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Summary record of the 15th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 13 May 2009, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Bras Gomes (Vice-Chairperson)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Consideration of reports:

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (item 8 of the agenda) (continued)

Fourth and fifth periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (E/C.12/GBR/5 and Adds.1 and 2; basic document (HRI/CORE/1/Add.62/Rev.1); concluding observations of the Committee on the third periodic report of the United Kingdom (E/C.12/1/Add.79); list of issues (E/C.12/GBR/Q/5), written replies of the British Government to the list of issues (E/C.12/GBR/Q/5/Add.1) (continued)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland resumed their places at the Committee table.*

Articles 1 to 5 of the Covenant (continued)

2. **Ms. Majid** (United Kingdom), replying to a question raised with regard to urban revitalization programmes, said that all major social policies implemented in the United Kingdom were evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively, if possible. The New Deal for Skills programme had, for example, helped 2.1 million people return to the job market in 10 years. Aware of the need for local solutions to local problems, the British Government had launched in 15 pilot zones an innovative “City Strategy” policy, the objectives of which were adapted to local needs, including objectives concerning ethnic minorities in 13 of the 15 projects.

3. **Mr. Luxton** (United Kingdom) said that Wales was one of the United Kingdom’s poorest regions. Responsibility for economic development had been devolved to the Welsh Assembly Government, thereby enabling it to take rapid and local action to meet the needs of the Welsh population. The local urban revitalization strategy brought together all stakeholders (local coordinators, the European Union, interested members of the Welsh Assembly Government and so forth). A business development project, aimed at groups that were usually underrepresented among beneficiaries of business support policies — single parents, women, the disabled, young people, the elderly — had thus far helped 10,000 individuals go into business and 735 businesses to adapt to clients from diverse backgrounds. It was planned to set up a centre of excellence to conduct a survey of and disseminate good urban and rural revitalization practices. At the level of the Welsh Assembly Government, a training programme had been set up to draw the attention of the teams responsible for those policies, and their partners, to the fact that diversity was not only a moral and legal issue but also an economic issue.

4. **Mr. O’Gorman** (United Kingdom) said that United Kingdom had not, for the moment, ratified the revised European Social Charter because it contained a large number of rights of a very general scope. The United Kingdom was paying close attention to the interpretation in practice of those rights and would make its decision when the precise consequences of ratification had become clear.

5. He went on to explain the reasons why the United Kingdom had decided not to ratify three sections of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 102 on social security. Part VI of the Convention (on assistance to persons injured on the job) provided that all medications should be free of charge. In the United Kingdom, with the exception of Wales, that benefit was reserved for low-income persons while the rest of the population had to pay a modest fee. Ratifying Part VIII (Maternity Benefit) implied providing benefits at a fixed rate in relation to income, while the United Kingdom applied variable rates

according to the number of years worked (the amount was, however, equivalent to 90 per cent of income in most cases); a specific rate was applied during an initial period and a lower fixed rate was applied subsequently. Part IX (Invalidity Benefit) meant guaranteeing that no beneficiary would, upon retirement, receive a pension lower than the amount of the invalidity benefit. The United Kingdom could not make that guarantee since pensions were linked to contributions, even though the reform planned for 2010 would improve the situation by reducing the number of years of obligatory contributions.

6. While it fully endorsed the aims and spirit of ILO Convention No. 106 on weekly rest (commerce and offices), the United Kingdom had opted for a more flexible arrangement by making it possible to combine weekly rest days into two days off every two weeks, instead of a compulsory rest day each week, as provided for under the Convention.

7. **Ms. Nelthorp** (United Kingdom) said that the declarations made by the United Kingdom with regard to the Covenant were in line with Article 103 of the Charter of the United Nations, which stipulated that “[i]n the event of a conflict between the obligations of the Members of the United Nations under the present Charter and their obligations under any other international agreement, their obligations under the present Charter shall prevail”. To her knowledge, however, there had never been a specific conflict of that kind.

8. With regard to the situation of the Chagossians, she said that according to estimates, approximately 1,000 Chagossians were living in the United Kingdom and between 3,000 and 4,000 in Mauritius and the Seychelles. British citizenship had been granted to some Chagossians under the British Overseas Territories Act 2002. Those who had settled in the United Kingdom had the same rights as all British citizens, including the right to social security benefits.

9. The most recent official contacts to date between the United Kingdom and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) had occurred at the Group of 20 (G-20) Summit in London in April 2009. The United Kingdom chaired the committee monitoring the NEPAD-Infrastructure Project Preparation Facility Special Fund, a fund to which it had contributed £6 million. Concerning the integration of human rights into British international development assistance policy, that dimension was systematically taken into consideration, particularly since the Department for International Development had adopted its conditionality policy in 2005.

10. The United Kingdom considered it particularly important in a time of global crisis, in order not to jeopardize the progress made in the past decade, to maintain its goals concerning the ratio of official development assistance (ODA) to gross national income (GNI), namely 0.56 per cent by 2010 and 0.7 per cent by 2013. The United Kingdom had not enacted legislation to make the goal of 0.7 per cent compulsory. The Department for International Development’s budget had been £5.3 billion in 2007–2008 and would increase to £7.9 billion in 2010–2011. The United Kingdom was on the governing body of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank and encouraged reform of those two institutions. The recent G-20 Summit in London had agreed on the need for such reform. The United Kingdom cooperated closely with IMF, by sharing analyses, and with the World Bank, by financing programmes.

11. The United Kingdom took full account of economic, social and cultural rights in its development policies. For example, 75 per cent of the funds allocated to the Department for International Development’s programmes for Kenya concerned education, health and social welfare. British ODA was based on the principle that macroeconomic stability, growth, good governance and social inclusion were vital to long-term economic development; developing countries must also be capable of defining for themselves the policies they wished to implement to achieve their development objectives. The share of British development assistance devoted to multilateral aid, currently at 44 per cent, would be rising

to 46 per cent; the rest consisted of bilateral aid. The use of development assistance funds could be monitored by traditional public accounting and financial auditing methods in some cases – for example, in the case of countries with which the United Kingdom maintained close relations and which benefited from budgetary support; in other countries, assistance took the form of sectoral support and project financing. With regard to cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), great importance was accorded to the role of local NGOs and civil society.

12. **Ms. Majid** (United Kingdom) said that the British Government recognized the benefits of NGO contributions to public policy. For example, a group of NGOs active in the field of ethnic minorities and labour issues was part of an interministerial team responsible for such matters, and was thus able to contribute to policymaking. In terms of results, disparities in the employment of ethnic minorities had diminished a further 2 per cent since 2005.

13. **Mr. Kissane** (United Kingdom) said, concerning the reservations made by the State party to various articles of the Covenant, that the British Government had, in 2004, reviewed its position concerning all the international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It was difficult to understand why some of those reservations, which seemed to be anachronistic, were still maintained. The matter should be explored further to see if such reservations were still relevant. With regard to the report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, he said that the Government had made a detailed reply to that report which had been published on the Committee's website.

14. **Mr. Sadi**, returning to the question of the status and relevance of the Covenant, told the State party that it might use the draft bill of rights for Northern Ireland, which provided for the protection of economic, social and cultural rights and would be debated in Parliament at the end of the year, as a testing ground for the inclusion of those rights, thereby clearing up the confusion surrounding the issue. The State party appeared to be excessively apprehensive in that regard, including in respect of the Optional Protocol to the Covenant. If the State party feared that it had nothing to gain in signing that instrument, it had nothing to lose either.

15. **Mr. Schrijver** asked the British delegation to elaborate on its response to his question on measures to combat terrorism and their impact on the economic, social and cultural rights of Muslims and ethnic minorities.

16. **Mr. Pillay** was surprised that the Committee members had been referred to a website in order to obtain information and requested an explanation on the rights enshrined in the Covenant that, according to Mr. Rangarajan himself, required "immediate realization" and those whose realization was "progressive". Similarly, the United Kingdom's precise position on the essential elements making up each of the economic, social and cultural rights had still not been set out. He would also like to have some idea as to when the bill of rights for Northern Ireland, already in preparation for quite some time, would be adopted.

17. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim**, referring to paragraph 16 of the text of the British delegation's declaration, said that while the notion of British overseas territories might be important from the viewpoint of international law, it was not really significant from the viewpoint of the Covenant.

18. **Mr. Kolosov** asked what the State party's policies and practices were with regard to the extradition of persons convicted of human rights violations.

19. **Mr. Rangarajan** (United Kingdom) said that while there was no compelling reason why the obligations under the Covenant had not been directly integrated into British

domestic law, the complexities that would entail legally and practically explained in part the reluctance in that regard. Moreover, direct applicability would short-circuit an essential stage in the British democratic process, namely decision-making by Parliament and identification of priorities and corresponding resources. The United Kingdom was in no way hostile to economic, social and cultural rights; however, it considered it particularly important for such decisions to be taken with the consent of the populations concerned and not imposed from on high. In respect of the Optional Protocol to the Covenant, the British delegation regarded the term “apprehensive” as somewhat excessive: the United Kingdom was simply waiting to see the practical effects of the application of the Optional Protocol and the benefits that it might have for the British population before making a decision.

20. The issue of anti-terrorism measures and their impact on minority groups was the subject of wide-reaching political debate in the country. Aware of the need to guard against taking any counterproductive measures in that regard, the Government had focused its efforts on preventing the radicalization of marginalized persons by endeavouring, with the help of local authorities, to foster their integration and promote unity within the population.

21. The bill of rights for the United Kingdom and its equivalent for Northern Ireland were part of an open democratic process. For the time being, consultations with regard to the Green Paper on that subject were being held. In an effort to broaden the debate, the Government planned to initiate local discussion on the issue. It remained to be seen if the process would result in a law, a declaration or a text having constitutional status.

22. **Mr. Oppenheim** (United Kingdom) said that the position of the British Government with regard to extradition was based essentially on international instruments, which it always respected scrupulously. He raised the particular problem of persons who had allegedly committed human rights violations and who came to the United Kingdom seeking asylum.

23. **Mr. Pillay** asked what steps had been taken by the State party to improve the social housing situation, given that 5 million people were currently on a waiting list, 73 per cent of Catholic residents in the north of Belfast were still waiting for social housing, and a seven-year strategy in that regard had been launched, with a budget of £130 million. In Scotland, 230,000 homes still had to be adapted to the needs of disabled persons. Similarly, he regretted the absence of annual statistics disaggregated by the various criteria defining the situation of homeless persons, and he asked whether the objective stated in paragraph 180 of the British Government’s written replies to the list of issues — 50,000 households in insecure temporary accommodation by 2010 — was likely to be attained. He wished to know in that regard whether the United Kingdom planned to base its efforts on the law adopted in 2003 in Scotland to benefit the homeless [Homelessness (Scotland) Act], which addressed the question of homelessness from a human rights perspective and made the right to housing an enforceable right.

24. **Ms. Keats** (United Kingdom) said that the Government had invested more than £8 billion in the housing sector. Aware that the social housing waiting list was very long, the British Government had not only begun to create new housing but had also launched a programme to prevent homelessness. Persons likely to be confronted with that problem could thus turn to the local authorities for help and be granted housing if they met the requirements. Persons counted as “homeless” were those who had been registered as such by the local authorities, in application of the law on the homeless. Homeless persons who managed to find housing on their own were not included in those statistics. They nevertheless benefited from family mediation programmes, assistance in paying rental deposits and help in gaining access to private sector rentals provided to them by the competent social services of the local authorities.

25. Fifty per cent of municipalities had already achieved the goal of halving by 2010 the number of persons living in temporary housing, and even if all municipalities might not be able to do so, it could reasonably be estimated that the goal would be attained at the national level.

26. During consideration of the United Kingdom's fourth periodic report in 2002, many families with children living in temporary shelters had been staying in bed and breakfast accommodations, which had made their situation precarious. That was no longer possible, or at least not longer than six weeks, and 87 per cent of the households concerned were currently living in independent housing, which was a significant improvement. The next step was to do the same for young people aged 16 and 17, who had become a priority target group under the new relevant legislation. The results were already convincing: only 330 young people were still living in bed and breakfast accommodations, as compared to 1,000 in 2008.

27. Overcrowded housing was also a major problem, seen mainly in the social housing sector, where 565,000 dwellings were allegedly concerned, as compared to 234,000 in the private housing sector. At the same time, many two- or three-bedroom accommodations granted to single-parent families were under-occupied, the current estimate being 456,000. To address those two problems simultaneously, an action plan, funded by a £15 million budget, had been launched in 2007 and agents known as "pioneers" had been recruited to collect data on the accommodations in question and try and resolve that dual problem.

28. **Mr. Peddie** (United Kingdom) said that the Scottish Government was currently working to institute the right to housing in Scotland. Under previously existing legislation, social housing was assigned by local authorities according to a number of official priority criteria based on the degree of need of those seeking housing. The ultimate goal of the new Homelessness (Scotland) Act, adopted in 2003, was to eliminate those criteria by 2012, which would then make the right enforceable in practice and ensure that all requests were treated equally. In the meantime, the Government had broadened the category of persons regarded as a priority to those likely to become victims of sexual or financial exploitation and those abusing alcohol or drugs owing to their specific living conditions.

29. At the same time, the Scottish Government had provided local authorities with the possibility of restricting the right tenants had had up until then to buy their social housing, in order to maintain a stock of social housing and prevent its reduction, to the benefit of the private sector. Many local authorities had invoked that clause to avoid being confronted by a scarcity of public housing.

30. **Mr. Rangarajan** (United Kingdom) said that the economic crisis had made the combat against homelessness much more difficult and had even undermined the progress in that field made in the previous few years. The British Government was therefore investing substantial amounts of money to counteract the effects of the recession and provide temporary assistance to homeowners to enable them to continue reimbursing their loans and thus prevent seizure of their mortgaged property.

31. Persons sleeping rough, the most extreme form of homelessness, could apply for social housing accommodation, especially if they had children. Rough sleeping had declined by 74 per cent since 1998, and the goal was to eradicate that scourge by 2012. To do so, the British Government was counting on the success of the "No one left out" programme implemented for that purpose.

32. **Mr. Pillar** said that he had asked a question with regard to social housing in Belfast and would appreciate receiving a reply to it. He wondered if there was a representative of Northern Ireland in the delegation.

33. **Mr. Rangarajan** (United Kingdom) said that the delegation did not have a representative of Northern Ireland. He offered to transmit Mr. Pillar's question to the competent Irish authorities, which could send the Committee a written reply.

34. **The Chairperson** pointed out that if the delegation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland wished the Committee to take account of that reply when it drafted its concluding observations, the reply would have to be transmitted to it within 48 hours.

Articles 6 to 9 of the Covenant

35. **Mr. Texier** hoped that because it considered the reservations made by the United Kingdom on acceding to the Covenant to be obsolete, the British delegation would be able to inform the Committee, during its consideration of the United Kingdom's sixth periodic report, that the reservations had been withdrawn.

36. Having read in the documentation provided by the British delegation that the United Kingdom prided itself on having one of the highest employment rates in the world, he wished to know what percentage 29.3 million workers represented, whether the current crisis was having an impact on the unemployment rate and, if so, what special measures had been taken to keep it in check. Citing a 2006 ILO report indicating that certain minority groups, including Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Caribbean blacks and black men from Africa, continued to suffer from a much higher unemployment rate than the rest of the population, he wished to know what specific unemployment-reduction programmes had been implemented to assist those population groups.

37. Given the extreme length of the procedure for granting asylum, which took over 12 months, it would be desirable, in his view, to give asylum-seekers access to the job market. Had that possibility been considered by the State party?

38. Citing a 2005 ILO report indicating gender-based salary differences, amounting to 22.6 per cent in the private sector and 13.3 per cent in the public sector, he wished to know whether that gap was still as significant in 2009, both in the public and private sectors.

39. He recalled that in order not to be qualified as "forced labour", prison work had to meet the following two criteria: it had to be carried out under government control and supervision (in that particular case, the officials responsible for prison security) and organized in such a way that workers could not be directly recruited by private sector employers. According to another ILO report, dating from 2007, the United Kingdom apparently did not fulfil those two conditions. Could the British delegation comment on that matter?

40. It would be useful to have more information on the actual amount of the minimum hourly wage, given that the figures varied from paragraph to paragraph of the report under consideration: according to paragraph 107, it was £7 per hour, but varied between £3.30, £4.45 and £5.35 depending on age in paragraph 211. More information would also be appreciated on why individuals aged 18 to 21 were earning a lower salary than those aged 22 and over, even though both groups had attained their majority. Should it be concluded that young people earning a lower salary were still in training?

41. With regard to trade union rights and the application of article 8 of the Covenant, he wished to know whether the State party had amended or even eliminated national legislation making it possible to exclude trade unionists carrying out political activities in parallel.

42. **Mr. Martynov**, noting the State party's successful efforts to promote employment of disabled persons, pointed out that much remained to be done in that area, as, moreover, the Government itself had acknowledged. Referring to paragraph 73 of the British

Government's written replies to the list of issues, he asked the delegation what steps it had taken to implement the New Deal project to ensure full employment for the new generation, which had been announced in 2007, and whether the delegation could describe the set of additional provisions aimed at helping disabled persons find employment. The delegation might also indicate whether the State party had instituted quotas for the recruitment of disabled persons and had taken measures to ensure that disabled persons had access to the same degree of education and skills as the rest of the population, and consequently had the same employment opportunities.

43. The delegation might also wish to clarify whether the information contained in paragraphs 98 to 101 of the British Government's written replies to the list of issues, pertaining to working conditions and in particular weekly rest, daily rest and paid annual leave, applied solely to British workers, and whether, in the framework of prevention of industrial accidents, the State party planned to ratify ILO Convention No. 174 on Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents.

44. Similarly, the British delegation might explain why the State party was reluctant to ratify the revised European Social Charter, and how long the State party intended to study its practical application before deciding whether or not to ratify it. It might also let the Committee know whether the United Kingdom planned to ratify ILO Convention No. 117 on Social Policy (Basic Aims and Standards) and ILO Convention No. 118 on Equality of Treatment (Social Security).

45. It would also be useful if the British delegation could indicate whether the aim of the pension reform was to ensure an adequate income for all population groups, including women, disabled persons and members of ethnic minorities, and provide the Committee with comparative cost of living data.

46. It would also be interesting to know what the length of post-natal maternity leave was in the United Kingdom, whether women who failed to meet the criteria set out in paragraph 231 of the report under consideration could still claim statutory maternity pay and, lastly, whether there had been any evidence of the statutory maternity pay and pre- and post-natal benefits that had been judged insufficient by the European Committee of Social Rights in 2005.

47. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** asked whether the four key elements (macroeconomic stability, flexibility and diversity, making work pay, and active labour market policies) on which the British Government's labour policy was founded permitted the State party to fulfil its obligations under article 6 (2) of the Covenant. He doubted, for example, that flexibility was as attractive to employers as it was to employees. He cited information sources according to which retirement pensions for women were allegedly lower than those for men and asked the British delegation to provide clarifications in that regard.

48. **Mr. Kedzia** asked for up-to-date information on the estimated number of asylum-seekers whose request had been turned down and who could not return to their country for various reasons. As he understood it, they were neither entitled to State aid nor to work, and he wondered how they survived. Given that several thousand people were in that situation, he asked whether the United Kingdom had taken any steps to address the problem.

49. **Mr. Sadi** said that according to several information sources, immigrants working in the fishing industry in Scotland and Northern Ireland were allegedly victims of exploitation, and asked why the State party could not guarantee them decent working conditions and a minimum wage.

50. **Mr. Kolosov** asked how many young people worked in the fishing industry in Northern Ireland, what was their salary, and what was their age. He wished to know in particular whether they had had regular schooling before they started working.

51. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as a member of the Committee, asked for further details on the pension reform that should bring about a better balance between the State pension scheme, to which workers had to contribute for 40 years, and personal retirement savings accounts. She wondered, moreover, whether targeted information campaigns had been conducted to make citizens aware that they were increasingly responsible for managing their future retirement pensions. Lastly, she wished to know whether the British Government planned to implement the recommendations of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights that measures should be taken to facilitate women's access to the labour market, foster a better balance between professional and private life and increase men's access to parental leave.

The meeting was suspended at 12 p.m. and resumed at 12.10 p.m.

52. **Ms. Keats** (United Kingdom) said that by virtue of the 2002 law on homelessness, it was up to local authorities to provide assistance to the homeless and to families that were likely to end up homeless. Pursuant to that law, local authorities had had to draw up a strategy identifying the measures they planned to take to prevent homelessness. New at-risk groups had been identified, including young people aged 16 to 18 and persons released from prison. As part of the strategy, efforts had focused on non-priority groups which up until that time had not been receiving government assistance, in order to help them find housing. Local authorities had also been urged to review the housing services they offered to ensure that the economic slowdown did not worsen the situation of the homeless even more. A programme to construct 70,000 housing units by 2011 was also under way, and 45,000 of them would be rented at a very moderate price.

53. **Mr. Rangarajan** (United Kingdom) said that the employment policy implemented by the United Kingdom, which was indeed founded on the four key elements mentioned by Mr. Abdel-Moneim, was fully in accordance with the "policies and techniques to achieve steady economic, social and cultural development and full and productive employment" called for in article 6 (2) of the Covenant. Technical and vocational guidance and training programmes had also been set up and the State party was making every effort to protect and promote the enjoyment of fundamental political and economic freedoms for all.

54. **Mr. Strutt** (United Kingdom) said that in 2008 gender-based differences in salary had amounted to 22.6 per cent in the public sector and 28.3 per cent in the private sector. While much remained to be done in promoting gender equality, the gap in salaries was gradually narrowing. Moreover, those gaps were less significant among younger people: for example, the difference was 5.9 per cent between men and women aged 22 to 29 in contrast to 30.6 per cent between men and women over 40 years of age. The explanation probably lay in the level of education, which was much higher among young women. There were, however, marked salary differences between part-time and full-time workers. The Commission for Equality and Human Rights had undertaken a study on the issue of salary inequality. Under the 2006 law on equality, employers had to provide information to the Government on salary gaps between their employees. Nevertheless, the goal was to encourage the employers themselves to foster women's access to employment and to narrow the salary gap rather than to apply sanctions where the law on equality was not respected.

55. **Mr. O'Gorman** (United Kingdom) provided up-to-date employment statistics. According to the latest figures, in April 2009, the employment rate stood at 73.6 per cent, a decline of 0.5 per cent in comparison with the previous trimester, and 1,513,000 people were receiving unemployment benefits. The recession had clearly had a negative impact on the employment situation. With regard to the differences in figures mentioned by Mr. Texier between paragraphs 107 and 211 of the report under consideration, he explained that paragraph 107 referred to the minimum wage paid by employers and tax credits accorded

by the British Government to lower-income households, while paragraph 211 referred simply to the minimum wage paid by employers.

56. With regard to employment of disabled persons, the British delegation acknowledged that much remained to be done even though many steps had been taken to ensure better protection for disabled persons against job discrimination, provide additional aid to disabled persons who were unemployed and improve the skills of young disabled persons by promoting their inclusion in mainstream schools and, consequently, their entry into the job market. Programmes were aimed in particular at providing disabled adults with training and helping them acquire basic skills. In addition, specific initiatives, such as those under the Access to Work scheme, were designed to help disabled persons get to their jobs, including by paying taxi fares and by helping employers adapt their premises to the needs of disabled workers. Until 1995, there had been a quota system under which 3 per cent of jobs in any particular place of business had to be reserved for disabled persons. It had been generally agreed that the policy had produced mixed results mainly because many disabled persons refused to be officially registered in order to benefit from the quota and simply asked to be treated in the same way as other citizens.

57. To the question of whether the British Government planned to sign and ratify the revised European Social Charter and, if so, when, he replied that the Government wished first to study the practical implications of the new rights contained in the Charter and that no timetable had been fixed and no decision taken with regard to signing or ratifying that instrument.

58. With regard to pension reform and measures taken by the Government to reduce the poverty of pensioners, in particular women, disabled persons and minorities, a substantive reform would come into effect the following year, the main object of which would be to relax the full pension benefit requirements for individuals in those categories, for whom the number of contributory years would decrease from 40 to 30. With regard to the minimum pension level in comparison with the cost of living, the Government was striving to improve communication and make better use of the information available to it so that pensioners already receiving certain social benefits, in particular the minimum old-age pension, could receive benefits to which they were entitled, some of which, such as local taxes assistance, were currently provided to them automatically. It should be noted that under British law, pensions were adjusted to the cost of living. In recent years, the Government had readjusted the minimum old-age pension on the basis of salary increases, which had been more rapid than price increases. Arrangements had also been made to allow women to buy back years of contribution. On the important question of the relation between the retirement savings account and the minimum old-age pension, he explained that surveys of those concerned had shown that with the new savings incentives, more than 95 per cent of persons who opened retirement savings accounts could expect to receive an amount at least equal to what they had saved and 70 per cent could expect to receive two times that amount.

Articles 10 to 12 of the Covenant

59. **Mr. Riedel** asked what the State party had done to reduce inequalities between social classes, which had risen 4 per cent among men and 11 per cent among women.

60. Given that disabled persons suffering from mental illness had greater health problems than other people, he wished to know what the British Government was doing about that situation. He also wished to know what measures had been taken to address the problem of the relatively low life expectancy of male patients in hospitals in the poorest areas of Glasgow, compared to the life expectancy of male patients in hospitals in more prosperous neighbourhoods. He also wished to know what the Government was doing to

ensure equal access to the provision of medical goods, equipment and services in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom as a whole.

61. HIV-positive asylum-seekers awaiting expulsion and undocumented immigrants were not entitled to free medical treatment. He was surprised at that in view of the commitment made by the British Government, together with the other governments of the eight most highly industrialized countries (G-8), to ensure universal access to AIDS treatment by 2010.

62. In 2007, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health had denounced the ignorance of physicians who were unaware of the importance of the right to health. He wondered what the Government was doing to inform physicians and health professionals about the right to health and the Covenant in general.

63. In Northern Ireland, 60 to 80 per cent of the country's 1,000 detainees apparently suffered from a personality disorder, while the sole unit capable of caring for them had only 20 beds. He wondered what measures had been taken by the Government to ensure equal access to health in that sector.

64. Lastly, he wished to know what the Government was doing, in face of the 750,000 persons in the United Kingdom suffering from Alzheimer's disease and dementia, in order to raise the awareness of and train health professionals, raise the awareness of and inform the public, and inform patients and their family of their rights and the services to which they were entitled.

65. **Mr. Pillay** said that the problem of child poverty remained serious and feared that the British Government would not achieve its objective of halving the child poverty rate by 2010. In view of the recession and "fuel poverty", especially in Northern Ireland, he asked what measures had been taken to ensure that child poverty did not worsen and to solve that problem. He also wished to know whether the British Government had integrated human rights into its poverty-eradication strategy by including economic, social and cultural rights in it, in line with the Committee's statement on poverty adopted in May 2001.

66. **Mr. Schrijver** asked whether the anti-trafficking measures listed by the British Government in its replies to the list of issues were effective and what problems remained to be addressed in that area.

67. He also wished to know whether the Government was conducting a study on the impact of the future London Olympic Games on human rights, whether institutions had begun a dialogue with human rights defence groups and whether lessons had been learned in that area from the Beijing Games.

68. **Mr. Martynov**, referring to paragraphs 237, 246 and 247 of the United Kingdom's fifth periodic report, asked whether the Government had reached its goal in terms of the number of nurseries and childcare centres and whether there were waiting lists for full-time enrolment in nurseries and childcare centres.

69. Referring to the great disparities between different regions in the United Kingdom, he stressed the substantial inequalities faced by disadvantaged and marginalized groups with regard to their enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, illustrating his statement by referring to the suicide rate and inequalities in the employment of disabled persons. He wished to know whether the Government was making systematic efforts to reduce differences in access to economic, social and cultural rights resulting from disparities between regions.

70. **Mr. Kedzia** said that social services, which were run by the Government, were more and more frequently being subcontracted to the private sector. He wished to know how the Government assessed the efficiency of the services, whether subcontractors had to comply

with human rights standards set out in international instruments and what measures had been taken to ensure that they respected those standards.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.