



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

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

Summary record of the 1893rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 22 June 2022, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Haidar (Vice-Chair)

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Ms. Haidar (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

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

Fourth periodic report of the United Arab Emirates (continued)
(CEDAW/C/ARE/4; CEDAW/C/ARE/Q/4; CEDAW/C/ARE/RQ/4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the United Arab Emirates joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that women had worked at the Ministry of the Interior since 1971 and held high-ranking positions on an equal basis with men. Relevant statistics would be provided in writing.
3. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that under updated legislative provisions, to date, 4,320 children of women citizens who were married to foreigners had been able to obtain citizenship. The foreign spouses of women nationals were accorded certain privileges, but were otherwise subject to articles 5, 6 and 7 of Federal Act No. 17. The Government's priority in matters relating to citizenship was the preservation of family unity. The Government had not adopted temporary special measures benefiting stateless persons. Instead, it worked to ensure that they acquired the citizenship of their countries of origin, thus enabling them to live lawfully in the United Arab Emirates and to enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as other residents. The Government would consider acceding to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, provided that its provisions aligned with the country's aims in tackling the root causes of statelessness. The authorities had found that the rights of stateless persons to access, inter alia, health and education services, as covered by the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, were guaranteed by providing them with a legal status.
4. Under article 2 of Federal Act No. 17, sons born out of wedlock to women citizens of the State party were eligible for citizenship. The relevant authorities, in cooperation with partners at the federal and local level, had measures in place to ensure that such children were supported until citizenship had been granted.
5. **Ms. Bint Essa Buhumaid** (United Arab Emirates) said that responses to other follow-up questions would be provided in writing.

Articles 10–14

6. **Ms. Al-Rammah** said that she would appreciate information on the school dropout rate among girls and on progress towards ensuring inclusive education for women and girls with disabilities. She also wished to know whether stateless and migrant girls had full access to quality education and what support was available to them.
7. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that, under the United Arab Emirates Vision 2021, curricula had been designed to increase students' skills in science and technology. Vocational training and university studies in science and technology subjects were provided by the State and were available to everyone. Programmes and campaigns had been launched to encourage female students, particularly at the secondary school level, to study science and technology.
8. There was a programme to promote diplomacy, communications and related subjects, and women accounted for 50 per cent of its participants. Approximately 80 per cent of students in vocational training and over 60 per cent of university graduates in science subjects were female.
9. **Ms. Bint Essa Buhumaid** (United Arab Emirates) said that smart applications had been adopted to support distance and home-based education for children with disabilities, and guides had been issued to help parents monitor their children's education. Thousands of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) tests, with instructions for the parents of children with disabilities, were being provided to facilitate the return to in-person schooling following the

COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, a number of videos, awareness-raising campaigns and other initiatives had been launched to support children with disabilities returning to school.

10. Measures were in place to respond to the specific needs of persons with disabilities during emergencies, including a guide for parents on how to identify and address certain symptoms in their children. Moreover, the Government had developed a guide on how to make education inclusive and accessible, and a programme for sign language interpreters had been launched to enable deaf and hard-of-hearing children to continue to receive education during and after the pandemic. Statistics on children with disabilities in schools and dedicated rehabilitation centres would be provided in writing.

11. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that students were enrolled in education with the use of their national identity documents, and all educational establishments were responsible for maintaining accurate student registration records so that dropout rates could be measured and addressed. Dropout rates were lower among girls than boys and had decreased in recent years.

12. **Mr. Safarov** said that he would appreciate further information on the State party's policy to combat the gender pay gap, in particular on how it was being implemented, what the results had been and how the situation in the United Arab Emirates compared with the situation in other countries. Although the State party had adopted the principle of equal pay for equal work, it did not appear to have any guarantee of equal pay for work of equal value. Up-to-date information on the possible ratification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) and the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) would be welcome. He would also like to know about any measures to protect domestic workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and to support women at home during periods of lockdown. It would also be useful to hear about equal employment standards in favour of women, in particular migrants and other non-nationals, and measures to prevent sexual harassment and eliminate gender-based discrimination in the workplace.

13. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government had introduced a strategy to support domestic workers. The strategy included providing access to tests and vaccinations and extending contracts to ensure the continued provision of valid work permits. There had been no labour market restrictions on domestic workers during the pandemic, and, as at 2021, around 6,000 of them had moved to jobs in the private sector. The labour market was an open one, based on supply and demand, and wages reflected workers' skills, experience and education. Moreover, forced labour, defined as any work that people were compelled to perform against their will, was prohibited, as were all forms of harassment and violence in the workplace.

14. The United Arab Emirates used the term "temporary contractual workers" to refer to foreign domestic workers. The term was recognized by the United Nations Network on Migration and referred to migration linked to an employment contract. As a result of such migration, in 2021, over \$44 billion in remittances had been sent by temporary contractual workers in the United Arab Emirates to their families and communities around the world. The level of remittances sent from the United Arab Emirates was the second highest in the world, surpassed only by remittances sent from the United States of America.

15. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that women made up 46 per cent of the country's workforce; 66 per cent of female employees worked in the public sector and 15 per cent worked in academia and specialized areas. There were around 23,000 female entrepreneurs, and they managed business projects with a total income of over \$60 billion. All relevant indicators from the United Nations Development Programme had been adopted. Flexible and teleworking arrangements were available, as well as alternative working arrangements for women in remote areas. The Government had developed a guide for teleworkers and it issued commercial permits allowing women to perform telework and online work.

16. Women in the State party enjoyed equal rights in the labour market. Numerous amendments had been made to the Labour Code to support women in the workplace and to lift all legal restrictions on women's work. There was legislation on equal salaries for men and women, and discrimination against women in the workplace was prohibited. Women's employment contracts could not be terminated on the grounds of pregnancy, and generous

maternity leave entitlements were provided. In addition, the Central Bank had guaranteed gender equality in banking transactions and credit agreements.

17. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that her country had ratified the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) and incorporated it into the country's legislation, particularly the provisions concerning forced labour, equitable working conditions and the submission of job offers before workers left their country of origin. Sixteen memorandums of understanding had been signed in 2019 with various countries following visits by officials from the United Arab Emirates to their recruitment centres for domestic workers. Staff in the countries of origin had been informed of complaint procedures in the United Arab Emirates and means of contacting focal points. Recruitment contracts were thus carefully managed and domestic workers were fully aware of their rights and obligations under the applicable legislation. They were entitled to compensation in the event of non-payment of wages and had access to alternative working opportunities when conflicts arose with their employers. They were also covered by a programme that included a comprehensive insurance policy.

18. **Mr. Safarov** asked whether cases of child labour had been detected in the State party. He wondered how the two separate labour markets for foreigners and residents could be monitored and regulated, for instance with the use of digitalized procedures.

19. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that there was a single labour market. The Government empowered citizens by providing them with skills and developing their capacity to compete in the labour market. The market was open to everyone and employment contracts were the same for all. The United Arab Emirates had ratified the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). Legal regulations specified the terms and conditions applicable to young people in the 15 to 18 age group who entered the labour market.

20. **Ms. Chalal** said that significant progress had been made by the State party in guaranteeing equal access for women and girls to health-care services. However, there were still a number of shortcomings, such as limited access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, to abortion and to modern contraceptive methods, such as the morning-after pill. Other shortcomings included the lack of HIV/AIDS control procedures and the requirement to submit a marriage certificate to obtain access to certain benefits related to sexual and reproductive health at public and private hospitals.

21. The Committee had previously recommended that the State party should prevent the placement of women and girls with disabilities in mental health institutions and should ensure that they were not denied the right to have any surgical procedures subject to their prior free, full and informed consent. As women who lacked a medical certificate could be denied access to sexual and reproductive health care in public and private hospitals, she wished to know what measures were being taken to guarantee access to such health care for all women and teenage girls, including residents in rural and remote areas and migrants.

22. She urged the State party to abolish the provision in the 2020 legislation requiring physicians to report cases in which women had engaged in extramarital sexual relations. The voluntary interruption of pregnancy was illegal, except in a limited number of cases, when physicians were granted discretionary authority to perform abortions. She wished to know whether the State party would render abortion legal in cases of rape, incest, risks to the mother's health and life and serious malformation of the fetus.

23. In view of the prevalence of consanguineous marriages, she asked whether a preconception care programme based on the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030) had been established. She also enquired about a strategy for surveillance of HIV/AIDS.

24. She wished to know what measures had been taken to facilitate the access of women and girls without health insurance to health-care services. Lastly, she asked whether the seven emirates possessed the same human resources and financial means for the provision of health-care services.

25. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that information on sexual and reproductive health care was disseminated to girls of school age and to women, particularly

prior to marriage and during and after pregnancy. Breastfeeding was encouraged in order to safeguard babies' health. The Ministry of Health had introduced a programme in 2018 aimed at detecting and eliminating colon cancer and cancer of the uterus. Vaccinations against those diseases had been provided to 66,400 female students by 2020.

26. There was a national programme in place to combat HIV/AIDS. Women constituted 25 per cent of HIV/AIDS patients and all affected persons received comprehensive treatment. Federal Act No. 4 concerning medical liability, Federal Act No. 14 on combating communicable diseases and Federal Act No. 2 regulating the collection, processing and transfer of electronic health data all guaranteed the confidentiality of information concerning patients. Abortion was authorized in the event of a physical or psychological risk to the mother's life or in the event of fetal malformation. Health-care services were available to everyone without discrimination on grounds of nationality, sex, age, workplace or social status.

27. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that employers were required by law to cover all medical insurance and health-care costs for their employees.

28. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that an amendment to the Penal Code had repealed the article that had criminalized extramarital relations. Children who were born as a result of such relations were recognized in the official birth registry.

29. **Ms. Chalal** said that, according to the 2018 household survey, 10.3 per cent of women suffered from diabetes, 64.9 per cent were overweight and 42.9 per cent suffered from high blood cholesterol. She wished to know whether any action had been taken to raise women's awareness of such health risks.

30. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that programmes based on international norms aimed at monitoring and curbing various diseases were implemented throughout the country. The right to free, full and informed consent to medical treatment was legally recognized for persons with disabilities, and medical practitioners were responsible for securing such consent. The Patient's Rights and Responsibilities Charter specified the norms to be applied without discrimination in all cases of medical treatment, bearing in mind the best interests of the patient. A medical committee was required to decide on the optimal treatment for patients who lacked the capacity to take the requisite decisions themselves.

31. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that high priority was accorded to women's entrepreneurship. Action had been taken to bridge the gender gap, especially by facilitating women's access to appropriate technology and by enabling female entrepreneurs to engage in e-commerce.

32. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that the General Women's Union had developed a number of strategies aimed at enhancing women's quality of life and guaranteeing their access to health care. It cooperated with public and private health-care institutions. It had launched an initiative sponsored by Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak aimed at establishing mobile hospital units in all regions to diagnose women's illnesses. A whole range of health-care services and awareness-raising activities were implemented for girls over 15 years of age.

33. **Ms. Al-Rammah** commended the State party's capacity-building initiatives for women in various sectors of the economy. According to statistics issued by the Ministry of Economy, some 32,000 businesswomen were currently handling investments valued at more than \$100 billion. She also commended the strategic plans developed by the businesswomen's councils to support women's investment projects and the launching of the Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak International Award for Innovative Entrepreneurship. She would welcome additional information on women's participation in boards of directors and in executive and leadership positions in the private sector.

34. The State party had launched initiatives to support women and girls with disabilities, such as the national strategy on autism and the Mashaghel project. It would be useful to know whether those initiatives had increased employment rates among persons with disabilities, whether any additional action had been taken to support their economic stability and independence, and whether girls and women with disabilities had access to adequate justice and health-care services.

35. She wished to know what measures, programmes and support systems were implemented to enhance the quality of life of Bedouins and stateless women and girls, to guarantee their access to adequate health-care services, education and justice, to protect them from all forms of violence and child marriage and to promote their socioeconomic empowerment and inclusiveness.

36. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that a strategy linked to Sustainable Development Goal 5 concerning gender equality had been launched, in partnership with the private sector, to promote women's economic participation. The goal was to increase women's participation in leadership positions in the private sector by 30 per cent by 2025. Companies' compliance with their pledge to bridge the gender gap was monitored by the Gender Balance Council. As a result of a decision taken by the Ministry of Economy in March 2021 to promote women's participation in public shareholding companies in the financial sector, their participation had increased from 1.4 to 8 per cent. Women currently constituted 15 per cent of board members of the country's chambers of commerce and industry. Electronic protection was provided to safeguard female leaders from electronic piracy and their performance was promoted by business incubators and interactive platforms with successful enterprises. The authorities accorded women preferential rates for the exhibition of their products and they were also given priority in the area of intellectual property rights.

37. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that the General Women's Union had launched the National Productive Families Project in 1997 to enable families with limited income to become entrepreneurs. The Union had also launched the "My Store" virtual market, which was accessible to all segments of the population, including women with disabilities. The General Women's Union cooperated with companies and trade unions to support women through partnerships and networks with relevant authorities.

38. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that a national policy had been adopted to promote the rights of persons with disabilities by addressing health care, rehabilitation, education, vocational training and employment. Training was tailored to the needs of individuals and of the labour market, and persons with disabilities could register on a platform that provided appropriate employment opportunities. A specialist had been recruited to support persons with disabilities in the workplace and to liaise with their employers. Other measures included the provision of housing and social security coverage to persons with disabilities and the alignment of national legislation on disability with international instruments. Persons with disabilities were represented on consultative councils that examined disability programmes, policies and strategies, and women could also advocate for their rights as members of representative bodies.

Articles 15 and 16

39. **Ms. Akizuki** said that the Committee was concerned that despite the commendable amendments to the Personal Status Act, women did not enjoy equal rights with regard to marriage, divorce, property and child custody. She therefore wished to know whether the State party envisaged developing an action plan for comprehensive legal reform in those areas. She would welcome information on measures, and the relevant time frames, to further amend the Personal Status Act so as to afford women the right to enter into marriage of their own volition, without the consent of a male guardian, and to ensure their equal rights in relation to divorce, property and child custody. Although the Personal Status Act set the minimum age for marriage at 18, exceptions existed that could expose children to the risk of forced marriage. Dowries and polygamy had apparently not been totally eradicated. Accurate data on child marriage would therefore be welcome, along with information on the steps taken to remove the legal exceptions that permitted it and on plans to introduce penalties for guardians and officiants who allowed or formalized early and forced marriage. It would be useful to know what training was given to law enforcement officers, the judiciary and health-care and social workers on reporting and responding to child marriage and on ways of providing adequate support for the children involved. Were there plans to amend the Personal Status Act to abolish dowries and polygamy?

40. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that under the Personal Status Act, notaries were prohibited from signing marriage contracts if one of the parties was under

the age of 18, and penalties were imposed for non-compliance. No complaints of child marriage had been received.

41. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that the Personal Status Act was applied in line with cultural and social norms. Social norms also served to protect the institution of marriage, thereby protecting children, who were disadvantaged if their parents divorced. A number of policies and laws were in place to protect women and children and to maintain the balance between the parties to a marriage contract, including legislation on children's rights and child custody. Trained marriage counsellors assisted in settling family disputes and in preventing them from reaching the courts.

42. Child custody legislation, which was reviewed regularly, prioritized the best interests of the child. Custody was not always granted to the father, although it generally was granted to the father if the mother was deemed to be unable to care for the child. There were legal provisions governing circumstances in which women were prevented from entering into marriage. Requests for marriage involving a child under 18 were examined closely by the courts and rejected if they were not in the child's best interests. The provisions that allowed for exceptions to the minimum age for marriage were under review, a process that was undertaken regularly.

43. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that there were no stateless persons in the country and therefore there was no need for specific legislation to define the services that they should receive. Nevertheless, should such cases arise, stateless persons would have access to services until their situation was resolved, according to well-defined protocols.

44. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that all children had the right to education up to the age of 16, without discrimination on grounds of disability, origin or ethnicity, and an equal opportunities policy had recently been adopted. Children with disabilities were integrated into public education institutions by virtue of an inclusion policy, and the inclusivity of educational institutions at all levels was monitored, including through regular visits. In the 2021/22 academic year approximately 512,000 pupils in schools, or 49 per cent of the total, were female, and around 7,000 of them had disabilities. In higher education, more than 86,000 students were women, representing 63 per cent of the total, and more than 7,300 had disabilities.

45. **Ms. Akizuki** said that, although child marriage and polygamy were not permitted in law, the legal provisions that allowed for them to exist in practice must be addressed.

46. **The Chair** said that while the State party's success in relation to women's rights in the public sphere was commendable, it must do more to uphold them in the private sphere.

47. **Ms. Gabr** said that she would welcome clarification of whether dowries were symbolic or represented a significant financial commitment.

48. **A representative of the United Arab Emirates** said that dowries constituted a gift between intended spouses and varied greatly, from sums of money to flowers, or even the symbolic amount of 1 dirham.

49. **Ms. Bint Essa Buhumaid** (United Arab Emirates) said that she wished to reiterate her Government's intention to increase its cooperation with treaty bodies with a view to strengthening human rights and exchanging information, experiences and best practice. Respect for human rights was a vital principle for the Government, and while good progress had been made towards women's empowerment, much also remained to be done.

50. **The Chair** said that the Committee commended the State party for its efforts and encouraged it to adopt all measures necessary to implement the Committee's recommendations to allow for a more comprehensive implementation of the Convention.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.