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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 32nd MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 5 November 2008, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Texier

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (agenda item 6) (*continued*)

Fifth periodic report of Sweden (E/C.12/SWE/5); Core document (HRI/CORE/1/Add.4/Rev.1); Concluding observations of the Committee on the fourth periodic report (E/C.12/1/Add.70); List of issues to be taken up (E/C.12/SWE/Q/5); Written replies by the Swedish Government to the list of issues to be taken up (E/C.12/SWE/Q/5/Add.1), additional replies by the Swedish Government to the list of points to be taken up (E/C.12/SWE/Q/5/Add.2))

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the Swedish delegation resumed their seats at the Committee table.*

2. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed the Swedish delegation and invited it to present the fifth periodic report of the State party.

3. Ms. JENRYD (Sweden), mentioned that there had been a change of Government since the presentation of the fifth periodic report, and said that Sweden remained determined to fulfil its obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, since those rights formed the basis of its social protection policy. The instability caused by armed conflicts and difficult conditions of life prevailing in various parts of the world had generated large-scale population movements, including migration into Sweden, which, for example, had taken in more refugees from Iran than the whole of the United States. From being relatively homogeneous, Sweden had become a multi-ethnic society in which one inhabitant out of eight had been born outside its borders. It went without saying, therefore, that the social protection system had to take account of that reality. The fifth periodic report described measures taken by the previous Government up to the submission of the report in September 2006, while subsequent initiatives were presented in the written replies to the list of points to be taken up.

4. All legislation relating to combating discrimination and its various aspects had now been consolidated in a single text, the new Discrimination Act, which would come into force on 1 January 2009. Apart from the five types of discrimination previously considered — ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief and disability — the new law would also include age and sexual identity, and would address areas previously not covered, such as discrimination by civil servants. To ensure greater respect for the law and better treatment of cases involving different types of discrimination, the various specialized ombudsman's offices would be merged into a single national authority, the Ombudsman for Discrimination Issues.

5. The National Plan of Action on Human Rights 2006-2009 highlighted the fight against discrimination by addressing the rights of disabled persons, children, national minorities and the Sami people, violence by men against women and human trafficking. It also addressed the right to work, housing, health and education, and aimed to inform the public, both within the education system and in society at large. The Government had set up a delegation with a long-term mission to ensure full respect for human rights in Sweden, within the framework of the measures contained in the Plan of Action.

6. Sweden attached major importance to the right to work, since this was a way to combat exclusion and marginalization. Moreover, a high and sustainable rate of employment was a pre-requisite for long-term financing of the public social protection system and eliminating poverty and economic inequalities. Although Sweden's poverty rate was the lowest in the European Union, according to a 2008 European Community report, and its wealth was distributed more equitably than in other countries, efforts needed to be maintained. Reforms had thus been undertaken to improve the situation on the Swedish labour market, by providing economic incentives, particularly tax credits, and amendments to unemployment insurance regimes and health insurance. Steps had been taken on behalf of persons who had quit their jobs a long time ago (lay-off, early retirement, illness) or who relied on social assistance, as well as young people. Between 2006 and 2007, the employment rate had risen by one percentage point to 67%, essentially benefiting young people and foreigners, although their employment situation, along with that of the disabled people, required further improvement.

7. On 10 July 2008, the Government had adopted a plan of action to combat prostitution and human trafficking, based essentially on individual protection and assistance needs — needs that should be integrated into the activities of the public authorities. The plan aimed to upgrade information activities and set up protected housing, care centres and other forms of protection and support. Establishing contact with children and young people who were exposed or susceptible to sexual exploitation, was difficult. One solution was clearly to strengthen the training of professional groups working with victims of prostitution and trafficking. The results of the plan of action would be presented to the Riksdag (Parliament) in 2010. Sweden also had a plan of action to combat violence perpetrated by men against women and between persons of the same sex, which included 56 measures, and to which the Government had allocated about €80 million over a four-year period. That plan aimed first of all to shed light on the circumstances in situations in which women were particularly susceptible as targets of violence (disabled women, migrants, women with addiction problems, those belonging to minorities or even the elderly). Although Sweden had made progress in those areas, as noted by Ms. Ertürk, the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, much remained to be done.

8. The objective of Sweden's policy on disability was diversity within equality at all stages of life, which entailed eradicating obstacles to full participation by every member of society, combating discrimination and assisting individuals, through crosscutting measures mainstreamed into most domains of public action. Such measures concerned access to employment in particular; the Government had thus ordered the public employment service to prepare an employment incentives strategy for disabled people, which would be presented in February 2009. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, Sweden intended to ratify those two instruments and thus enable persons who considered their rights under the Convention to have been violated, to lodge a complaint with the oversight committee. As the Convention did not create any new rights, ratification of the convention and its optional protocol did not require current legislation to be amended. The Human Rights Delegation would submit a report in April 2009, indicating whether the public authorities, either individually or collectively, were respecting the provisions of the Convention.

9. Sweden set great store by social protection and upholding the rights of the elderly. A number of reforms had been implemented to respond to the new needs generated by demographic trends. They were based on three areas: strengthening individual rights and possibilities of choice; promoting quality and diversity in the provision of services; and improving and ensuring the quality of care provided. To achieve that, the Government was strengthening the legal foundations of its action, intensifying information for all, and investing in training for persons responsible for providing services and care to the elderly. As of 2006, it had allocated 2 billion Swedish crowns per year to improving social protection and the rights of the elderly, and today it was preparing to increase that funding.

10. Following his visit to Sweden, Mr. Paul Hunt, Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, had submitted a report (A/HRC/428/Add.2) welcoming the progress made by the country in those areas, but noting that the mental health situation had deteriorated. To combat that complex phenomenon, Sweden was working on several fronts, including reduction of long-term unemployment, investing in assistance for parents, and strengthening measures to combat discrimination, noting that young people were the population sector most affected. At the same time, it was also increasing the budget for psychiatric care.

11. Setting up a welfare state based on equal rights for all, which included economic, social and cultural or other rights, was a permanent process requiring adjustment, reflection, and rearrangement. From that standpoint, Sweden therefore expected to receive many observations and recommendations from the Committee, along with the opinions and concerns that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had raised with it.

Articles 1 to 5 of the Covenant

12. Mr. ABDEL-MONEIM, applauded the spirit of honesty that permeated Sweden's fifth periodic report, but deplored the fact that to update the trend of certain provisions, the country had merely reverted to its previous report(s). Yet, as more than 10 years had elapsed in the meantime, circumstances and situations had changed, which rendered comparisons difficult. He also regretted that owing to the restructuring of public statistics (AKU), it had not been possible to compare the figures for 2005 with those of previous years.

13. Mr. ATANGANA asked why Sweden had not incorporated the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as it had done for the European Convention on Human Rights. Moreover, according to information obtained from various sources, the country's legal organization was hybrid, based on professional judges working in conjunction with persons appointed by local organizations and political parties. If that information was confirmed, it would be legitimate to question the independence of the judicial apparatus, and he wanted to know what the State party intended to do to improve the situation.

14. Mr. RIEDEL, in relation to the written reply provided by the Swedish Government to question No. 1 of the list of points to be taken up, asked where the country had got to in relation to the measures to be taken, including amendments to its legislation, to fully respect the rights specified in the Covenant, since it was understood that the various national plans of action mentioned in the documents, formed part of that process. He also wanted to know the results of the National Plan

of Action on Human Rights 2006-2009, in terms of economic, social and cultural rights. Mr. Riedel wanted to know Sweden's position regarding the imminent adoption of the Draft Optional Protocol in relation to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights by the United Nations General Assembly.

15. Mr. PILLAY asked whether the rights defined in the Covenant could be invoked before the Swedish courts and other judicial bodies such as the new Ombudsman. Discrimination seemed to be a recurrent problem in Sweden; reports mentioned cases of foreigners who had suffered racial prejudice at the hands of law enforcement agents, for example. Were the victims benefiting from protection and advice; were staff being recruited to assist them? Mr. Pillay also regretted the fact that Roma people continued to suffer discrimination in access to housing, education and employment. He welcomed the fact that the State party had followed up one of the Committee's recommendations, namely to create a national human rights body. He asked whether the new Ombudsman had jurisdiction to deal with cases involving violations of economic, social and cultural rights by non-government agents, and to award compensation.

16. Ms. BRAS GOMES asked whether the new Ombudsman would have the same resources, particularly human ones, that had been assigned to the other four Ombudsmen before their services were merged. She noted that Sweden was publicly known to be active in international cooperation; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) had nonetheless stated that that cooperation needed to be expanded and made more flexible. Ms. Bras Gomes wanted to know whether Sweden agreed, and if so, what it intended to do in that regard, and whether it might go as far as supervising the activities of private enterprises, for example.

17. Mr. KERDOUN was pleased to learn that Sweden had implemented a new global development policy based on international cooperation. He asked for examples of countries that were benefiting from this, and figures on the development assistance provided by Sweden. He also pointed out that, in its preliminary statement, the Swedish delegation had said their country had changed from being a homogeneous society to a multi-ethnic one. He asked about the problems posed by that trend and the reception of migrants, and the reasons why Iraqis were emigrating to Sweden.

18. Ms. WILSON welcomed the adoption of a multilateral agreement between Sweden, Finland and Norway in relation to the Sami people, covering property issues. She wanted to know why the transfer of responsibilities to the Sami Parliament, relating to reindeer breeding, did not also cover other traditional Sami activities, such as forestry and mining. On matters of property, the process had been delayed because the cost of procedures to uphold property rights was too high for some Sami people. Ms. Wilson asked whether financial assistance was being provided for those procedures. She wanted the Swedish delegation to comment on allegations relating to the new asylum appeal system, which had not protected the confidentiality of asylum-seekers or given them information in the case of a deportation decision; it was also possible to deport them by force. Ms. Wilson asked what percentage of asylum-seekers whose requests had been rejected did not leave the country but remained there on a clandestine basis.

19. Referring to information from Swedish NGOs that there was a mismatch between the law and practice in terms of protection of disabled people, Ms. Wilson asked whether, outside the public sector, sanctions could be imposed on employers

who discriminated against disabled people in terms of employment. She also wanted clarification of the strategy for providing incentives to employ disabled people, in terms of the nature of that strategy, its possible applicability to private employers, possible establishment of quotas, and the use of sanctions if the quotas were not achieved.

20. Mr. SADI requested examples of cases where the Covenant had been directly invoked in Sweden, since international treaties were not automatically part of Swedish law and had to be transcribed into a law. He asked whether the recent banking and financial crisis would have effects on Sweden's public development assistance programme. Noting that a number of NGOs had mentioned problems of access to the transport system for disabled people, he also asked for clarification on that subject.

21. Mr. DASGUPTA thanked the delegation for its information on Swedish international cooperation, but asked for additional data on the amount of financial resources allocated to Swedish global development policy and public development assistance, specifically in relation to GNP. He asked for clarification on the definition of disability and the notion of disabled persons "whose work capacity is not impaired", because, according to the figures contained in the report under review, the unemployment rate among that category of persons was higher than in the rest of the population.

22. Ms. BONOAN-DANDAN asked for clarification of the meaning of a sentence in paragraph 18 of the fifth periodic report of Sweden, to the effect that "a non-discrimination perspective had been added to economic and social rights" in the framework of Sweden's new plan of action for human rights — since non-discrimination was already a fundamental principle of economic, social and cultural rights. Referring to the report on the mission undertaken in Sweden by the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (A/HRC/428/Add.2), she was surprised to read there that the right to health was poorly integrated into Sweden's domestic laws and policies, and she asked to what extent economic, social and cultural rights were fully taken into account in its domestic processes. Lastly, in relation to the merger of the four existing ombudsmen for discrimination issues, she asked whether the creation of a national human rights institution based on the Paris Principles could be envisaged in Sweden, without compromising the functions of the Ombudsman — the difference being that a national institution could cover the entire spectrum of economic, social and cultural rights, whereas the Ombudsman had a specialized role.

23. The CHAIRPERSON, speaking in his capacity as a Committee member, asked whether the Swedish parliament had started to consider the difficulties posed for Sweden by Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), particularly the right to land, and whether agreements had been reached on those issues with the relevant population groups and the Sami people in particular.

The meeting was suspended at 4.05 p.m. and at 4.15 p.m.

24. Ms. JENRYD (Sweden) said that there was no problem of compatibility between the Covenant and Swedish legislation since the Supreme Court considered the national laws should be interpreted in accordance with Sweden's international obligations and that treaties prevailed in the event of conflict. Examples of this

jurisprudence could be provided at the next meeting. Nothing prevented the content of the Covenant being invoked by an individual in a legal case or before the courts. In answer to a question on political appointment of non- professional judges in the courts, Ms. Jenryd said that it was an ancient Swedish tradition that aimed to enable ordinary citizens to participate in justice administration.

25. Moreover, if, in the report to be submitted in March 2010, the Human Rights Delegation recommended creating an independent institution to oversee respect for human rights in Sweden, the proposal would still be reviewed by the Government. Ms. Jenryd also stated that the national plan of action and rights contained a separate chapter on economic, social and cultural rights.

26. Ms. STEIN (Sweden), replying to a question of the optional protocol aimed at setting up a communications mechanism, said that full protection of all human rights was a central pillar of Swedish human rights policy. As noted on several occasions, Sweden was not convinced that preparing an optional protocol on individual communications was the best way to promote its human rights policy. During the negotiations, it had argued for specific criteria for admission and review of complaints to be included in the text; it had also expressed doubts about including provisions on international cooperation and assistance, which might be interpreted as giving the Committee a role in managing such assistance, thereby risking an overlap with existing strategies and diverting the Committee from its essential functions when resources were limited. Sweden regretted that important points of its position had not been taken into consideration in the draft text on which the General Assembly was currently working. Nonetheless, it would not object to the adoption of the text in the coming weeks.

27. Mr. WILHELMSSON (Sweden) explained that it had recently been decided that the new Ombudsman resulting from the merger of the four ombudsman currently handling issues of discrimination would be called the Ombudsman for Equality. The new institution would still have the general mandate of overseeing respect for laws on discrimination and would be able to review violations of economic, social and cultural rights, but only when discrimination was also involved. The staff of the four existing services would be transferred to the new authority, but some changes were possible because the new Ombudsman would be free to decide on the composition of his staff.

28. The new law on discrimination that would shortly enter into force rectified most of the shortcomings in previous legislation on disabled people. The Parliamentary Commission on Discrimination had suggested including the issue of accessibility for disabled people, but the Government had deemed this inadvisable. Nonetheless, the issue needed to be addressed and active steps taken to find a solution. The forthcoming law defined disability as a “permanent physical, mental or intellectual limitation of a person’s functional capacity, which, owing to an accident or disease, existed at birth or had arisen since, or was likely to occur.” The main type of sanction in cases of discrimination were damages and interest, and these would be strengthened under the new law.

29. Ms. SANTESSON (Sweden) believed that the figures contained in the fifth periodic report on disabled people who were not work-impaired, were based on non-scientific studies conducted by the Government every two years in the form of interviews in which each person stated whether they considered themselves disabled and whether or not their disability prevented them from working. The public

employment service had been mandated to prepare a new strategy of incentives for employing disabled people, which would be unveiled in the spring of 2009. If quotas and sanctions were envisaged, Sweden had a long-standing policy in this area of providing incentives rather than repression, which consisted of paying wage subsidies for employers taking on disabled people.

30. Ms. ALDEN (Sweden) said that the Swedish Government was aware of the inconsistencies that existed between legislation on discrimination and its application, and considered that the best solution was a multiple strategy based on clear and complete legislation, precise implementation instructions, plans of action and strategies, together with a transparent monitoring system and adequate resources. In Sweden, it was the municipalities and local authorities that provided most services to disabled people, and some of them were currently finding it hard to satisfy needs. The Government ensured that disabled people received the benefits to which they were entitled, together with access to services. The courts were very important in guiding the way legislation was applied in practice. Over the last few years, the Government had taken specific steps to ensure that court rulings were effectively enforced, in cases where local or municipal authorities had not fulfilled their service mission.

31. As Sweden purported to be an open society accessible to all, its policy towards disabled people should be seen as complementing its fundamental and global strategy to promote full participation by all citizens. The Government, which gave a high priority to strengthening access to the network and different modes of public transport and had been working on that for many years, was working to reach agreement on priorities, resources and the necessary funding, and had allocated €15 million for that purpose.

32. Ms. STEIN (Sweden), referring to global development policy, noted that the Government was designing an effective and high-quality development policy while ensuring consistency between all domains of government action (foreign affairs, security, migration, agriculture in particular). In the report it had submitted to the Riksdag in March 2008 on implementing that policy, the Government had stated that it now wanted to base its strategy on democracy and human rights, and target its efforts on some 30 countries, mostly in Africa. The policy being implemented contributed to economic, social and cultural rights through six domains of action: fighting oppression, combating economic exclusion, and managing migratory movements, the repercussions of climate change, instability or conflicts, and the various health threats. Sweden allocated 1% of GDP to international development cooperation. The amount allocated thus matched the trend of GDP and had recently increased from €2.77 billion in 2007 to €3.2 billion in 2008; it could also decrease if GDP contracted.

33. Sweden supported the work of the World Bank on governance and strengthening of national capacities, and it had joined Switzerland and other Nordic countries in setting up a voluntary contribution fund specifically to finance studies to better determine the links between development and human rights. The fund would be operational in the near future.

34. On the issue of trade policies and corporate social responsibility, Ms. Stein stated that the Government actively encouraged the country's businesses through its partnership for global responsibility, as shown by Sweden's top ranking in the 2007 Global Competitiveness Index. The policy being implemented was based on the

conviction that States were responsible for respecting and defending human rights; but it was also necessary to provide businesses with a framework for their actions in that area, for which reason the country was providing financial support to the work being done by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General responsible for human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

35. Ms. JENRYD (Sweden) said that the Government was currently working to find a solution to the issue of ILO Convention 169. The right to breed reindeer should not impair other people's land rights, and the political aim was to respect a balance between the interests of each person. In terms of legal aid entitlement, the Sami people had the same individual rights as other citizens, but a Sami village, for example, was a collective body and, as such, could not obtain legal aid. The Samis had reached an agreement with an insurance company on this issue, and Sami villages could engage the Ombudsman responsible for ethnic discrimination to represent them. Lastly, on the issue of fishing, which was highly controversial for each of the parties involved, the results of the survey undertaken had not led to legislative proposals, and were tending more towards an association encompassing Sami villages, together with national entities and international institutions to attempt to resolve the problems.

36. Mr. ANDERSSON (Sweden), replying to various questions on health, firstly made it clear that in its future reports, Sweden would avoid referring to previous reports. He then explained that the country's statistical authority had had to be adapted to the new system implemented throughout Europe, and would thenceforth produce statistics that could be used for comparison purposes. The percentage of people who remained in the country after having been refused authorization to stay was impossible to calculate; but the authorities considered the number to be small, and they certainly received care and treatment when they needed it.

37. In terms of the impact of the current economic instability, Mr. Andersson stated that, following the lead of other European Union countries, Sweden had bailed out its banks, but there would be repercussions on the unemployment rate (the current 6% was expected to rise to 10% in 2009). Nonetheless, the country had a system that enabled the population to survive in good conditions in such circumstances.

38. With regard to the failure to explicitly mention the entitlement to health in Swedish legislation, the Swedish delegation made clear that that right was included in the Constitution (chapter 1). Moreover, there was a wide spectrum of laws guaranteeing Swedish people's right to health (the law on health services and medical services, the law prohibiting discrimination, etc.).

39. Ms. JENRYD (Sweden) said that to guarantee the right of Sami people to health, the Government had ordered the national public health institution to study the health status of ethnic minorities, including the Samis.

40. The Government was aware of ethnic discrimination in the judicial apparatus, and had taken various steps to address the problem. Studies undertaken in 2003 and 2006 showed that discrimination against persons of non-Swedish origin existed throughout the system, but it was most pronounced in the police force. A number of recommendations for specific measures had been made and were currently being reviewed by the government services; they constituted an excellent starting point for action in that area. Furthermore, chapter 8 of the Administrative Procedures Act

provided for the use of interpreters and translators, where necessary, at the authorities' expense. The Government had assigned supplementary funding to cover such costs.

41. Lastly, with regard to the situation of vulnerability facing the Roma people, Ms. Jenryd said that the Government took the issue very seriously. The delegation responsible for Roma issues was dealing with the problem of housing for that population group, and in spring 2008 had set up an education task force, mandated to make proposals to improve the school situation for Roma children.

42. Mr. KOLOSOV, noting that Sweden was very active in the field of international cooperation, asked whether the Swedish Government made its development assistance conditional, for example, on promoting and upholding human rights.

43. Ms. BONOAN-DANDAN asked what economic, social and cultural rights defined in the Covenant were the subject of specific policies and programmes.

44. Mr. SADI asked for further information on the real number of disabled persons in the State party, since, given Sweden's development level, he doubted that such persons represented 20% of the population, as some sources claimed.

45. Ms. STEIN (Sweden) said that development assistance was not generally subject to any condition. One could not require country ravaged by conflict or natural disasters to put their whole emphasis on promoting human rights. Nonetheless, development programmes were accompanied by technical capacity strengthening activities aimed specifically at taking better account of human rights issues.

46. Ms. AKESSON (Sweden) explained that Sweden did not have a clear and precise definition of the concept of "disability", although the competent bodies generally referred to the international classification of functioning, handicap and health published by the World Health Organization (WHO). The proportion of disabled persons varied considerably depending on the type of study. Account also needed to be taken of the rapid ageing of the Swedish population and the fact that many elderly people claimed to suffer from a disability and were therefore classified as disabled.

47. Mr. ANDERSSON (Sweden) said it was impossible to specify which economic, social and cultural rights promoted by the Covenant were the subject of which programmes. As was well known, Sweden was a developed country that had a very wide range of social programmes and services, and for a long time had implemented a policy to provide its inhabitants with the best possible conditions in the various domains: education, health, work, housing, etc.

Articles 6 to 9 of the Covenant

48. Mr. ABDEL-MONEIM asked whether the Swedish Government was included in the labour-market stakeholders referred to in paragraph 60 of the report under review and, if so, what its specific role was. He also wanted to know the total value of the labour market action programmes mentioned in paragraphs 70 to 74 of the report, and whether it was comparable to the amounts allocated to the banking sector by the Swedish Government to alleviate the effects of the global financial crisis. He noted that paragraph 63 of the report said that "open unemployment had increased and the employment rate had continued to fall in 2004", which was a

worrying finding that called the Government's employment policy into question. The Swedish delegation was asked for its point of view on that subject, particularly as regards youth unemployment, which was reaching alarming levels.

49. Ms. BRAS GOMES noted in paragraph 8 of the Swedish Government's written replies to the list of points to be taken up, that issues relating to part-time work were included in collective bargaining agreements; and she asked why the Government had nothing to say on that subject, since, according to the written replies, many women employed on a part-time basis wanted to work more. She noted in paragraph 71 of the written replies that the unemployment rate among foreign workers, particularly women, was much higher than for Swedish nationals, and the gap seemed to be growing. She asked the delegation to explain that situation and provide information on the effectiveness of the programme to integrate new immigrants. Lastly, she asked for explanation of a sentence in paragraph 88 of the written replies, to the effect that minimum wages were particularly important for hiring unskilled workers.

50. Mr. ZHAN DAODE asked why the State party had not adopted a clear definition of the notion of "disability" and wanted to know what steps had been taken to combat employment discrimination against disabled people. He also wanted the Swedish delegation to provide further information on the difficulties immigrants continued to face in finding work.

51. The CHAIRPERSON, speaking as a member of the Committee, noted that paragraph 71 of the Swedish Government's written replies provided statistics on unemployment among persons of 15-74 years of age, and he requested assurance from the delegation that the minimum age for employment in the State party was not 15 years. He also assumed that, if the economic crisis was raising the retirement age, workers did not have to reach 74 years of age to gain their pension entitlements.

52. Ms. SANTESSON (Sweden) confirmed that no young person under 15 years old could work in Sweden, and that the retirement age was 61, although it was possible to continue working beyond that age while also receiving a retirement pension. Sweden did not lack programmes and policies to promote employment, and it would be unfair to cast doubt on their effectiveness, since it was mainly the international economic situation that was affecting the domestic labour market. A wide-ranging reform of the labour market had been undertaken two years ago with a view to simplifying hiring procedures for employers, promoting new businesses and giving incentives for unemployed workers to actively look for work, rather than relying on social assistance. It also entailed combating all forms of labour-market exclusion by implementing specific programmes targeting disabled people, new immigrants, youth and the long-term unemployed. The delegation would provide further specific information on that issue at the next meeting.

The meeting rose at 6.00 p.m.