



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

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

Summary record of the 1953rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 15 February 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Peláez Narváez

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

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

Fourth periodic report of Mauritania (CEDAW/C/MRT/4; CEDAW/C/MRT/Q/4; CEDAW/C/MRT/RQ/4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Mauritania joined the meeting.*
2. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania), introducing his country's fourth periodic report (CEDAW/C/MRT/4), said that his Government was aware of the importance of human rights for development and harnessed all available resources to eliminate discrimination against women. The Convention could be invoked by the courts and took precedence over national legislation, and awareness of its provisions had been raised through workshops and training sessions. In recent years, legislation had been adopted on the criminalization of discrimination, women's access to elected office, reproductive health and trafficking in persons. The newly established National Observatory for Women's and Girls' Rights advised the authorities on shortcomings in the area of women's rights and provided assistance to the Government, civil society and other stakeholders. It had organized training sessions, advocated for legislation on women's empowerment and raised awareness among civil society leaders of the need to intensify protection for women and girls. In addition to the Observatory, a number of other institutions had been set up, such as the National Authority for Combating Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants and a body that coordinated education and training policy.
3. The National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights had been adopted with the aim of consolidating the rule of law, promoting economic and social rights and eradicating exclusion and discrimination, while the National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Persons had made it possible to update the relevant legal framework. The Government had acted swiftly to respond to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, for example by imposing lockdowns and border closures and making cash transfers to poor families. Measures had also been adopted to improve welfare by, for example, providing job opportunities; enabling 100,000 families, or 15 per cent of citizens, to have access to health insurance; establishing the National Health Solidarity Fund, which would cover 70 per cent of the population by 2050; increasing equality through a food security programme for vulnerable groups; building housing; and promoting entrepreneurship and microcredit.
4. Women's political representation had been improved through the introduction of quotas at the national and local levels, including a quota of 20 seats in the parliament. Women represented almost 20 per cent of members of the National Assembly and held around 35 per cent of elected positions at the municipal and local levels. Approximately 18 per cent of ministers and 35 per cent of persons holding public office were women. Women had also benefited from changes to labour regulations, such as the alignment of the retirement age and pension entitlements for women and men, the introduction of maternity leave with full pay, the extension of the employment contract for 130 days during the period of mourning in the event of a husband's death and the establishment of the right to receive the spouse's pension upon his death.
5. The tools in place to combat violence against women included a mechanism to prevent gender-based violence and care for victims at the local level through coordination between public and private institutions, local bodies that intervened in family disputes, standard operating procedures to address victims of violence, hotlines for the reporting of cases, specialized hospital units and shelters for victims. Rates of female genital mutilation, while high, were decreasing, and the phenomenon was addressed through a strategy of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family, under which awareness-raising sessions had been organized for women's cooperatives and students. The Ministry had also publicly denounced the practice in a number of villages. The Government had led the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage, whose implementation in Mauritania was overseen by a multisectoral commission according to a road map that focused on legislation, awareness-raising and training. A national campaign to combat the phenomenon was organized each year.

6. Through its reproductive health strategy, the Government ensured access to reproductive health and perinatal care, with particular focus on anaemia, malaria and prenatal and postnatal examinations. Material and human resources had been increased and awareness-raising and health education activities had been undertaken in rural and semi-urban areas. The Ministry of Health had launched the so-called Mouyassar Programme to offer access to affordable care and essential medicines throughout the country, and a national fund had been established to provide health care to persons without social insurance. Women's economic empowerment was promoted by means of insurance, savings and microcredit funds, State-funded institutions that ran income-generating activities, a family bank and a zakat fund. In 2022, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family had funded more than 4,600 women-led income-generation projects and provided cash transfers to around 10,000 women, as well as to 100,000 poor families. Nine centres had been opened to train rural women, and 945 girls had received training in a range of subjects at a vocational training centre for women. Girls also benefited from a training programme for women in the Sahel.

7. Early years facilities had been established in more than 150 schools, and 150 new primary schools had been opened to provide education to children from poor families. The number of girls enrolled in school had risen thanks to a range of measures, including free buses for female students in rural areas, safe spaces and toilets for girls in schools and monthly grants, which had been given to 2,400 girls. The crime of trafficking in persons was dealt with by specialist courts, whose budgets had been increased significantly. Victims were assisted in lodging complaints, including with the National Human Rights Commission, and received care through a specific fund, as well as legal aid. An awareness-campaign on trafficking in persons had been launched.

8. **Mr. Bouhoubeyni** (National Human Rights Commission) said that the Commission noted with satisfaction the measures adopted by the Government to promote human rights, including to combat trafficking in persons and strengthen the legal framework with the aim of improving the implementation of the Convention. Of particular note was the creation of a national preventive mechanism to combat torture, the Observatory for Women's and Girls' Rights and the National Authority for Combating Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants. Those bodies would, however, have been rendered more sustainable if they had been established by means of an act, rather than a decree, and the Observatory's independence would be made more credible by its separation from the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family. Moreover, the Observatory should enjoy financial and legal independence. Despite the many mechanisms and strategies introduced to promote human rights, there was a need for overarching legislation on the protection of women and for the adoption of existing draft legislation on gender-based violence to be accelerated; the workshop organized by the Ministry of Justice to help push through such legislation was a welcome step forwards.

Articles 1–6

9. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that, despite the progress made by the State party on various issues relating to the advancement of women, the concept of discrimination against women as defined under article 1 of the Convention had still not been incorporated into national law. It would therefore be interesting to know whether the provisions on marriage, divorce, custody and legal guardianship of children, division of labour, property and inheritance that had been included in the Personal Status Code were fully compatible with the definitions, principles and standards laid down in the Convention. It would also be helpful to understand whether the Government planned to abolish the death penalty and repeal discriminatory provisions relating to early marriage from national legislation. Confirmation as to whether it would consider withdrawing its reservations to articles 13 and 16 of the Convention would be of particular interest.

10. The Committee would welcome information on any laws, enforcement mechanisms and judicial procedures that had been reviewed in order to bring the State party's practices into line with international human rights standards, including those set out in joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful

practices (CEDAW/C/GC/31-CRC/C/GC/18). Further details concerning implementation plans, indicators and time frames for ongoing legislative reforms would also be of interest. Moreover, she wished to know which State agencies were responsible for enforcing the new legislation and how many cases had already been investigated. At a more general level, she would be interested to hear about the tangible ways in which the reforms had improved the lives of Mauritanian women and girls, including those belonging to vulnerable groups and ethnic or minority communities.

11. **Ms. Ameline** said that, in accordance with article 80 of the Constitution, the human rights treaties ratified by Mauritania took precedence over national law. Since other legal systems existed in the State party, including customary and religious law, she would be interested to know what specific measures the Government was taking to maintain a dialogue with religious and customary leaders and civil society organizations with a view to ensuring that they contributed to raising awareness about the elimination of violence against women. The Committee would also welcome further information on the main objectives of the project to reform the justice system. In that regard, she would appreciate further details about any new plans the Government had made regarding the training of members of the judiciary, the establishment of a school for judges, the appointment of more women judges, the dissemination of information on human rights, the promotion of equal access to justice and the provision of legal aid for vulnerable groups. It would also be helpful to understand the extent to which civil society was participating in the design and implementation of those reforms.

12. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, first and foremost, she wished to underline that female judges had been appointed to sit in all the different types of court in her country. The human rights treaties ratified by Mauritania had been disseminated among members of the judiciary, and judges were also trained on relevant cases that had resulted in prosecutions for human rights violations. A mechanism had been put in place to enable women to lodge complaints, and their allegations were systematically investigated. However, the statistics showed that relatively few cases of women's rights violations had been brought before a judge. There were various reasons for that. In rape cases, for example, investigations were often complicated by the time that elapsed before the allegation was made or by the fact that the victim had become pregnant.

13. **A representative of Mauritania** said that national consultations on the judiciary had been organized in January 2023 in the form of six workshops on four core themes: the independence of the judiciary and fair trials, legal practitioners, the criminal justice chain and prison administration, and training. A comprehensive action plan on judicial reform would be drawn up once the full report had been published. In the meantime, a plot of land had already been earmarked for the construction of a new higher institute of judicial training.

14. All international instruments ratified by Mauritania were published in the Official Gazette. They were also translated into the country's four official languages and were the subject of awareness-raising campaigns.

15. The bill on combating violence against women and girls that had been under consideration included a provision to make early marriage a criminal offence. The bill had since been withdrawn from the National Assembly, not owing to a lack of support but because the President of the Republic had wished to achieve an even broader consensus for its adoption. With that in mind, relevant stakeholders from all sectors had been invited to discuss the new legislation at a workshop organized by the Ministry of Justice the following week.

16. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that a review of the Personal Status Code had begun and the proposed amendments would soon be submitted for parliamentary approval. It should be noted that the bill on combating violence against women and girls had also been amended since its withdrawal in order to strengthen its provisions on female genital mutilation.

17. **A representative of Mauritania** said that his country had made considerable progress with respect to changing attitudes towards women's and girls' rights since the Personal Status Code had first been adopted in 2001. It had therefore been decided to update the Code with a view to amending outdated provisions, addressing weaknesses and adding any new elements that might be deemed necessary. A series of consultations had been held with women, families, religious leaders, legal experts, members of the judiciary and other

stakeholders to ensure that the new legislation responded fully to the needs of women and girls in Mauritania.

18. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that the Government always encouraged representatives of civil society and religious leaders to participate in raising public awareness of new laws and legislative amendments, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, more, religious leaders had played a crucial role in paving the way for the approval of the revised Personal Status Code by reassuring the public that the proposed amendments did not contradict sharia law.

19. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she wished to know whether religious leaders and ulemas had been given a formal role in the fight against harmful traditional practices in the State party. It would also be interesting to know whether there were any proactive measures taken or social sanctions used to deter people from carrying out such practices.

20. **Ms. Haidar** said that she would like to know whether the public institutions that had been set up to protect and promote the rights of women and girls were fully independent. Confirmation as to whether a specific institution or office had been put in place to receive and address the individual complaints of women would also be of interest.

21. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that, although capital punishment still existed in Mauritania, a moratorium had been in effect for many years. The Government always sought the broadest possible consensus for its actions and, for that reason, it was not currently considering withdrawing the reservations to article 13 and 16 of the Convention, since they contained elements that ran counter to the religion of its people.

22. **A representative of Mauritania** said that only the most serious crimes carried the death penalty. There were currently around 190 people who had been sentenced to death and they had all been convicted of crimes that had resulted in loss of life.

23. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Government was currently implementing a national strategy for the eradication of female genital mutilation. Female genital mutilation of girls was classified as cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment under the General Child Protection Code and was punishable by prison sentences of up to 15 years.

24. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family had the power to receive and address individual complaints made by women. Furthermore, a number of regional units and committees had been set up to handle and resolve family disputes. A woman who had been subject to domestic violence could also bring criminal or civil proceedings against her husband. In such cases, judges had often ruled in favour of female victims.

25. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) played an important role in the efforts taken to combat gender-based violence in Mauritania. They had participated in the design and implementation of the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and also participated in the provision of the support services, including shelters and a national hotline, that had been set up for women victims of violence.

26. **The Chair** said that capital punishment was a violation of the basic human right to life and could not be justified under any circumstances. The Committee strongly urged the State party to take the necessary measures to abolish the death penalty and to do so immediately.

27. **Ms. Bethel** said that she would appreciate an explanation as to the relationship between the National Observatory for Women's and Girls' Rights and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family. Further information on how the National Observatory had been empowered to influence national policies and bring about change would also be of interest. Beyond the establishment of the Observatory, she wished to know what legal and social protection measures had been taken to promote and protect women's rights in all sectors. For example, it would be helpful to understand whether ministerial departments had been provided with comprehensive guidelines on gender mainstreaming to help ensure that gender was taken into account in all sectoral policies, strategies and action plans. She also wondered whether any specific targets had been set for the State party's gender mainstreaming strategy.

28. She would be interested to learn whether the Ministry had put in place an interministerial committee on women's rights. Furthermore, it would be useful to know what percentage of the national budget was allocated to the Ministry and the National Observatory, whether that funding was adequate and whether it was linked to the country's development priorities in any way. She wondered what measures had been put in place to coordinate the work of the different components of the national gender machinery.

29. It would be interesting to find out whether the State party had formulated a national gender policy or action plan for the advancement of women across all sectors and, if so, what priorities and targets had been set. She would also like to hear more about the role played by NGOs in devising such a policy and how its implementation was monitored. The Committee would welcome further information on the human resources allocated to the Ministry and the National Observatory and on any measures taken to train staff to identify and analyse gender inequalities in different sectors. It would be helpful to understand whether campaigns were carried out to raise awareness of the policies and programmes of the national gender machinery among all women, particularly those in vulnerable situations. In that regard, she wished to know what steps were taken to promote those campaigns in the media and to disseminate information in rural areas.

30. **Ms. Morsy**, commending the State party for its introduction of a requirement for 20 per cent of seats in local and legislative elections to be reserved for women candidates, pointed out however that, in constituencies with two seats, the party list must contain one male and one female candidate and women who came second on the lists had little chance of being elected. Nevertheless, the fact that women accounted for 30 per cent of the seats on municipal councils had greatly exceeded expectations. She would like more information on Mauritanian electoral law and how the quota system was used. It would be useful to learn about the measures aimed at achieving gender equality that made use of affirmative action and quota systems, the strategies in place to encourage the redistribution of resources and power between men and women and the impact that temporary special measures had had on women's empowerment nationally. Noting with concern that the informal network of women parliamentarians that had lobbied for the bill on violence against women had been disbanded in 2020, she would appreciate an explanation of the reasons for its disbandment. She would also welcome information on temporary special measures taken to tackle issues outside of the electoral and political sphere, in addition to any other affirmative action to level the playing field in terms of women's participation in economic and social sectors and address the challenges faced by rural women and women with disabilities. With regard to women living in poverty, she wondered whether temporary special measures had been used to accelerate substantive equality, particularly in employment.

31. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the National Observatory for Women's and Girl's Rights was established in 2020 and brought together persons specializing in the protection and empowerment of women and girls, such as doctors, lawyers and civil society representatives. Despite the clear political will and support for the Observatory at the highest levels of government, certain influential public officials with entrenched patriarchal attitudes continued to present obstacles to its work. For example, greater support was needed to address the serious difficulties facing rural women and girls, which, as she had witnessed on a recent visit to rural areas, included school dropout, the cover-up of a case of rape and female genital mutilation.

32. The Observatory was grateful for the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Nonetheless, more assistance was needed for awareness-raising campaigns aimed at challenging the stereotypical views that undermined women's independence and advocacy work in the public sector and religious and political circles. An example of such work had been its contribution to the bill on combating violence against women and girls, which it hoped would be adopted shortly.

33. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that the budget allocated to the Observatory was equal to that earmarked for the National Human Rights Commission, which was testament to the importance attached to the Observatory by the Government.

34. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Government had implemented meaningful economic and social reforms in recent years, thanks to which it had made

significant progress in furthering women's empowerment. National measures in that connection included the adoption of a strategy for the advancement of women through the promotion of girls' education and the use of information, education and communication to combat negative stereotypes; a rural women's action plan; a national family policy aimed at contributing to the stability of families; a child protection strategy; standard operating procedures for tackling early marriage; and a national strategy for ending female genital mutilation.

35. In the education sphere, a programme to ensure girls' equal access to education had been launched, working with religious and community leaders to eradicate the sociocultural barriers that prevented girls from completing their studies. The programme promoted the availability of textbooks and school supplies, school canteens in rural areas, school bus services and remedial classes for girls. At the higher education level, the Government had increased to 6 per cent the share of bursaries awarded to girls and nine professional training centres for girls had recently been opened in rural areas. Prizes were awarded to girls graduating from various levels of education and national fairs had been organized to exhibit products created by women.

36. **A representative of Mauritania** said that Mauritanian women were highly active in economic spheres, occupying posts in areas traditionally dominated by men, such as the armed forces. Equal treatment in the labour market and workplace was guaranteed under national laws and the Labour Code provided for equal pay for work of equal value. Furthermore, maternity provisions had been amended to increase from 70 to 100 per cent the share of a woman's salary paid to her while on maternity leave.

37. **A representative of Mauritania** said that a national strategy for gender equality and the incorporation of gender mainstreaming into the programmes, policies and projects of all government departments was currently being implemented, with a view to tackling discrimination and eliminating any discriminatory provisions from the country's human rights-related laws. Gender units responsible for implementing the strategy had been set up in all government departments.

38. Issues relating to the functions, status and budget of the National Observatory for Women's and Girls' Rights remained under consideration by an interministerial committee. The bill on combating violence against women and girls, to which the Observatory had contributed, would be submitted to the Government and National Assembly for adoption.

39. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that at least one candidate listed in electoral districts with three seats must be a woman. The Government had also established a national electoral list of 11 young people, which needed to include two persons with disabilities. An awareness-raising campaign had been rolled out in collaboration with NGOs to encourage women to stand as candidates and vote, while simultaneously educating men on the importance of women's representation in elected office.

40. **A representative of Mauritania** said that financial incentives were made available to political parties that put forward women candidates and it was a requirement that the names of men and women candidates were alternated on electoral lists. The President of the Republic had also sought to promote a culture of equality and equity in his addresses to the nation.

41. **Ms. Bethel** said that she was not satisfied that the national women's machinery under the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family was active and effective. She would therefore appreciate information on how it operated and whether it was fulfilling its mandate, particularly with regard to outreach into rural areas. She would also be grateful for a response to her questions on whether the Ministry had formulated a gender policy, whether a national action plan was in place to guide gender policy and whether staff at the Ministry had the necessary capacity to undertake the gender analysis required across all sectors to inform policy.

42. **Ms. Morsy** said that she wished to hear about any affirmative action taken in areas other than the political sphere, such as support for women with disabilities and rural women, steps to increase the representation of women on boards of investment banks and private sector companies and general employment-related measures.

43. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the National Observatory for Women's and Girls' Rights was an autonomous organization advising the Government, the parliament and civil society. While it often worked together with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family, the two entities were completely independent from one another.

44. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the National Human Rights Commission had run awareness-raising campaigns in rural and remote areas to inform people of their rights and explain the various legal channels available to them for the exercise of such rights. Information pertaining to the Economic Community of West African States and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa was also provided as part of those campaigns. The Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family had offices in each region and their staff were involved in the awareness-raising work, aiming to change attitudes and ensure that the population was directly involved in the implementation of all human rights-related legal provisions.

45. **A representative of Mauritania** said that temporary special measures aimed specifically at women had been introduced, such as financial support for the integration into the labour market of women graduating from professional training centres and programmes to promote women's access to the market and public transactions. As regards efforts to ensure wage equality, the concept of equal pay for work of equal value had been incorporated through amendments to the Labour Code and the Social Security Act.

46. **Ms. Tisheva** said that there was a need in the State party for a comprehensive law to tackle gender-based violence. She therefore wondered what the timeline was for the adoption of the bill on combating violence against women and girls and of a comprehensive plan for its implementation and monitoring.

47. She would appreciate updated statistical information on the prevalence of female genital mutilation in the State party and on the number of prosecutions and convictions of perpetrators of the practice, and information on the penalties imposed on them. In addition to criminalizing female genital mutilation, she wondered whether Act No. 2017-025 explicitly addressed the procurement, aiding or abetting of the practice or the failure to report it. What action had been taken to address the extremely high prevalence of female genital mutilation in the south and south-east of the country?

48. Moreover, she wished to know whether practices other than female genital mutilation and child marriage were covered in the country's national awareness campaigns against harmful practices. She would be interested to learn whether the condemnation of female genital mutilation by religious leaders had had a positive impact.

49. It would be useful to know how the State party planned to bring its legislation for the protection of women against sexual violence into conformity with international standards, as it was not currently based on the concept of consent. Information on the support offered by the Government to women victims of violence would also be welcome; she was particularly concerned that the system of judicial mediation for family disputes could compel women to stay with their aggressors. Lastly, she would be interested to hear how the Government supported civil society organizations in caring for victims and whether specific support was available for the most vulnerable, such as women refugees, women with disabilities and women from the poorest and most remote regions.

50. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Government had adopted a national strategy to combat female genital mutilation and an action plan to encourage the voluntary discontinuation of the practice in wilayahs in which it was widespread. Under the strategy, relevant public authorities had strengthened their partnerships with the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and national and international civil society organizations. Imams and doctors had participated in awareness-raising campaigns at the community level, and fatwas had been issued calling for the prohibition of female genital mutilation. Thanks to the measures taken, the prevalence of the practice had fallen to 45 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years from a high of 80 per cent in some areas. Regional units had been set up by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family to provide legal and other support to women in the resolution of family disputes.

51. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the bill on combating violence against women and girls had been opposed on religious grounds. The search for consensus was a lengthy but necessary process to facilitate future implementation.

52. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the impact of campaigns to raise awareness of the devastating effects of female genital mutilation could best be gauged by looking at the percentage of girls under 5 years of age who had been subjected to the practice. The Government had decided to withdraw the bill on combating violence against women and girls, which had been the subject of a frank and transparent debate in the National Assembly, and revise it with the aim of achieving the consensus necessary for smooth adoption.

53. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that the revised bill would be presented for public approval on 9 March 2023 and submitted to the Council of Ministers later that month and to the National Assembly in April or May.

54. **Ms. Ameline** said that adopting the bill should be a priority. Female genital mutilation was tantamount to torture and was entirely incompatible with the rule of law. The Government had a responsibility to act. It could not simply wait for the population's views on the practice to evolve. Countries including Egypt, Morocco and Saudi Arabia had explicitly condemned female genital mutilation and had argued that it was a customary practice, rather than a religious one. It was important for Mauritania to send a message to other countries in the region.

55. **Ms. Tisheva** asked whether provisions criminalizing sexual relations outside marriage would be repealed independently of the adoption of the bill.

56. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that domestic laws were based on Islam, which prohibited such relations. The Government was therefore powerless to repeal the provisions.

57. **Ms. Tisheva**, noting that Mauritania remained a source, transit and destination country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation, said that the continued prohibition of sexual relations outside marriage made it harder to provide victims with support. She wished to know what results had been achieved under the National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Persons for the period 2020–2022, whether a new plan had been adopted and whether comprehensive national statistics were available on trafficking in women and girls. She would be interested to hear how the process of voluntary return of trafficking victims was implemented in practice and to receive data on returnees disaggregated by age, sex and country of origin.

58. She would be grateful for an indication of whether sufficient budgetary resources had been allocated to the implementation of the Plan, including with respect to the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims, and a description of the protection afforded to NGOs that dealt with trafficking and slavery victims, bearing in mind their crucial role as service providers. Furthermore, she wished to know what steps the State party was taking to screen for trafficking indicators and raise awareness of trafficking among vulnerable populations.

59. Children of Haratine and Afro-Mauritanian descent faced difficulties in obtaining birth certificates, which made them easy targets for traffickers. It would be useful to know whether the State party had adopted protocols for identifying trafficking and slavery victims and referring them to appropriate protection and counselling services. Information on the main actors involved in identifying victims and on any measures planned to improve the investigation, prosecution and punishment of traffickers and the protection of victims would also be appreciated.

60. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that the Government had recruited a consultant from the International Organization for Migration to assist in updating the National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Persons for the period 2022–2024. The legal arsenal that Mauritania had at its disposal included Act No. 2015-031 criminalizing slavery and punishing slavery-like practices, Act No. 2020-017 on the prevention and punishment of trafficking in persons and the protection of victims and Act No. 2020-018 on combating the smuggling of migrants. Under the Plan for 2022–2024, statistics had been collected and training had been provided to civil society organizations on the documentation of cases, thanks to which two suspected cases, one of slavery and the other of human trafficking, had recently been reported in the north of the country. The Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian

Action and Relations with Civil Society had filed civil actions in the corresponding criminal proceedings to prevent amicable settlements, which were in any case prohibited by law for such offences. A fund had been set up to provide direct support to slavery and trafficking victims and help relevant NGOs with accommodation, transportation and other costs.

61. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization had adopted a joint circular to enhance the implementation of Acts Nos. 2015-031, 2020-017 and 2020-018, including by promoting the proactive investigation of cases. Furthermore, a multidisciplinary unit had been created in October 2022 to trace and monitor suspected cases of slavery and trafficking and expedite criminal proceedings. Since its inception, charges had been filed in 84 cases, 40 of which had already been judged.

62. The National Human Rights Commission had established a multi-partner mechanism to document and verify reported cases of slavery and trafficking, while the National Authority for Combating Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants was operational and had taken steps to provide victims with appropriate support.

63. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society and the National Human Rights Commission had launched campaigns to raise public awareness of domestic laws to combat slavery and trafficking. In addition, the Attorney General had organized a nationwide tour to provide guidance on the laws to public prosecutors, and training sessions had been organized for administrative, judicial and security authorities.

64. **Ms. Mikko** asked whether there were currently slave markets in the State party.

65. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she would appreciate details of the steps taken to prosecute and punish human traffickers, their agents and family members complicit in trafficking activities and a description of the role played by the National Observatory for Women's and Girls' Rights in anti-trafficking efforts, given that it appeared not to have been involved in the adoption of the joint circular mentioned by the delegation.

66. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that there had never been slave markets in Mauritania. Slavery was a crime against humanity and was dealt with through the strict application of relevant legislation. In recent years, four cases of slavery had been detected thanks to a campaign launched by the National Human Rights Commission. All human traffickers and their accomplices were punished in accordance with the law. The joint circular concerned the implementation of Acts Nos. 2015-031, 2020-017 and 2020-018 specifically and had been adopted by the three ministries responsible in that regard.

67. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, in 2022, there had been 85 recorded cases of human trafficking, 19 of slavery, 93 of migrant smuggling and 11 of hate crimes and discrimination. All cases would be dealt with in a manner commensurate with their seriousness.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.