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the Elimination
of all Forms of
Racial Discrimination**

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1445th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Friday, 9 March 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. SHERIFIS

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (agenda item 6) (continued)

Thirteenth and fourteenth periodic reports of Algeria (CERD/C/362/Add.6)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Dembri, Mr. Akreche, Ms. Benabdallah, Mr. Sahraoui, Mr. Ouyedder and Mr. Bencherif (Algeria) took places at the Committee table.
2. Mr. DEMBRI (Algeria) said that Algerian society was characterized by its anthropological diversity, which in order to be fully understood must be seen in its historical and cultural context, in the light of formative political, economic and social events. Owing to its geographical location, at the crossroads of age-old cultures and civilizations, Algeria had not only benefited from the distinctive creative genius of those cultures, but had also become a breeding ground for noble and progressive values. That had resulted in the dual character of the Algerian people with, on the one hand, the solid foundations of its threefold Arab, Amazigh and Islamic identity, and, on the other, openness to diversity and hence opposition to all forms of exclusion, intolerance and discrimination, since it had always seen in otherness the potential for contact rather than confrontation.
3. During the period of colonial rule, all Algerians had been second-class citizens in political, legal, economic and social terms - victims of institutionalized discrimination. That helped to explain why the basic values underpinning Algerian society were the pursuit of dignity, equality and fundamental freedoms and the elimination of all doctrines of superiority and all forms of discrimination. Upon gaining independence, Algeria had continued along that path; hence the desire of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria to ensure that in both its basic legal texts and in practice national solidarity would be the driving force behind social change, and that the key to national unity would be the development of basic rights and freedoms for all Algerian citizens without distinction.
4. The fact that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and also the Republic's basic objective of combating all forms of discrimination, particularly on grounds of race or religion, were enshrined in Algeria's first Constitution adopted in September 1963, even before the proclamation and adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, showed that Algerian legislation had pre-empted international treaty law with respect to racial discrimination. The second Constitution adopted in 1976 had introduced new guarantees such as the equality of all citizens before the law and the inviolability of freedom of conscience and belief. The third Constitution of 1989 was broader in scope, paving the way for democracy, pluralism and the primacy of the rule of law, through open political debate and free elections. In that Constitution Algeria expressed its solidarity to all peoples who struggled for the right to self-determination and against racial discrimination (art. 27). Moreover, any foreigner legally residing on Algerian territory enjoyed the protection of the law with respect to his person and property (art. 64). Under no circumstances could a political refugee legally benefiting from the right to asylum be handed over or extradited to the authorities of another State (art. 66). As of 1969, in accordance with the Algerian Nationality Code, the granting of nationality to a foreigner did not take account of race, religion or social condition.

5. The revised Constitution of 1996 formally prohibited feudal and regionalist practices as well as forms of nepotism (art. 9), and guaranteed the right to establish political parties, which could not be founded on religious, linguistic, racial, gender, corporate-type or regional bases (art. 42). The successive constitutional revisions reflected the ongoing concern to reflect the Algerian people's desire for progress in national legislation. As it had built up a corpus of domestic legislation, Algeria had also ratified international treaties to complement it, including the Convention and other treaties relating specifically to discrimination, listed in paragraph 145 of the report.

6. It was against that background that the Algerian people had made their historic choices during the pluralist presidential elections of 1995 and 1999, striving both for an approach based on the primacy of the law, as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and for a political vision of civil harmony which united them even during the current difficulties in their efforts to consolidate the process of democracy under way since 1989.

7. Since the consideration of the eleventh and twelfth periodic reports (CERD/C/280/Add.3), the mechanisms for safeguarding and promoting human rights had been strengthened and Algerian legislation relating to economic, social and cultural spheres had been or was being brought up to date or into line with international obligations. The National Commission for Judicial Reform established by President Bouteflika at the very outset of his term of office had undertaken the enormous task of revising the Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure, Civil Code and Code of Civil Procedure as well as other basic laws. As at January 2001, four preliminary draft laws had been adopted for submission to Parliament covering such issues as the decriminalization of administrative error, criminal investigation, custody and preventive detention, strengthening of legal aid and procedures for administrative appeal. He hoped that the Committee would appreciate the progress made and the work that remained to be done in Algeria in the building of a modern nation that was sure of its identity yet tolerant and open to new ideas. He looked forward to a constructive dialogue with the Committee.

8. Mr. PILLAI (Country Rapporteur) welcomed the fact that the combined periodic report (CERD/C/362/Add.6) was far more comprehensive than the previous ones, with more detail given on relevant constitutional and legislative provisions. Positive aspects to be highlighted were the constitutional principle whereby ratified international treaties took precedence over domestic law, the strengthening of human rights mechanisms, the broad mandate of the National Human Rights Observatory (NHRO), the establishment of a human rights faculty at the University of Oran, human rights education for members of the judiciary, police force and prison staff, substantial progress in the health and education sectors and a largely independent press. Such factors, together with the introduction of a multiparty democracy and free market economy, had heightened awareness about individual and group rights and had been accompanied by a substantial increase in the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with socio-economic and human rights issues. As of 1997, political party statutes and programmes had been required to ensure protection of individual rights and fundamental freedoms. Last but not least, the violence which had plagued Algeria for so long was finally abating.

9. The report contained ample information on socio-economic indicators, but without any reference to specific sectors of the population. Despite the Committee's past recommendations, no disaggregated demographic data had been provided. According to paragraph 34 of the report, Algerian law forbade population censuses based on ethnic, religious or linguistic criteria, while at the same time paragraph 39 referred to the richness and diversity of the Algerian population. Many former colonies had faced the dilemma of forging a national identity while recognizing demographic/ethnic diversity - it was a question of striking the right balance. He asked whether the most vulnerable and underprivileged sectors of the population targeted as beneficiaries of the special social welfare system set up in 1992, referred to in paragraphs 119 and 120 of the report, could be identified with a specific geographical area or ethnic group.

10. Several human rights treaty bodies and NGOs had voiced concern about discriminatory action that was impeding the full enjoyment of human rights in the State party. In 1995, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had stated that the principle of non-discrimination and the universality of human rights had not fully taken root in Algerian society. When considering Algeria's initial report in 1999, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had noted an absence of specific and adequate regulations governing the registration of children who were members of nomadic groups. He appreciated the difficulties faced in the country's nation-building efforts and had been impressed by the statement, contained in a report by a panel of experts appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to provide the international community with a clearer picture of the situation in Algeria, that many Algerians encountered took great pride in their linguistic and cultural diversity. However that was not reflected in the report. There was a marked absence of information on the Amazigh (Berber) community despite its long-established links with the territory now known as Algeria and an estimated population of 7.8 million, concentrated mainly though not exclusively in the Kabylia area. According to the preamble of the revised Constitution, the fundamental components of the Algerian national identity were Islam, Arabness and Amazighness. Yet there was no mention in the report of measures to protect and promote the Amazigh culture and identity. NGO sources claimed that the Tamazight language was taught in some 220 pilot schools and was thus accessible to around only 100,000 members of that group, on an optional basis. It was also alleged that legislation on the compulsory use of Arabic introduced in 1998 denied linguistic and cultural differences and specificity, and that constitutional provisions banning political propaganda by parties on a linguistic basis hindered the promotion of Amazighness.

11. One of the positive aspects highlighted by the Committee in its concluding observations on Algeria's eleventh and twelfth periodic reports had been the establishment of an Office of the High Commissioner on Amazigh Status. Some NGOs had expressed reservations about the effectiveness and activities of the Office, reporting that it had no legal or constitutional status, had been allocated inadequate resources and its leaders were not recognized authorities on the Amazigh language or culture. He asked for some clarification in that regard.

12. The Committee was not interested in the demographic divide per se, but rather its effect on the equal and universal enjoyment of human rights and the legislation and judicial and other institutional mechanisms in place to address such matters. Articles 27 and 42 of the Algerian Constitution prohibited discrimination based on race, language and religion. How were such

provisions enforced, what remedies were available to victims of such discrimination and what punishment would the perpetrators be liable to? The penal provisions referred to in paragraphs 48, 52 and 53 of the report did not appear to refer specifically to racial discrimination as defined in article 1 of the Convention.

13. Paragraph 50 of the report referred to the provisions of the Constitution, Commune code and Wilaya code establishing a ban on incitement to and encouragement of racial discrimination by public institutions or authorities. He would welcome more information on the existence of corresponding provisions in the Penal Code, the institutional mechanisms to enforce them and any cases dealt with. Referring to article 17 of the Labour Relations Act No. 90-11, described in paragraph 90 of the report, he asked whether the State party did not consider it necessary to provide also for protection against racial discrimination in such matters.

14. It was important to stress not only the punitive, but also the preventive value of the law in terms of the availability of adequate legal provisions and also the certainty of punishment and the broad dissemination of information on its existence. In that connection, he noted that paragraph 26 of the report cited the accessibility of private citizens to the Human Rights Committee and the Committee against Torture once domestic remedies were exhausted, but failed to refer to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Algeria had been one of the first States to acknowledge the Committee's competence to receive and consider individual communications. Had the Algerian people been made aware that such a possibility existed and, if so, in which languages? He reiterated the Committee's earlier request for information on complaints and court cases relating to acts of racial discrimination and on the right of individuals to seek compensation for damages suffered as a result of such acts.

15. Turning to implementation of article 5, he said that it was heartening to note that the Algerian press was one of the freest in developing countries. He sought information on the linguistic and geographic coverage of the media, the kind of human rights issues they addressed and whether they included ethnic issues. The Committee would like to know more about the kind of complaints brought before the National Human Rights Observatory (NHRO), the social groups affected and the geographic extent of action taken. Should it assume that, to date, the Observatory had not received any complaints with an ethnic dimension? He had difficulty in relating the extensive information provided in the report to the letter and spirit of article 5. Facts and figures concerned the entire population and were not disaggregated. He drew the Algerian delegation's attention to the Committee's general guidelines regarding the form and contents of reports to be submitted by States parties (CERD/C/70/Rev.4), in particular on article 5.

16. The fourteenth periodic report was silent on the situation of the large number of refugees in Algeria. There were probably about 165,000 Western Saharan refugees, as well as 400 urban refugees from Mali and Niger and 200 Tuareg refugees who had remained after the completion of voluntary repatriation in 1998. Algerian citizenship was derived exclusively from the father; consequently, children of an Algerian mother and a refugee father were not eligible for Algerian citizenship. That would contribute to an increasing number of stateless persons.

The 1960 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness stipulated that a State party should grant its nationality to persons born on its territory or descended from its nationals who would otherwise be stateless. Algeria should consider acceding to that Convention and reviewing its special procedures for individual refugees from Mali and Niger so as to ensure that they were not discriminatory.

17. Regarding article 7 of the Convention, very few details had been provided on education, culture and information with a view to combating racial discrimination. Some reference had been made to the work of the NHRO. It would, however, be useful to have further information on how the issue was treated in textbooks, academic institutions and training programmes for civil servants. The work of States parties in pursuance of article 7 was of great preventive value.

18. Mr. VALENCIA RODRIGUEZ, stressing first the importance of the NHRO, asked whether one of its tasks was to monitor compliance with the Convention. He noted that, according to paragraph 34 of the report, Algerian law forbade population censuses based on ethnic, religious or linguistic criteria, but pointed out that many countries with a similar prohibition had provided disaggregated data on the population on the basis of other socio-economic studies. Concerning the country's various ethnic groups, the Committee wished to have information on the nomads of the Saharan regions and on the Amazigh population. With regard to article 2 of the Convention, he stressed the importance of the principle of equality, as set out in article 29 of the Algerian Constitution. That principle should inspire all national legislation, and not merely the codes referred to in paragraph 43 of the report. In order to be able to assess the scope of article 13 of Ordinance No. 66-211 (para. 45), it would be useful to know how many aliens lived in the country and what their nationalities were.

19. Although, strictly speaking, the provisions of the Penal Code cited in paragraph 48 were not in conformity with article 4 (a) of the Convention, its requirements were to a large extent covered by article 298 of the Code, which referred to defamation on ethnic grounds. It would be useful to learn whether the article of the Penal Code mentioned in paragraph 48 had been applied in cases involving acts of racial discrimination. He sought further information on the articles set out in paragraph 49 so as to be able to assess their scope; had they ever been applied to prohibit or punish a racist organization? Turning to implementation of article 5, he asked for further details on how the guarantees under its provisions were applied to nomads.

20. Paragraph 77 provided an eloquent example of how freedom of expression and freedom of the press could coexist with the prohibition on the propagation of racist ideas or hatred. With regard to article 6 of the Convention, he had the impression, given the information provided, that the courts had never had to consider any cases involving racial discrimination. As to article 7 of the Convention, the Committee welcomed the information contained in paragraphs 28 to 31 and the efforts made to promote understanding and tolerance among the country's inhabitants. Could further information be provided on such initiatives in the cultural sphere? It was hoped that Algeria's periodic report and the Committee's concluding observations would be published so that the public could comment on them.

21. Mr. BOSSUYT said that he would confine himself to the question of the Amazigh (Berbers) in Algeria and the Law on the Generalization of the Arabic Language. He had noted the assertion (para. 34) that Algerian law forbade population censuses based on ethnic, religious or linguistic criteria; such statements sometimes suggested an intention to conceal certain facts. The same remark applied to paragraph 39, which stated that the criteria for identifying minorities within the present population of Algeria were far from convincing. According to information from a number of sources, the Berber population in Algeria totalled between 7 and 8 million persons, or 25 per cent of the country's population. How was it possible that no mention had been made of such a group in the report?

22. The Law on the Generalization of the Arabic Language in Algeria, which had entered into force on 5 July 1998, gave cause for concern. Whereas there could be good reasons for a country to have legislation on the use of a particular language in public life, that usually concerned languages that had long been dominated or the protection of an endangered language, which was hardly the case with Arabic in Algeria. He had the impression that that law was an expression of cultural and linguistic imperialism, which was contrary to the spirit of the Convention. The law contained draconian measures and was full of prohibitions and exclusions. It was forbidden to use a language other than Arabic in many situations; most shocking of all, the law contained penal, and not merely administrative, sanctions for violations. Surely that went too far. Moreover, the law went beyond the sphere of official use. For example, article 17 of the law spoke of the language used in films, article 19 of advertisements, article 20 of signs, billboards and symbols. Article 38 even stipulated that medical prescriptions were to be written in Arabic. The Human Rights Committee had recently concluded that Canadian legislation requiring that signs be written in one language only was in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As he saw it, the purpose of the Algerian legislation was not to ensure the presence of Arabic, but to eliminate the presence of other languages. That could hardly be compatible with the spirit of the Convention, especially given the size of the minority population in question.

23. Mr. de GOUTTES, commending the regular submission of Algeria's periodic reports, recalled the Committee's previous acknowledgement of the problems faced by Algeria and reiterated its desire to be of assistance. While the Committee was pleased that Algeria had made the declaration under article 14 recognizing the Committee's competence to receive and consider individual communications, it had yet to receive a single such case. It was unfortunate that the report made no mention of the article 14 mechanism or even of the Convention itself.

24. Although the fourteenth periodic report contained much information on legal provisions in force, it did not give a clear picture of the actual problems encountered in the country. There was still insufficient information on the ethnic make-up of the population, which made it difficult to identify vulnerable groups, notably the Amazigh (Berbers), but also refugees and sub-Saharan blacks. The explanations given in paragraphs 34 and 35 were not consistent with the Committee's position on the need for data on the ethnic characteristics of the population as set out in paragraph 8 of the Committee's guidelines. The Committee requested information on socio-economic indicators that reflected the situation of existing ethnic groups, so that it could fully monitor implementation of the Convention in the State party.

25. Concerning the implementation of article 4, it appeared that the disagreement with the Committee noted in 1997 persisted. The provisions of Algeria's Penal Code, in particular article 298, only concerned defamation and insults directed at persons belonging to an ethnic or philosophical group (para. 48), but said nothing about racial groups. Moreover, neither the Constitution nor the Penal Code expressly prohibited racial discrimination as such. The Penal Code did not punish the acts covered by article 4. The Algerian Government should consider amending its legislation to bring it into line with the Convention.

26. Turning to article 5 of the Convention, the report contained no information on the actual implementation of the numerous legal provisions cited. It was not sufficient to refer to laws; it was essential to verify whether they were actually respected. Similarly, the paragraphs on implementation of article 6 did not contain any example of a case in which an act of racial discrimination had been prosecuted and punished by the courts. Nor was it enough to say, as in paragraph 42, that acts of racial discrimination were traditionally unknown in Algerian society.

27. Regarding the rights of the Amazigh (Berber) community, the Algerian Government's relations with that group were contradictory. On the one hand, concessions had been made, such as the authorization of Berber cultural associations, the creation of Berber departments in two universities, the introduction of Berber in television and the teaching of Berber in pilot schools. On the other hand, he noted the existence of the Law on the Generalization of the Arabic Language and the failure to provide constitutional recognition of the Amazigh culture or language. How did the Algerian delegation explain that apparent contradiction? Had the concessions been followed up? Was the Algerian Government planning any additional measures to protect the Berber culture and language?

28. Could the Algerian delegation indicate what measures were taken to familiarize the public with the Convention, the periodic country reports and the Committee's concluding observations; what role did NGOs play in drawing up the periodic reports and disseminating the views of the Committee?

29. Mr. THORNBERRY endorsed Mr. Bossuyt's comments regarding the Law on the Generalization of the Arabic Language, which seemed to conflict with international human rights jurisprudence, as reflected in the Human Rights Committee's findings in the case of Ballantyne/Davidson v. Canada and other similar cases. Caution should be exercised in imposing an official language in law and practice on those who were not fully conversant with it.

30. With regard to Amazigh identity, the modern tendency was to recognize personal identity as multiple and national identity as differentiated and complex. How was the "three-dimensional personality" of Algeria mentioned in paragraph 35 of the report reflected in law and practice and to what extent was the Amazigh language cherished and promoted by the State? In the light of the statement in paragraph 37 that the various ethnic contributions had blended intimately together to form the Algerian identity, he asked whether the Government's overall policy on ethnic and linguistic groups could properly be described as assimilationist or integrationist in cultural and social terms.

31. It would be interesting to learn whether the Government considered that the provisions of the Convention could be implemented without appropriate compilation of demographic data. Observing that the Tuareg had presented themselves to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights as an indigenous people, he asked whether the Government recognized such status in the case of nomadic groups such as the Tuareg in Algeria.

32. Mr. TANG Chengyuan commended the Algerian authorities on their decision to incorporate many provisions of international human rights treaties in the Constitution. Referring to paragraphs 75 and 76 concerning criminal activities by extremist groups who opposed freedom of religious practice and freedom of conscience, he asked what provisions of the Penal Code were applicable to such acts. With reference to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, he inquired about the nationality of children born to refugees in Algeria. If an Algerian woman married a foreigner, were her children recognized as Algerian citizens? He would welcome additional information concerning the status of minorities in Algeria and measures taken by the authorities on their behalf.

33. Mr. DEMBRI (Algeria) acknowledged that the report failed to provide sufficient statistical and demographic data, an omission that would be rectified as soon as possible. The process of building a balanced society in Algeria, a society in which the basic rights of all citizens were respected, had begun in 1962. As a united Arab-Berber society, Algeria had played a leading role in the global decolonization movement. In 1938 the colonial authorities had prohibited the use of the Arabic language and all regional dialects. The Law on the Generalization of the Arabic Language was therefore not a repressive law but one designed to promote the use of the official national language, which was spoken by the entire population. The title was somewhat misleading, since it was simply a law on the official language comparable to Canada's Official Languages Act. The Office of the High Commissioner on Amazigh Status had been established to rehabilitate all aspects of the country's cultural heritage and to protect the 14 local Berber dialects. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages had been adopted for precisely the same purpose.

34. He warned against the adoption of an anthropological or ethnographic approach to Algerian society. It should be viewed instead as a unitary society without ethnic minorities that set a high premium on modernization in all fields. In 1962, there had been just one embryonic university in Algeria; there were now 45.

35. He agreed that certain legal provisions that had been unduly influenced by religious considerations, for example those concerning children born out of wedlock, should be amended. Certain steps had already been taken in that direction, as other members of the delegation would report.

36. Ms. BENABDALLAH (Algeria) noted that the Committee, in its previous concluding observations (CERD/C/304/Add.33), had recommended that a prohibition of racial discrimination should be incorporated in Algerian domestic legislation. The President had

established the National Commission for Judicial Reform in 1999 to review the whole body of civil and criminal legislation in order to bring it into line with Algeria's obligations under the international treaties it had ratified. But even before its establishment, the Committee's concerns had been reflected in amendments to the Penal Code. Although the wording was not identical to that contained in article 1 of the Convention, the notion of ethnic or racial motivation had been included in articles 298 bis and 299 of the Penal Code. Under article 298 bis, any defamation directed against a person or group of persons on grounds of their origin, membership or non-membership of an ethnic group, race or religion was punishable by a term of imprisonment or a fine. Article 299 concerning insults had been amended along the same lines. The penalties in both cases had also been made more severe. She conceded that the notions of defamation and insult fell somewhat short of what was required by the Convention. However, the National Commission for Judicial Reform would no doubt recommend a more thoroughgoing reform of the Penal Code.

37. With regard to the role of the National Human Rights Observatory (NHRO) as an independent mediating institution, a decision had recently been taken to establish by presidential decree a national advisory commission for the promotion and protection of human rights. It would be composed for the most part, and on the basis of gender parity, of representatives of civil society and NGOs. Representatives of State institutions would also serve on the commission in an advisory capacity. It would review, for example, NHRO procedures for dealing with complaints. The Observatory currently operated in close consultation with the Ministries of Justice and the Interior in verifying allegations. If they were found to be substantiated, the Ministry of Justice transmitted the file to the relevant public prosecutor who opened an investigation.

38. As far as she was aware, no person had been punished for using a language other than Arabic since the Law on the Generalization of the Arabic Language had come into force. Algerians continued to draft documents and speak in both Arabic and French with impunity.

39. The law in Algeria, which had opted for ius sanguinis over ius soli, was unequivocal about nationality. Under article 6 of the Nationality Code, Algerian nationality was automatically granted to the child of an Algerian father, the child of an Algerian mother and unknown father, and the child of an Algerian mother and stateless father. By virtue of article 7, if a child born in Algeria of unknown parents was legally found to be descended from a foreigner and carried that nationality by law, he or she would be deemed never to have been Algerian. A child born in Algeria of an Algerian mother and a foreign father also born in Algeria would enjoy Algerian nationality unless the child renounced it up to one year before attaining his or her majority. Moreover, a newborn baby found on Algerian territory was presumed to be Algerian unless proven otherwise. Some problems persisted, but the authorities were considering making the necessary reforms. Adoption was prohibited by the shariah, but an important measure had been taken whereby under the foster placement system - the kafalah of Islamic law - a family member taking over the care of a child could bestow his or her name on the child.

40. Mr. SAHRAOUI (Algeria) confirmed that international instruments took precedence over domestic law. The fact that the Convention was not specifically mentioned was no oversight, since it was the subject of the very title of the pertinent chapter heading and, indeed, was implicit in the term "international instruments". The Convention relating to the Status of Stateless

Persons had been ratified by Algeria in 1964 and had been published in the Official Gazette. The International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination had been one of the first international instruments to be ratified by Algeria. With the second wave of ratifications in the late 1980s and the start of the country's presentation of reports to the United Nations treaty bodies, he had been instrumental in ensuring that the texts of international treaties, including the Convention, were published as addenda to the Official Gazette, since only decrees had thus far been published therein. In the wake of a recent NHRO investigation, the International Bill of Human Rights had been published in Arabic and French in order to apprise Algerians of the issues involved.

41. Mr. AKRECHE (Algeria) said that registrars were obliged by law to record the births, deaths and marriages of all inhabitants, including nomads, regardless of ethnicity, kinship or race, and failure to do so was punishable by law. Given the enormous stretches of desert in the country and the distances involved, the deadline for registration had been extended in the southern part of the country, and local offices had been established.

42. On the subject of foreigners in general and refugees and displaced and stateless persons in particular, he said that aliens were governed by Ordinance No. 66-211, which was currently under review. However, the general principle was that foreigners' freedom of movement and their choice of domicile and activity were protected by law. For one reason or another, the previous decade had witnessed a huge influx of displaced persons from Algeria's two southern neighbours. The country had taken them in, established them in centres and provided them with educational and health services, food and security, thereby not only honouring its long-standing tradition of hospitality, but also fulfilling its international obligations under the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. An agreement had also been concluded with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for multilateral support to enable many displaced persons to return to their countries of origin.

43. A number of legislative changes had been made in order to combat racial discrimination in the social and economic fields. As part of the general overhaul of the system, a recent law stipulated that everyone must enjoy free access to hotel services, without discrimination based on gender, race or religion. Administrative sanctions, in the form of warnings and fines, were imposed on anyone violating that right. In short, Algeria was determined to fight discrimination and uphold the rule of law.

44. Mr. PILLAI (Country Rapporteur), thanking the delegation for the additional information it had furnished, welcomed the fact that Algeria, in its commitment to building a more modern society, was reviewing many of its legal provisions, articles 298 and 299 of the Penal Code being a case in point. He had been pleased to hear more about the law governing free access to public places. He wondered whether the State party was considering amending the legislation to eliminate the anomaly of a law providing for punitive action to prevent the use of a language other than Arabic when in fact no such action was ever taken. He looked forward to receiving information not provided in the report or in the delegation's answers as soon as possible, and thanked the delegation for its fruitful and constructive dialogue with the Committee.

45. Mr. DEMBRI (Algeria) said he would provide the missing statistics within a few days and assured the Committee that its comments would be heeded by the authorities. Algeria was striving to become a modern society and in those efforts benefited in large measure from dialogue with experts, such as the members of the Committee, who could steer it on the right course. Dialogue was paramount, even in a situation of cultural diversity. In the light of the concerns expressed regarding national and international publicity of its activities, the authorities would avail themselves of its national media. Aware as they were that the audio-visual media were sorely in need of development, they were drafting legislation to enable the country to have private television stations, and it was hoped that investors would come forward. Since independence, the Official Gazette had been published in both Arabic and French, which was precisely one reason why the Law on the Generalization of the Arabic Language was not enforced. The change from a one-party system to a pluralist society based on multiparty politics had called for the enhancement of the population's critical faculties to mould new citizens who were fully aware of developments in the world.

46. The CHAIRMAN, thanking the delegation, expressed hope for continued cooperation between Algeria and the Committee in their common aim of ensuring implementation of the Convention.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.