



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

Distr.: General  
13 November 2015

English only

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**  
**Sixty-second session**

**Summary record of the 1349th meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 5 November 2015, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Hayashi

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

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

*Combined second and third periodic reports of the United Arab Emirates (CEDAW/C/ARE/2-3; CEDAW/C/ARE/Q/2-3 and Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of the United Arab Emirates took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Maitha Alshamsi** (United Arab Emirates), introducing the combined second and third periodic reports of the United Arab Emirates (CEDAW/C/ARE/2-3), said that the United Arab Emirates had been elected to the executive board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for two consecutive terms between 2013 and 2018. It had contributed US\$ 12 million to UN-Women and was currently funding a liaison office in Abu Dhabi. Her country was also active in the international arena to promote girls' right to education, and charitable organizations such as Dubai Cares, working in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), had been able to help millions of children in more than 30 developing countries. The United Arab Emirates had also signed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict and, jointly with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, had allocated US\$ 1.5 million to support efforts by the Government of Somalia to end sexual violence in conflict. It had recently announced an additional US\$ 1 million to help the United Nations strengthen the capacity of other countries affected by the problem.

3. Thanks to the vision and foresight of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founding father and first president of the United Arab Emirates, women were now able to participate on an equal basis in all aspects of the country's civic, economic and political life. That vision was being upheld by Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, president of the General Women's Union, head of the Family Development Foundation and president of the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood, who had launched the 2015-2021 National Strategy for the Empowerment and Advancement of Emirati Women, which provided a framework to help the United Arab Emirates to become one of the most advanced countries in the world in terms of women's empowerment. The Strategy was complemented by the seven-year national agenda known as Vision 2021 which included provisions to protect women from all forms of discrimination in the workplace and in society generally.

4. Her country had implemented a number of other important initiatives. They included cabinet rulings requiring the inclusion of women on the boards of companies and federal institutions, and the establishment of the Gender Balance Council, which was working to reduce the gender gap in all aspects of work, including decision-making, and to improve the country's standing in that regard in Global Competitiveness Reports. As part of the country's contribution to the United Nations Every Woman Every Child initiative, a meeting on reproductive health and the health of mothers and children in crisis situations had recently been organized in Abu Dhabi, in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

5. Achievements in eliminating discrimination were reflected in recent global rankings and statistics. The United Arab Emirates ranked fortieth in the world on the Human Development Index, twentieth in the World Happiness Report, and forty-third on the Gender Inequality Index. According to the 2015 World Health Statistics, the country's maternal mortality rate was the lowest in the region and one of the lowest in the world, having dropped from 16 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 8 in 2015. Infant mortality had also fallen significantly and the number of deaths of children under 5

had more than halved. Health care was free for all citizens and there was a compulsory health insurance scheme in place for residents of Abu Dhabi.

6. In 2014, the World Economic Forum had reported that the United Arab Emirates had essentially achieved gender equality in education, health and life expectancy. Ninety-five per cent of female high school graduates went on to higher education and women accounted for 71.6 per cent of students in State universities and 50.1 per cent in private universities. A total of 70 per cent of university graduates were women and women occupied 66 per cent of public sector jobs. Those were some of the highest figures in the world in that regard. Female business owners accounted for 10 per cent of the total in the private sector, running projects worth 40 billion UAE dirham (Dh).

7. Women were active in technical and scientific fields, where they contributed to innovation and sustainable development in strategic sectors such as renewable energy and nuclear energy. Women held 60 per cent of the technical jobs in medicine, teaching, pharmacy and nursing, and many were employed in the aviation industry, the arms industry and the UAE Space Agency. Both the armed forces and the police admitted women, as did the judiciary, where there were a number of women judges and prosecutors. Civil society institutions played an important role in the development process and in professional, public and cultural life, and the proportion of female membership of such organizations had reached 54 per cent.

*Articles 1 to 6*

8. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that women in the United Arab Emirates had made considerable political and social gains, and the Government had recognized the important role they played in sustainable development. However, she remained concerned about ongoing discrimination in law and in access to justice. The Constitution did not address equality between men and women and did not define gender-specific discrimination. In fact, it reinforced traditional gender roles by identifying women primarily as wives and mothers.

9. She wished to know what measures the Government was intending to take to eliminate exceptions to the principle of non-discrimination on the grounds of sex, pursuant to commitments made during the second cycle of the Human Rights Council universal periodic review in 2013. She commended the United Arab Emirates for the steps it had taken to provide training on the Convention to members of the judiciary. However, in light of evidence that courts had gone beyond codified laws and imposed sentences such as stoning and flogging, she requested clarification on the status of the Convention in national law. International standards had to take precedence over other sources of law, including religious law.

10. She was concerned that many female non-citizens were not informed of their rights. Female domestic workers in particular were often denied basic legal protection. She would welcome further information about the formation of an independent women's rights group, and she asked the delegation to tell the Committee about any plans to withdraw some or all of the State party's reservations to the Convention.

11. **Ms. Almheiri** (United Arab Emirates) said that, in line with commitments made during the second cycle of the universal periodic review, the possibility of withdrawing reservations to articles which did not contradict sharia law was currently being studied.

12. **Ms. Almaazmi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the Constitution indeed sought to protect motherhood and childhood but it also upheld the right to work for both sexes without discrimination. Furthermore, women had the privilege of financial independence, irrespective of whether their income came from work or inheritance or any other source. The State also afforded protection to foreign workers. Their

relationship with their employers or sponsors and with labour-importing brokerage offices was regulated by a standard contract which contained provisions covering work permits, health care and other matters. A new act specifically devoted to foreign workers was also in the process of becoming law.

13. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that she would appreciate more precise details about the ongoing studies to withdraw the reservations to the Convention. What direction were those studies taking and which institutions were involved? Did they, for example, address the harmonization of personal status legislation with the definition of discrimination in the Convention, or were they focusing more on article 2 (f) of the Convention? The improvements in the economic and social situation risked being reversed if legislation was not adequately amended to reflect women's new situation.

14. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that she wished to know what steps had been taken to follow up on the Committee's previous concluding observations, particularly with regard to the withdrawal of reservations to articles 2 and 16 of the Convention.

15. **Ms. Almheiri** (United Arab Emirates) said that a committee had been established by the Cabinet to follow up on all recommendations accepted during the universal periodic review, including the withdrawal of reservations to the Convention. The main concern was to withdraw the reservations in a manner which did not contradict sharia law. The committee met regularly but, on matters involving changes to national legislation, progress was inevitably slow. She hoped that her country would be able to report progress at its next universal periodic review.

16. **Ms. Gabr** said she wished to know whether any comparative studies were planned or had been carried out into the situation in other countries with a structure similar to that of the United Arab Emirates, such as States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, many of which had ratified the Convention without any reservations.

17. **Ms. Almheiri** (United Arab Emirates) said that such studies were being carried out.

18. **Ms. Haidar** said that she would like some information about the role and status of the Gender Balance Council, its human and material resources, and its involvement in monitoring activities and drafting strategies. How did it help improve women's access to justice? It was an important body so its work needed to be visible. Did the Government plan to amend the provisions of the Penal Code which gave men the right to "correct" their spouses and, if so, did the Gender Balance Council have the authority to take steps towards that end?

19. She asked what temporary special measures the Government had implemented, or planned to implement, to achieve gender equality in practice. What decisions had been taken to that end, and had their implementation been evaluated? She asked whether the measures taken had addressed the cross-cutting problem of multiple discrimination. She asked whether statistics were available on the implementation of measures to achieve gender equality and combat discrimination, and asked what steps had been taken to ensure accountability in that regard. What efforts had been made to appoint more women to the boards of companies?

20. **Ms. Noora Alsuwaidi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the General Women's Union, established in 1975, represented women's interests and worked to promote gender equality.

21. **Ms. Maitha Alshamsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that, although the General Women's Union had initially focused on literacy campaigns, it now worked with civil society, the private sector, and the Government on the implementation of a range of

activities and campaigns to promote women's role. It had no executive powers, and was a coordinating body. The General Women's Union was a full member of the recently established Gender Balance Council, which aimed to promote equality and strengthen women's rights, particularly for groups such as women with disabilities.

22. Various government departments were responsible for the implementation of the Convention, and there was a high level of accountability in all spheres of its application, including the various programmes and strategies implemented. An implementation plan was prepared for all Cabinet decisions issued. Women were active in all sectors of the economy, and some private companies had been inspired to take steps to appoint more women to senior positions.

23. **Ms. Noora Alsuwaidi** (United Arab Emirates) said that, as of 2015, 15.4 per cent of seats on the boards of public companies were held by women, representing an increase of just under 1 per cent from 2014. It was still too early to evaluate the impact of recent measures to promote women's participation. All women, including women with disabilities, were on an equal footing with men. The level of representation for women with special needs had also risen over the previous few years.

24. **Ms. Haidar** requested further information about the General Women's Union, particularly its human and financial resources, and about its role in dealing with complaints, and its monitoring capacity in that regard. What assistance did it provide? She reminded the delegation that unreported complaints could not be followed up.

25. **Ms. Noora Alsuwaidi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the General Women's Union was a special quasi-governmental organization, supported by ministries but not funded from the State budget. It coordinated with various ministries, both at the federal and the emirate levels, on the national strategy for women. The Union had a women's support department, which operated a complaints mechanism. Complaints were collected electronically and transmitted to the relevant authorities for action. The Union had implemented an awareness-raising campaign on women's rights, published information on the Convention on its website and printed leaflets on the Convention and other legislation relating to women's rights. The Gender Balance Council was a new institution, responsible for following up all measures aimed at ensuring a gender balance.

26. **Ms. Allamki** (United Arab Emirates) said that the General Women's Union had more than 100 members of staff.

27. **Ms. Al-Dosari** requested additional information on measures to combat patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes, including awareness-raising measures for civil society, religious leaders and families. The legal age for marriage must be increased to put a stop to the harm caused by early marriages. She would like information about awareness-raising activities implemented by civil society organizations, notably those working to promote women's rights and combat stereotypes. She requested further details on the Family Development Foundation, including its role, status, and programmes.

28. **Ms. Hofmeister** stressed that the goal of the Convention was gender equality rather than equity. She asked whether the Government planned to introduce a specific law on violence against women, and domestic violence in particular. What obstacles existed to that endeavour? She asked whether there was adequate statistical information available on reported cases of violence against women. What was the role of the judiciary and the law enforcement services in preventing and combating violence, particularly violence against domestic workers and migrant women? What role did the media play? Were budgetary resources allocated at the national level for measures to combat violence against women? She asked whether the Government

planned to implement a top-down strategy to meet international standards on preventing violence against women and girls.

29. **Ms. Gabr** said that, while she welcomed the State party's efforts to tackle human trafficking, she stressed the need to address the exploitation of prostitution of women, which took many forms. Recalling that in 2010 the Committee had expressed concern at the lack of statistics on that subject in the State party's previous report, she said she would like to see some figures on cases. She asked what role the Public Prosecutor's Office played in dealing with human trafficking cases. Noting that the Committee had received reports that trafficking was a growing problem, she requested additional data on the prevalence of trafficking, including the number of reported cases. In some cases, girls or women might arrive in the United Arab Emirates having been promised domestic work or jobs in hotels, only to find that they had been misled and were unable to escape. What measures was the Government taking to pursue the criminals involved in such cases, to prevent the sexual exploitation of women and to tackle the demand for prostitution? She would appreciate hearing the delegation's comments on the somewhat confusing reports surrounding the deportation of female victims of trafficking; she emphasized that such women deserved protection, support and assistance.

30. **Ms. Allamki** (United Arab Emirates) said that gender stereotypes were not prevalent in Emirati society. Women were active in all sectors, including the judiciary, the diplomatic service and the private sector. In 2014, the United Arab Emirates had been ranked first on one list of countries that respected women's rights. The Government had a national strategy for women's advancement.

31. **Ms. Maitha Alshamsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the culture in the United Arab Emirates was frequently misunderstood. There was no "macho" culture, and women had always enjoyed all relevant rights. The United Arab Emirates had always been receptive to the spirit and letter of the Convention, and Emirati society accepted women as equal, not second class, citizens. Media reports were not always accurate, and did not reflect the reality of the situation in the United Arab Emirates.

32. **Ms. Alamri** (United Arab Emirates) said that the legal requirements for creating women's NGOs were no different from those applied to other NGOs.

33. **Ms. Sara Alshamsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that, under the Constitution, the marriageable age was set at 18. Marriage contracts were formalized by registrars, who had a duty to ensure that both parties consented and that requests for special clauses were granted. Although there were no reported cases of child marriage, the Government conducted awareness-raising campaigns as a preventive measure.

34. **Ms. Maitha Alshamsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the Marriage Fund had been set up to provide young couples with financial support and to promote healthy marriages.

35. **Mr. Humaid Alsuwaidi** (United Arab Emirates) said that Act No. 51 on Combating Human Trafficking had been adopted in 2006, and the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking had been established. In 2009, the Ministry of Labour had opened an anti-trafficking department, which had carried out over 900 workplace inspections with a particular emphasis on employers that imported labour. To date, it had not identified any instances of abuse against women who had entered the country on a work visa. The Ministry also took preventive measures in cooperation with government partners and women's organizations.

36. **Ms. Shohail** (United Arab Emirates) said that the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, which comprised representatives of private companies and civil society organizations, had developed a four-pronged strategy to combat human

trafficking based on protection and prevention, prosecution and punishment, the protection of victims and the strengthening of international cooperation. A number of shelters had been set up for women and child victims and a shelter for men victims had recently opened in Abu Dhabi. The shelters offered a variety of services and made arrangements for voluntary repatriation. Victims who refused to return to their country of origin were resettled with the assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The situation of victims continued to be monitored even after they had left the United Arab Emirates. Moreover, a fund had been created to ensure that victims received appropriate educational, medical and other care.

37. **Ms. Albasti** (United Arab Emirates) said that civil society organizations offered extensive support to victims of human trafficking, each of whom was assigned a social worker and a psychological counsellor. Victims who wished to remain in the United Arab Emirates received help in finding dignified employment.

38. **Ms. Khanji** (United Arab Emirates) said that the Family Development Foundation, which had been created in 2006, developed strategies, policies and programmes to empower women, particularly in the field of employment, and gave psychological assistance to persons who were to be deported. It allocated 60 per cent of its resources to women and children, and conducted qualitative and quantitative impact assessments of its social programmes, which were drawn up in line with international best practices.

39. **Ms. Albasti** (United Arab Emirates) said that all persons responsible for dealing with women victims of violence received relevant training and that all victims had access to support services without discrimination. The Dubai Foundation for Women and Children provided shelter and other forms of assistance such as hotlines. It had formed partnerships with international bodies such as the Global Child Forum and was formulating policies to combat domestic violence, an issue that was also the subject of a bill that was in the process of being drafted. The Foundation also focused on education and awareness-raising, was working to create a comprehensive database on women and undertook rigorous research into women's issues. It had recently conducted two studies on violence in schools, the results of which could be communicated to the Committee if appropriate.

40. **Ms. Almaazmi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the Ministry of the Interior had adopted social policies that were geared towards the protection of victims of domestic violence, including women domestic workers. A complaints mechanism had been put in place and prosecutors handling domestic violence cases were required to protect the anonymity of victims at all times. Victims could seek assistance in special social support centres, which pursued a policy of prevention and mediation, or using hotlines. All response mechanisms were systematically evaluated and advice on avoiding domestic violence was given to high-risk groups and victims. Efforts were also made to inform workers who intended to move to the United Arab Emirates of their rights and of the redress available to victims.

41. **Ms. Al-Dosari**, referring to paragraph 25 (d) of the periodic report (CEDAW/C/ARE/2-3), said that she would appreciate further details on the purpose of the national curriculum for public and private education that had been published by the Ministry of Education in January 2013. Any information on other curricula for public and private education would also be welcome.

42. **Ms. Gabr** asked whether new measures that had been introduced to protect foreign employees in the State party would apply to domestic workers, who were particularly vulnerable.

43. **Ms. Maitha Alshamsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that additional information on the national curriculum would be sent to the Committee within 48 hours.

44. **Mr. Humaid Alsuwaidi** (United Arab Emirates) said that, in June 2014, the Government had approved legislation governing the working conditions of domestic workers, who were not subject to the Labour Code. Migrant workers could enter the United Arab Emirates only if they had received a firm offer of employment and had signed a contract, which could not generally be modified after arrival in the country. Domestic workers would benefit from new protection measures and a standard contract had been drawn up to regulate their relationship with employers.

45. **Ms. Almaazmi** (United Arab Emirates) said that migrant workers could change employer and that they received support to that end from the Ministry of the Interior. Victims of domestic violence could report complaints through hotlines or in person at police stations, shelters and, in the case of foreign nationals, embassies of the United Arab Emirates in their country of origin.

*Articles 7 to 9*

46. **Ms. Zou Xiaoqiao** asked how many women had been elected to the Federal National Council in the parliamentary elections of 3 October 2015 and how many women had been appointed to the Council. Referring to paragraph 7 of the written replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/ARE/Q/2-3/Add.1), she said that she wished to know the time frame for achieving gender balance in decision-making positions, what specific measures were envisaged to implement the decision requiring the appointment of women to company boards and what was being done to boost women's representation in local government.

47. The delegation should describe any measures, including temporary special measures, that the Government intended to take to increase the number of women in senior positions in the diplomatic service. It would also be interesting to know about capacity-building activities for women already employed in the service and about efforts to ensure that women were appointed on equal terms with men. Lastly, she urged the State party to include more sex-disaggregated data in its next periodic report.

48. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that the State party had made progress towards fulfilling its obligations under article 9 of the Convention. The royal directives of December 2011 requiring that children of Emirati women married to foreign men be granted Emirati nationality had benefited 2,047 children to date. However, Emirati women were still unable to transmit their nationality to their spouses. She asked whether the State party had any plans to withdraw its reservation to article 9 of the Convention with a view to remedying the situation. She would welcome information on the numbers of stateless women and girls in the United Arab Emirates as well as on any plans to eradicate the problem of statelessness generally.

49. **Ms. Albasti** (United Arab Emirates) said that, after the launch of the Head of State's strategy for political development in 2005, the first round of elections to the Federal National Council had taken place in 2006. Many women had stood as candidates and the transparency of selection procedures had been ensured nationwide. The second and third rounds of elections had been held in 2011 and in October 2015. Although there had been an increase in the level of participation in elections over the years, to date only one woman had been elected to the Council. The Government was not satisfied with the results as it was keen to see women in decision-making positions.

50. **Ms. Almaazmi** (United Arab Emirates) said that there were two main categories of persons in matters relating to naturalization, namely citizens of other States resident



in the United Arab Emirates and all other persons, including those who had entered the country illegally or had not regularized their situation. The State adopted a humane approach to persons in the second category, with due regard for national interests and in accordance with international agreements.

51. **Ms. Maitha Alshamsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that detailed disaggregated data showing the steady progress that Emirati women had made in the political, social and economic spheres since the foundation of the United Arab Emirates would be submitted to the Committee in due course.

52. **Ms. Zou Xiaojiao** said that she wished to know how many women had been appointed, as opposed to elected, to the Federal National Council. She also wished to know to what extent women were represented in local government. Could the delegation provide examples, at least for one or two emirates?

53. **Ms. Maitha Alshamsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that women had decision-making power in municipal councils and in local institutions. Two women from two emirates had been appointed to the Federal National Council. The electoral process afforded women the opportunity to show their powers of persuasion and put forward their views to the public. The current process was very favourable towards the nomination and election of women candidates.

54. **Ms. Almaazmi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the level of representation of women in local government varied among the emirates, whose institutions were not identical and which had different policies and regulations. In 2006, around a quarter of the candidates for election to the Federal National Council had been women, and only one woman had been elected. In 2011, the number of candidates had significantly increased, yet still only one woman had been elected. What was encouraging, nonetheless, was the level of support for the principle of promoting women's participation in politics.

55. Some residents of the United Arab Emirates had applied for and acquired Emirati citizenship. Others had applied but citizenship had not been granted either because they had not complied with the relevant procedures or because a family member had interfered their application. Stateless persons who did not attempt to regularize their situation were in contravention of the law. Persons who entered the country illegally must contact the competent authorities in order to obtain a temporary residence permit and had the possibility of applying for citizenship. The department of naturalization set specific times for dealing with such persons and regularizing their situation but did not hold them criminally liable.

56. **Ms. Maitha Alshamsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that legislation relating to citizenship was of great concern to the Government, which sought to achieve progress in that area while ensuring public safety, social cohesion and sustainable development. Although there were certain gaps in legislation, over time those gaps would be filled.

57. **Ms. Noora Alsuwaidi** (United Arab Emirates) said that, in the emirate of Sharjah, 7 of the 42 members of the Consultative Council were women, and 2 of the 17 members of the municipal council were women. Other Emirati women in senior positions included the current Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, a senior adviser at UN-Women, four Cabinet ministers and the Secretary-General of the Cabinet. More information on that subject would be submitted to the Committee in writing. The Federal National Council was seeking to increase the representation of women. The intent of the National Strategy for the Empowerment and Advancement of Emirati Women was to raise women's profile in the political, social and economic spheres.

*Articles 10 and 11*

58. **Ms. Bailey** said that the report did not contain any information on the net enrolment of girls in different stages of education, as requested by the Committee in its concluding observations on the previous report (CEDAW/C/ARE/CO/1). Instead the report provided the raw figures for male and female students at different levels of education and drew the conclusion that the percentages of male and female students at each level were equal. However, presenting the data in that way masked the fact that a considerable percentage of female students from one level had not moved on to the next one. That was particularly the case for secondary education. She therefore welcomed the enactment of a law raising the age of compulsory education for all children to 18, but would like to know whether there were plans to increase classroom capacity and teaching staff in order to absorb the rising numbers of students and whether and how the attendance of those new students would be monitored.

59. The report also lacked data on the percentage of women in each field of study and measures taken to increase the number of women and girls enrolled in non-traditional fields of study at university level, as requested in the list of issues (CEDAW/C/ARE/Q/2-3), nor was such information available on the Government's website. The delegation had stated that women held 60 per cent of technical posts in the education and health sectors, a figure which seemed rather high since, according to the website, only 32 per cent of students enrolled in technical educational institutions from 2013 to 2014 had been female. She suggested that the underrepresentation of women in those sectors of education together with traditional views on the role of women might account for the current high rate of unemployment (21.8%) among women and girls aged 15 to 24. She asked what measures were envisaged to increase the percentage of female students in technical and other male-dominated sectors of education.

60. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its concluding observations on the State party's second periodic report (CRC/C/ARE/CO/2), had expressed concern that children rarely reported incidents of sexual abuse owing to the risk of being accused of and punished for having committed a sexual offence. That Committee had therefore recommended that the State party should repeal all legislation treating child victims of sexual abuse as offenders. She wished to know how the State party intended to implement that recommendation and to protect girls against sexual abuse, particularly in schools, where they were often vulnerable to such incidents.

61. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** said that a woman's right to work on equal terms with men was an inalienable human right that should not be restricted in any way by a family member, spouse or guardian. She asked whether the State party had considered repealing article 72 of the Law on Personal Status in order to comply with article 11, paragraph 1, of the Convention. She wished to know what was standing in the way of the application of non-discriminatory labour policies and whether the Emirati bodies responsible for labour and employment issues had received any complaints of discrimination against women. In spite of the State party's efforts to protect the rights of all migrant workers, it was difficult to ensure that the rights of foreign domestic workers were observed in private homes. She asked whether any parts of the bill to regulate the conditions of domestic workers, approved by the Cabinet in 2012, had already entered into force, and when the bill was likely to be fully enacted. She was aware that changes had been made to the standard employment contract, but what of the *kafalah* system, had it remained the same?

62. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that, according to paragraph 64 of the State party's report, in most cases, government hospitals provided treatment to citizens free of charge and to foreigners possessing health cards at low prices. In what cases was treatment not free

of charge? For example, was maternity care free of charge for women in rural areas and for domestic workers? She asked whether employers had a legal requirement to provide health insurance for domestic workers and, if so, how compliance was monitored. According to information received from alternative sources, domestic workers who were ill and did not have proper health insurance were shackled to hospital beds to prevent them running away and becoming undocumented workers.

63. She expressed concern that the State party's replies to the list of issues did not answer any of the Committee's questions on health and, moreover, that the report itself contained no information on abortion. She understood that abortion was illegal in the United Arab Emirates except when the woman's life was at risk or there were severe foetal impairments, but wondered what the situation was when pregnancy occurred as a result of rape or incest, or when the woman's health was endangered. She asked what efforts were being made to help women avoid unwanted pregnancies and illegal abortion, and to increase the availability, affordability and accessibility of modern contraceptives for all women, including domestic workers and rural women. She also asked whether the costs of contraceptives were covered by the national health service for citizens and by health insurance schemes for non-nationals or whether there were any plans to cover those costs in the future. Lastly, she observed that there was no reference in the State party's documentation to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS or to measures in place to deal with mother-to-child transmission.

*The meeting rose at 1p.m.*