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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Forty-seventh session

Summary record of the 35th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 16 November 2011, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Pillay

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Third periodic report of Israel

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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)*

Third periodic report of Israel (E/C.12/ISR/3); core document (HRI/CORE/ISR/2008); concluding observations of the Committee on the second periodic report of Israel (E/C.12/1/Add.90); list of issues (E/C.12/ISR/Q/3); written replies by the Government of Israel to the list of issues (E/C.12/ISR/Q/3/Add.1)

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

2. **The Chairperson** welcomed the delegation of Israel and invited it to present the State party's third periodic report.

3. **Mr. Lenk** (Israel) said that Israel had carefully studied the concluding observations made by the Committee after its consideration of his country's second periodic report, and it had borne them in mind when formulating its policy on economic, social and cultural rights. Civil society organizations had been consulted on that matter in accordance with a number of laws. That consultation process should be strengthened and, possibly, institutionalized as one of the country's treaty obligations.

4. Israel was firmly committed to consolidating and developing its policy in the field of economic, social and cultural rights. In October 2011, the Israeli Government had adopted a significant report by the Trajtenberg Committee on those issues. As there was still room for progress, a whole range of measures encompassing legislation, judicial decisions, Government policies and public programmes had been adopted in order to promote the ideals and goals of the Covenant and Israel's basic laws.

5. Since its independence, 64 years earlier, Israel had aspired to live in peace with its neighbours. It had concluded peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. The current Government had called for the resumption of peace negotiations with its Palestinian neighbours in order that both States, Israel and Palestine, might live in peace and security. The situation in the Middle East was still extremely complex and volatile, but recent events, which were sometimes termed "the Arab spring", had generated cautious optimism and hope. Against that backdrop, Israel was endeavouring to help its many neighbours to seize opportunities to improve human rights and develop the economy. Great uncertainty still existed, along with threats stemming from violence and extremism. Amidst all those changes, the Israeli-Palestine question remained a constant closely related to Israel's implementation of the Covenant. For many years, Israeli citizens had been the victims of attacks launched from Gaza, the West Bank and the Egyptian border in Sinai. Israel had the basic obligation to protect all its citizens and it had to devote a substantial amount of its resources to fulfilling that obligation. Despite the existence of real dangers, the Israeli authorities' response was measured and in accordance with the principles of international human rights law. The Palestinians, who controlled the West Bank and Gaza Strip and who made the laws there, were in charge of the data, statistics and information about respect for the economic, social and cultural rights of Palestinians in those territories.

6. Israel was a democratic country with a diverse, creative and successful society. It had filed more patents in the United States than any other developed country. Six Israelis had been awarded the Nobel Prize in the previous decade and Israeli inventions were used the world over.

7. Since its birth in 1948, the State of Israel had consistently adopted comprehensive, welfare-based policies and had enacted countless measures to protect economic, social and cultural rights (compulsory medical insurance, free universal education, care for the disabled and elderly and the setting up of a huge network of social services which protected the most vulnerable segments of society). Fundamental human rights protection was afforded to every individual and enshrined in several basic laws with quasi-constitutional status, which applied in all areas, in the absence of a written constitution. But the remaining gaps meant that much still had to be done to meet all needs. In Israel, that question formed the subject of public debate with civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which played a key role in the promotion of human rights.

8. Four pieces of legislation had recently been adopted on economic, social and cultural rights. First, the National Council for Nutrition Security Law, enacted in July 2011, established a council of experts drawn from the civil service and civic society. It would engage in advocacy and would propose pragmatic solutions to food security issues. Secondly, the Students' Rights Law had been amended in August 2011. It required universities to accommodate and assist students who were pregnant or young parents. Thirdly, the Equal Employment Opportunities Law had been amended in July 2010 in order to bolster the provisions of the existing law which banned discrimination of a job applicant on the grounds of pregnancy, sex, religion or sexual orientation. Fourthly, in 2008, the Knesset had adopted a law to encourage the advancement and integration of women in the workforce and the adjustment of workplaces to women's needs, which offered financial incentives to private sector employers.

9. Several court decisions had been taken which pertained to the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights. In June 2011 the Supreme Court had rendered a landmark decision affirming that the right to water was a basic human right. In April 2011, sitting as the High Court of Justice, it had delivered a decision declaring that the expulsion of foreign workers three months after they had given birth was unconstitutional. In both cases, the Supreme Court had expressly relied on the Covenant and on other international instruments. In a third case, in February 2011, the High Court of Justice had asked the Ministry of Education to take steps to ensure the education of children in the eastern neighbourhoods of Jerusalem.

10. The Israeli Government had taken some important steps to further the ideals of the Covenant. In October 2011 it had endorsed the recommendations of the Trajtenberg report aimed at reducing the cost of living and housing, especially for less well-off families. A historic plan had been adopted in September 2011 for the regularization of Bedouin housing and the economic development of the Bedouin population in the Negev. Under that plan, US\$ 322 million would be devoted to the local economy, housing, settling land claims, regional planning and the development of industrial zones. That programme typified the Israeli Government's action to further the integration of the country's minority communities and to reduce the gap between the Bedouin and Israeli society.

11. Lastly, a standing inter-ministerial committee had just been set up to monitor human rights and to coordinate measures in that sphere. It was chaired by a deputy attorney general and it made and circulated recommendations on a wide gamut of administrative and legislative measures regarding human rights. In addition, in 2010 and 2011, the Israeli Government had approved several projects of significance for the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights, including a five-year plan, worth US\$ 290 million, for the economic development of local minorities, which also covered Arab, Bedouin, Druze and Circassian communities.

Articles 1 to 5

12. **Mr. Shrijver** (Rapporteur for Israel) said that most of the Committee's previous concluding observations were still valid, because little progress had been made in recent years in addressing the concerns raised. While the establishment of the Standing Inter-Ministerial Human Rights Monitoring Committee was a good thing, the Committee wished to know if it was a step towards the setting up of a national human rights commission in keeping with the Paris Principles and, if so, when that commission would be founded.

13. With regard to the incorporation of the Covenant in Israel's domestic legal system, it was encouraging to note that several court decisions, including some taken at the highest level, referred to rights under the Covenant and sometimes relied on them directly. However, as in 2003, the Committee deplored the fact that the Covenant had still not been incorporated into the domestic legal system and could not be cited directly by Israeli citizens. The Committee therefore reiterated the recommendation it had made to Israel in 2003 to incorporate the Covenant in its domestic legal order. In 2008, the General Assembly of the United Nations had adopted the Optional Protocol to the Covenant, which would facilitate more direct implementation of the rights set forth in the Covenant. The Committee wished to know if Israel was considering accession to the Protocol.

14. In paragraph 32 of the previous concluding observations, the Committee had reiterated its earlier recommendations that the State party should take steps to ensure equality of treatment for all Israeli citizens in relation to all Covenant rights. Several sources had, however, reported that some laws passed in the intervening period discriminated between citizens according to their origin and essentially disfavoured Arabs. The Committee asked the delegation to supply information on that question.

15. Israel, as a prosperous country, had a propitious environment for the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights. A few years earlier it had become a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Did it intend to use the tools of development aid to help less economically developed countries to apply the rights set forth in the Covenant?

16. In recent years, the Israeli Government had held that the Covenant ratified by Israel in 1966 did not apply to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In the replies to the list of issues, the Israeli Government said that it could not apply the Covenant, because it did not have effective control over that territory. Yet some of the paragraphs of the advisory opinion in the case concerning the *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, which the International Court of Justice had issued in July 2004, specifically referred to the Covenant. The Court had concluded that Israel was bound by the Covenant and was under an obligation not to raise any obstacle to the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights in those fields where competence had been transferred to Palestinian authorities. What was Israel's position on that matter?

17. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** noted that most of the statistics which had been supplied concerned only one year, whereas the Committee needed statistics covering the whole period under review in order to draw conclusions. It would be preferable to supply statistics in an annex to the report in order to make them easier to read. If the report under consideration contained references to previous periodic reports, it would be useful to specify the numbers of the pages concerned. Although Israel contended that some territories were not mentioned in the report on account of the situation obtaining there, international human rights instruments applied everywhere at all times, unlike international humanitarian law which covered only situations of armed conflict. With regard to the limit on the fishing zone off the coast of Gaza, which the Palestinians wished to extend beyond the five nautical miles at which it was currently set, he drew attention to the fact that under article 2 of the Covenant, the Palestinians had the right to make use of the resources of that zone and

wished to rely on international law in that connection. He therefore wondered to which authorities the Palestinians should bring that case, if not to the Israeli authorities.

18. **Ms. Shin** asked what measures had been taken by the Israeli Government to promote the population's economic, social and cultural rights in recent years. More precisely she wished to know what proportion of the national budget was devoted to health, social security and social and cultural development, in comparison with the defence budget and how those amounts had evolved. She asked which Israeli citizens had to do military service and which were authorized to do civilian service. Since the type of service performed constituted a criterion for access to certain social benefits and some jobs, she wished to receive clarification on that subject. With regard to measures to promote equality between men and women, she asked if Israel had assessed their impact on women, had analysed sex-related disparities and had allocated sufficient budgetary resources to securing equality between men and women, as had been advocated in the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.

19. **Mr. Texier** commented that Israel's control over the occupied territories had an impact on many rights, such as the right to water, work or education. He wondered whether acts constituting violations of economic rights by settlers, such as the destruction of fields or homes, had been referred to the courts and if any sentences had been handed down in such cases.

20. **Mr. Kedzia** said that, although the Covenant had not been incorporated into Israeli law, on several occasions the Supreme Court had referred to the Covenant as an important international instrument for applying the rights set forth therein at the national level. He wished to know whether the Supreme Court cited the provisions of the Covenant at its own initiative or at the request of petitioners. As in Israel most human rights ombudsmen formed part of the administration and therefore responded to the executive, he wondered how independent they were. He also wished to know if the terms of reference of the State Comptroller, who was independent and elected by the Knesset, also extended to economic, social and cultural rights. He wondered if the Israeli Government was contemplating the acceptance of some of the recommendations concerning economic and social rights formulated at the most recent universal periodic review of Israel.

21. **Mr. Sadi** regretted the fact that Israel had no law against discrimination. The adoption of a written constitution might go some way towards remedying that problem and filling the legal lacunae related to the provisions of the Covenant. Although Israel had concluded a peace agreement with Jordan in 1994, unfortunately Jordanians' land ownership rights were still not respected, despite the fact that that was a legal obligation which should in principle apply retroactively, in other words to the period prior to 1994. He welcomed the measures to increase the number of women in the public and civil service, but noted their continuing absence from the teams negotiating peace agreements. Were there any plans to bring them into those teams? Although the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor gave financial assistance to organizations which hired women, a democratic country like Israel should take more systematic measures to promote women's employment. It was also regrettable that Israel was not a party to several international human rights instruments such as the Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

22. **Mr. Riedel** asked the Israeli delegation to supply details concerning the legal response to the Supreme Court's decision regarding the building of the wall and to the Court's comments on reconciling State security with other imperatives.

23. **Mr. Ribeiro Leão** asked if the legislation of the State of Israel was compatible with the principle of non-discrimination established in article 2 of the Covenant.

24. **Mr. Atangana** recalled that the 2009 report on Israel of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (A/HRC/10/76) had found that human rights defenders were not safe in Israel and the occupied territories and had been subjected to administrative detention. He asked if the State party had taken measures to end that situation.

25. **Mr. Gottlieb** (Israel) said that the overall budget for local authorities' social services had risen by 29 per cent between 2006 and 2010. Social expenditure as a percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP) had remained slightly under 30 per cent between 2000 and 2010. That expenditure encompassed the social security, social services and public health budgets.

26. **Mr. Lenk** (Israel) commented that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had long had a division responsible for international cooperation with countries from all the regions of the world. Within that framework, Israel had put in place a system for exchanging information on various sectors, especially agriculture and health care. International cooperation represented a growing share of the budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Government hoped that it would reach the same level as in other OECD countries in the next few years.

27. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that the principle of equality was of cardinal importance in the Israeli legal system and was established in a variety of legislative texts. While Israel had no Constitution, it had adopted several fundamental laws which constituted a charter of rights and guaranteed respect for human dignity in a democratic State. Those laws prohibited any violation of the right to life, physical integrity or human dignity. Although the Covenant had not been incorporated into domestic law, it applied to all national legislation, as could be seen from numerous decisions of the Supreme Court. The bill relating to the founding of a human rights commission had been examined on several occasions in the Knesset, but had not yet been adopted. Israel nevertheless considered that it had a comprehensive institutional system for implementing human rights.

28. With reference to paragraph 137 of the report under consideration, she explained that the amendment in 2005 of the Equal Rights for Women Law had guaranteed women's participation in governmental teams, including peace negotiation teams. It was the task of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, whose duties were described in detail in paragraph 129 of the report, to monitor the implementation of measures to foster equality between men and women. Some 40 per cent of the members of working groups were women and Israel had set a target of parity. In conclusion, she gave assurances that the Committee's recommendations on methods for preparing reports would be heeded in the next periodic report.

29. **Ms. Shmueli** (Israel) explained that the Defence Service Law stipulated that every Israeli must perform military service and could be exempted only on medical or religious grounds. It also stipulated that anyone, including an Arab Israeli, who was unable to perform military service, could do voluntary civilian service for one to two years. That service entitled the person concerned to the same benefits as those received by Israelis who had performed military service, as the courts had found in the decisions cited in paragraph 461 of the third periodic report, provided that the person concerned had completed 12 months of voluntary service. Persons doing civilian service received the same financial support as non-combatant soldiers. The Israeli Government had taken numerous steps to increase the number of participants in voluntary service and had wished to make it compulsory, but that decision had met with stiff opposition from several Arab chiefs. The number of young Arabs doing that type of service was steadily increasing. It had gone up

from 240 in 2005 to stand currently at 1,256 and there was every sign that it would continue to rise. Young volunteers were assigned to a variety of associations in different regions.

30. Israel condemned all forms of violence irrespective of the identity of the perpetrator. It had adopted a number of measures to prevent violence and punish the perpetrators. The law-enforcement agency carried out investigations and, if appropriate, then referred a case to the relevant office of the prosecution service. An inter-ministerial team had been set up to counter incitement to violence, the glorification of violence and ideological crimes. It brought together representatives of the prosecution service, the General Security Service, the police and the Israel Defence Force (IDF). It met regularly to coordinate the activities of its member institutions and to deal with questions related to the application of criminal law and to breaches of the peace which undermined the political settlement of land-ownership disputes. That item remained on the agenda because of the security situation. Israel had recently shut one yeshiva and had stopped allocating funds to another because they had advocated violence and their students had participated in violent acts. The authorities had issued 13 expulsion orders against persons who had been planning violent action.

31. The armed forces were deployed to provide security during harvesting. At the first sign of trouble in the West Bank, the IDF arrested suspects and handed them over to the police as soon as the latter arrived on the spot. The district police forces had a prosecution unit, to which Arabic-speaking investigators were attached, which decided what action should be taken on each case. The work of the district police was supervised by the Attorney General's Office. Efforts were made to avoid friction between Israelis and Palestinians, especially at sensitive periods of the year, by deploying soldiers in certain areas. Violence often arose from land-ownership disputes. The legal proceedings resulting from these disputes were handled with equal care irrespective of whether the plaintiff was an Israeli or a Palestinian. The police services in the West Bank were investigating a growing number of cases against Israelis.

32. **Mr. Fried** (Israel) said that human rights formed part of the civic instruction syllabus at all levels of education. Every pupil in Israel, no matter whether they were Jewish, Arab or Druze was taught that Israel was a democratic Jewish State and they were instructed in citizens' human rights, minority rights, especially the rights of the Arab minority, the rule of law, the system of government, the way it functioned and pluralism. They were told about tensions within Israeli society and inter-communal tensions between the different groups of the population. The syllabi covered all rights, the reason for them, as well as restrictions on and reservations to their exercise. World events were analysed from a rights perspective taking account of the balance between rights and public interest. Specialized teaching units provided in-depth training in certain rights and freedoms.

33. Meetings were arranged between ethnic groups and seminars were held on teaching human rights and democracy, among other activities. Every year, teaching material was distributed in all schools on Human Rights Day. That distribution was accompanied by extensive training throughout the year and preparations to celebrate that day. NGOs were associated with that human rights education and teachers regularly underwent further training in human rights and how to teach them.

34. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that, although in recent years several bills had been introduced on the inclusion of social rights in national legislation, none had been adopted. The Ombudsman's independence was anchored in the State Comptroller Law. With regard to reliance on the Covenant in the application of the law, the Supreme Court had expressly referred to the Covenant and to the Committee's general comment No. 15, on the right to water, in a case concerning water and sanitation in unrecognized villages in the south of Israel. The Covenant was cited by both the Supreme Court and by petitioners.

35. **Mr. Karin** (Israel) explained the three reasons why human rights treaties did not apply in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. First, the international human rights instruments to which Israel was a party could not be formally applied owing to the notion of jurisdiction which was in turn closely related to that of sovereignty. Secondly, even if Israel exercised some physical control over the territories, for several years monitoring the application of the Covenant had been the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority. The joint application of international instruments and existing standard-setting texts was still a moot question. Thirdly, since control, power and responsibilities had been transferred to the Palestinian Authority, Israel was unable to answer the Committee's questions. That situation did not prevent the Israeli Supreme Court from using human rights instruments as a source of interpreting the law in cases concerning the territories. Israel respected the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, even though the Court's advisory opinions were sometimes open to controversy with other States, or with national or international courts.

36. **Mr. Schrijver** (Rapporteur for Israel) wished to know if Israel was intending to set up a national human rights commission in accordance with the Paris Principles and to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Covenant. Although he understood Israel's position with regard to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, he emphasized that the question of the Covenant's application did not even arise if it was not applicable in the territories. He wondered what controversy existed at international level, given that the Court had adopted the advisory opinion by 14 votes to 1, in other words by the largest possible majority. He welcomed Israel's commitment to international development aid and wished to know if Israel was aiming for the target recommended by the OECD of 0.7 per cent of GDP. He also wished to know if Israel was prepared to adopt an approach to international development aid that was based on human rights.

37. **Ms. Shin** commented that it was unfair if a person who was unable to perform military service for health or other reasons did not receive the same benefits as persons who had done military service.

38. **Mr. Texier** drew attention to the Committee's position with regard to the wall. When the wall separated Palestinian properties or encroached on Palestine and when that had a direct impact on access to food, water or health, or when access to health care was rendered impossible by closure or checks, Israel was directly responsible, regardless of the question of effective control, or lack of it, over the occupied territories.

39. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** held that no court would base a decision on a text which was at dispute in international law. Having read out paragraph 6 of the State party's second periodic report (E/1990/6/Add.32), he asked when the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement would no longer be termed "interim". In any case, that agreement could not serve as justification for declining responsibility for the non-application of the Covenant in the occupied territories.

40. **Mr. Kedzia** asked if the State party was contemplating acceptance of the recommendations made by the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review at its tenth session (A/HRC/10/76), some of which concerned respect for rights set forth in the Covenant. Canada had recommended that the State party should guarantee the Bedouin populations' access to basic public services such as sanitation, electricity and water and that it should comply with its obligations under international human rights and international humanitarian law to ensure the rights to health, education and work and protection of family rights in the West bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights, while the United Kingdom had recommended that it should ensure that Arab Israelis were represented in policy and decision-making positions and Jordan had recommended that Arab residents should not be expelled from their homes in Jerusalem.

41. **Mr. Lenk** (Israel) said that the Israeli Government would reflect on whether or not it was necessary for Israel to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Covenant. It had taken the first step towards possibly setting up a national human rights commission by establishing an inter-ministerial committee to study the matter. There was no way of saying whether such a commission would really be set up, or if it would be consistent with the Paris Principles.
42. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that bodies responsible for advancing women's rights were legion in Israel. They included the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women which responded to the Prime Minister's Office and the Gender Equality Division in the Civil Service Commission.
43. According to a national survey of levels of trust in various government bodies, the Ombudsman and the State Comptroller were held in particular esteem by the population. That explained why they received numerous petitions, mostly relating to health, education and economic and social rights, from men and women in all sectors of the population, irrespective of their religion. Many of the cases submitted to the State Comptroller were deemed admissible and led to corrective measures.
44. The question of founding a national human rights commission had been discussed at all the Knesset sessions for a year. Opponents of setting up a new institution pointed to the multitude of bodies which could already receive complaints in numerous spheres, such as the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission within the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor, the Commission for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the Ministry of Justice, the Ombudsman at the Ministry of Health, the National Council for Children or the Army Ombudsman. As a new bill on the setting up of a national human rights commission had been presented in the Knesset, the latter would soon debate that question.
45. In view of the plethora of complaints mechanisms, the Israeli Government considered that Israeli citizens and residents had sufficient means of obtaining redress for any breaches of their social rights and it had therefore decided not to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Covenant which enables the Committee to receive and examine communications.
46. **Mr. Lenk** (Israel) said that the State of Israel attached great importance to human rights, especially the right to health and food. He did not know if Israel would be able in the short term to devote 0.7 per cent of its national product to official development aid, but that was indeed the Government's target.
47. **Mr. Gottlieb** (Israel) said that, since 2009, the report on poverty had contained statistics disaggregated by sex. That would make it possible to see how women's economic situation had evolved over the years. The position with regard to the share of the State budget devoted to defence and social services had been reversed since 1985. In those days, the defence budget had made up 44 per cent of the total State budget, while social services had accounted for 32 per cent. In 2004, the date of the most recent available statistics, those figures were 24 and 53 per cent respectively.
48. **Mr. Lenk** (Israel) said that disabled persons who were exempt from compulsory military service could volunteer for civilian service if they wanted to play a role in society. If they did so, they would be entitled to social benefits.
49. **Mr. Karin** (Israel) said that in raising the question of the applicability of the Covenant and its legal responsibility, the State of Israel did not intend to shirk its responsibilities, or those of the military authorities, on the ground. In regions where the operations of the Israeli armed forces had direct repercussions on the Palestinian population, the fact that the State of Israel did not consider itself to be legally bound by the provisions of the Covenant did not mean that it did not have to find practical ways,

compatible with the military operations, of giving access to health care and food to persons who needed it.

Articles 6 to 9 of the Covenant

50. **Mr. Texier** asked how the unemployment rate was calculated, since he believed that any persons who had looked for a job in the four previous weeks were classified as job-seekers. He wished to know why the unemployment rate among Israeli Arabs, Druze and Circassians was higher than that of the rest of the population and why members of those groups generally held less well-paid jobs in agriculture, the hotel trade and catering. He asked the delegation if the fact that Arab Israelis did not do military service did not create de facto discrimination in access to employment.

51. Lastly, he wished to know what measures the Israeli Government already applied or intended to take to reduce the wage gap between men and women and whether Arab Israeli workers and Arabs who lived in the occupied territories but who worked in Israeli territory had the right to join a trade union.

52. **Mr. Martynov**, noting the particularly high rate of unemployment among the disabled, notwithstanding the numerous measures taken by the State party to reduce it, asked the Israeli delegation why it thought that those measures had not been more effective. He failed to understand why only about one hundred firms had sought the public support granted since 2007 to businesses which wished to adapt their premises to make them accessible to disabled workers. He wished to know the current employment rate of persons in that category, since the figures in the report dated from 2007. In that connection, he asked if, like many other countries, Israel had introduced a quota for hiring disabled persons, or whether it was contemplating such action.

53. He wished to know why the State party had steadily reduced the share of the budget devoted to social benefits between 2003 and 2007, since that had inevitably led to a rise in the poverty rate and he also wished to know what the trend had been since 2007. He asked about the amount of unemployment allowances and whether they guaranteed those in receipt of them a decent standard of living. For comparative purposes, what was the poverty threshold in the State party?

54. **Mr. Dasgupta** inquired about the percentage of persons from minority groups who held senior positions in the civil and public service, the amount of the average wage in Israel, the average wage of members of minorities and that of persons in the majority population and the unemployment rates of those categories of the population. He asked if the pertinent statistical data showed any substantial disparities between minority and majority communities.

55. **Mr. Kedzia** was pleased to note that women made up 50 per cent of the working population, but regretted that that was not the case of Arab women, only 29 per cent of whom worked. He wondered if the restrictions on freedom of movement and the fact that they had to pass through checkpoints did not hamper those women's access to employment. He invited the Israeli delegation to express its views on that point. It might also like to say what measures the State party had taken to reduce the wage gap between Jews and Arabs and to supply the unemployment rates for both groups of the population.

56. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim**, referring to paragraph 317 of the report under consideration, which spoke of a law permitting discounts on electricity bills, asked whether the State party was thinking of extending the preferential tariff given to the retired after the first 400 kilowatt hours had been consumed, since that volume probably accounted for just one year's consumption. The Israeli delegation might then like to say if government policy to reduce child allowances mentioned in paragraph 332 of the report had continued after 2009

and if the trend towards lowering social security benefits which had been observed between 2003 and 2007 had lasted.

Articles 10 to 12 of the Covenant

57. **Mr. Kerdoun** wished to know what measures had been taken by the State party to restore the water supply infrastructure in the West Bank and Jordan Valley, since Palestine's economic future depended on water for drinking, irrigation and the production of electricity. According to reliable information at the Committee's disposal, Israel controlled and diverted almost all water sources, including rivers and groundwater, thus creating unequal access to water between settlers (who had 400 litres of water available every day, or even 800 litres a day in the north of the country) and the Palestinians (who consumed only 70 to 90 litres a day on average). The selling price of water was also much too high for the Palestinians. As it had not obtained a satisfactory reply to question No. 27 on the list of issues, the Committee would appreciate it if the Israeli delegation could clearly say whether the State party had really decided to repair Palestinian communities' water supply infrastructure and to end unequal access to water, which constituted a violation of the right to water and intentional discrimination against Palestinians.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.