the false impression that they were the consequence of racist and discriminatory attitudes towards Roma.

37. Roma and civil society had been involved in the development of the Regional Strategies for Roma Inclusion. In recent years, with the support of the European Regional Development Fund, several million euros had been invested in infrastructure improvements that had benefited approximately 20,000 people. A map of Roma settlements, to be systematically updated by all local authorities, was currently in preparation. It would inform the development of housing policy. In compliance with the interim measures requested by the Committee, the State had refrained from evicting the Roma families who had settled on a plot of private land. Efforts had been made to house the families elsewhere and ensure that the children attended school. No inhabitants of the settlement had been made homeless.

38. **Ms. Toura** (Greece) said that the Education of Roma Children project had played a central role in the Government's policy on Roma education since 1997. The actions taken in the implementation of the project took into consideration the conditions that often led Roma children to drop out of school and the prejudices that

they faced. About 13,500 students had benefited from the project thus far and it would continue to be implemented as part of a broader intercultural education programme.

39. Despite the Government's efforts to remind all schools about their obligations with regard to education for Roma students, there were still some cases in which Roma students were taught in segregated schools. In some of those cases, the Roma parents themselves had opposed the transfer of their children to neighbouring schools. During the 2014/15 school year, there had been 13,447 Roma children enrolled in primary school and 2,620 in secondary school. The Ministry of Education would continue its efforts to include Roma children in all levels of education, despite the difficulties faced.

40. **Ms. Kourti** (Greece) said that the "Xenios Zeus" operation had been discontinued. Efforts had been made to upgrade the level of visible policing in Athens and other parts of the country, in order to respond directly and powerfully to emerging incidents. The police officers involved in those efforts did not target specific population groups, but rather specific issues such as drug trafficking, illegal trading and human trafficking.

41. **Mr. Xintaropoulos** (Greece) said that polygamy was strictly banned in Greece and was not practised in the country, in line with societal norms and the authorities' zero tolerance policy on the issue. The minimum legal age for marriage was 18 years. Courts could authorize the marriage of underage persons only after hearing representations from the future spouses and their guardians. Improvements in data collection would provide a more complete picture of the situation in the future.

42. The laws governing the regularization of property applied equally to the Roma and all other ethnic groups. The case of the settlement in Halandri was complicated by the fact that it involved private land and landowners who had initiated legal proceedings. Housing was limited in the administrative region of Attica, and different policies were therefore needed, such as rental subsidies or the upgrading and refurbishment of settlements.

43. **Ms. Zerva** (Greece) said that a recent law provided for immediate measures to alleviate the effects of the economic crisis for persons living in extreme poverty. Such measures included rental allowances and food subsidies. The Guaranteed Minimum Income programme was being implemented in 13 municipalities to provide income and social reintegration support to persons living in extreme poverty. The current priority was to promote employment opportunities through the programme, possibly through cooperation with public works programmes already in place, which benefited women.

44. The programme entitled "Reconciling work and family life 2014-2015" would be continued for the period 2015-2020. The special four-year employment promotion programme subsidizing insurance contributions had been deemed successful, because it had encouraged employers to hire unemployed persons, particularly those from vulnerable groups. Greek legislation did not permit any discrimination on the grounds of gender with regard to remuneration. According to the Labour Inspectorate, there were no recorded cases of violations of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

45. **Ms. Papageorgiou** (Greece) said that, despite the legislation in place, according to data from 2010 there was in fact a wage gap of 15 per cent between men and women. Those data would be updated in 2016. As data collection was the first step in creating adequate policy measures to address the issue, a mechanism had been established to monitor the wage gap.

46. A project was being carried out to support NGOs and women's groups, which would indirectly benefit unemployed women. Additional measures to promote employment opportunities had been taken in the context of the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013. Specific measures had been taken targeting women in different age groups who were unemployed or threatened with unemployment. Many of those women had received financial support to help them start their own businesses.

47. **Mr. Papaioannou** (Greece) said that, prior to the elections held in September 2015, the President of Parliament had been a woman. The President of the Supreme Court was also a woman and had served as caretaker Prime Minister in the lead-up to the elections.

48. **Ms. Papageorgiou** (Greece) said that, despite efforts to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions, further progress was needed in that area. Women's representation in politics had not been improved by the recent elections. Of the 300 members of Parliament, 56 were women. There was a need to raise awareness of the issue among political parties and improve the methods used for listing candidates, perhaps through the introduction of quotas. Her Government was aware of the issue and was willing to take steps to address it.

49. The National Programme for Substantive Gender Equality 2010-2013 had been extended until the end of 2015 thanks to further financing from the European Union and thus had not yet been evaluated. A working group had been established to draft a new action plan on gender equality, which would focus on issues such as women's access to labour, poverty eradication, unemployment and gender-based violence. Public consultations would be held with key stakeholders on the first draft.

50. **Ms. Rossidi** (Greece) said that Act No. 3896/2010 prohibited discrimination on the grounds of sex in matters relating to labour and employment only, whereas Act No. 3304/2005 offered protection from discrimination on the grounds of race, colour and disability. Increases in court fees and litigation costs had not been so drastic as to impede access to justice. Nevertheless, special legal protections were in place to ensure access to justice for victims of discrimination. Victims had the right to bring their complaints before a court, lodge an appeal and request mediation by the Office of the Ombudsman or the Consumer Ombudsman. The same rights applied to self-employed victims of discrimination.

51. Free legal aid was guaranteed for victims of discrimination on low incomes, who were also exempt from paying fees to initiate criminal proceedings. Those involved in civil proceedings could request a special benefit that exempted them from paying all fees and expenses. Victims of discrimination in matters of labour or unemployment could also lodge complaints with the Labour Inspectorate free of charge.

52. Forty counselling centres had been established to provide free legal advice and a handbook on sexual harassment had been issued to inform women about their rights. The Office of the Ombudsman also provided extensive information about victims' rights on its website and had highlighted the need for specialized training for labour inspectors on the legislation concerning equal treatment and non-discrimination. The complexity of the legislation posed a challenge and recodification was being considered as a possible solution.

53. **Ms. Ververidou** (Greece) said that human trafficking was still considered uncommon, in the light of the low figures seen in the statistical data. Reasons for those low figures included the elusive nature of the problem and new criminal trends. While the number of identified perpetrators had been decreasing in recent years, vigorous police investigations had resulted in the dismantling of many criminal rings. However, traffickers were taking advantage of new technologies by recruiting their

victims online. Because perpetrators were using less coercive methods and relying on psychological exploitation rather than extreme violence, victims were less inclined to reach out for help. Such new tactics used by criminal rings also explained the increase in the number of women identified as perpetrators.

54. Despite the new legal framework in place to combat human trafficking and care for victims, there were still shortcomings in its implementation. An adjustment period was needed to train the authorities mandated to implement the new victim support and identification measures. It was true that the number of identified victims did not adequately reflect the scale of the problem, given the influx of refugees, migrants and unaccompanied minors arriving in the country. There was a need to focus on potential victims and vulnerable groups at risk of being trafficked. The Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings was aware of the shortcomings in the implementation of the new legal framework. Currently, the main challenges it faced were to involve more partners and stakeholders in first-level identification of victims and to improve the collection of reliable, disaggregated statistical data.

55. To that end, the Office had held coordination meetings with various authorities on setting up a national database of trafficked persons and prosecuted cases. It was also working to set up a law-enforcement working group that would deal with failures and shortcomings in the fight against trafficking and a parliamentary committee on the exploitation of vulnerable groups at risk. Lastly, the Office had signed a memorandum of understanding with the private sector to address trafficking for the purposes of labour exploitation and was raising public awareness about that particular form of trafficking.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.