



International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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Summary record of the 2789th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 5 December 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Amir
later: Mr. Murillo Martínez (Vice-Chair)
later: Mr. Amir (Chair)

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

Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention *(continued)*

Combined seventeenth to nineteenth periodic report of Israel (continued)
(CERD/C/ISR/17-19; CERD/C/ISR/Q/17-19)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Israel took places at the Committee table.*
2. **The Chair** invited the delegation to reply to the questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting.
3. **Ms. Raz Shechter** (Israel) said that the complex realities on the ground in Israel admittedly gave rise to certain dilemmas. Still, some of the Committee's concerns pertained to political processes rather than matters of racial discrimination. The issue of settlements, for example, was a core political issue that could not be informed meaningfully by discussing it in the present forum. Although members had posed many well-researched questions, some of the comments had been less well informed. Allegations that there was a strategic scheme to fragment the Arab population were baseless. The Government's efforts to promote the rights of that population, as represented by the composition of her delegation, for example, told a different story. Claims that human rights defenders were treated as terrorists were equally untrue. Some 20,000 active non-governmental organizations operated freely in Israel, on a range of agendas. The Government welcomed the engagement of civil society in the present review, and it was unfortunate that some should use the opportunity to present false facts. For the sake of a focused and constructive exchange, her delegation would concentrate on those issues that fell squarely within the scope of the Convention.
4. **Mr. Heumann** (Israel) said that democratic values were the bedrock of the State of Israel and were underpinned by robust laws and jurisprudence. The new Basic Law: Israel – The Nation-State of the Jewish People (2018) (the Nation-State Law) did not derogate in any way from the human rights protected under the other 15 basic laws, nor did it affect the protection and enjoyment of the rights of minority populations. The principle of equality was firmly embedded in both the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty (1992) and the Israeli Constitution. The Nation-State Law gave expression to the majority population's right to self-determination, while upholding the commitment to respect for the rights of the country's minority populations. It came at a time when certain forces sought to delegitimize the fundamental right of the Jewish people to self-determination. It enshrined Israel's character as a home and a safe haven for the Jewish people, without prejudice to the right of others, including the Palestinian people, to self-determination. Israel's minority populations enjoyed educational, cultural and linguistic autonomy. The Government's commitment to equality, diversity, pluralism and minority rights remained unwavering, despite the many challenges in a region where such commitment was desperately lacking. The vibrant debate, protests and legal action surrounding the adoption of the Nation-State Law reflected the strong democratic values on which Israeli society was based.
5. **Mr. Hakroosh** (Israel) relayed his personal yet symbolic story of success: an Arab citizen who had grown up poor in a village in northern Israel, isolated from the rest of the world and with little prospect of a career, he had come to hold the rank of Major General in the Israeli Police. Describing the countless obstacles and challenges along his path, he expressed deep satisfaction at the progress made in the State party since his childhood and the opportunities that currently existed for young Arab people in Israel to study and pursue high-level careers.
6. In present-day Israel, the sociocultural transformation of the Muslim Arab community went hand in hand with growing levels of violence and a resulting loss of personal security for Arab citizens. Government Resolution No. 922 on Government activities for the development of minority populations for the years 2016–2020 provided, among other things, for improved police services to enhance the sense of security in Arab localities. In that framework, a new unit within the Israeli Police for services in Arab society had been established under his leadership. Eight of 18 planned new police stations

had already been opened and over 600 young Arab men and 55 young Arab women had been recruited to the Israeli Police. The programme had a budget of 15 billion new Israeli shekels (NIS). It was a fine example of equal opportunity and one stepping-stone on the road to a more egalitarian society.

7. **Ms. Granevitz Buzy** (Israel) said that, according to the most recent statistics, just over 6.7 million of Israel's 9 million people were Jewish and approximately 1.9 million were Muslim. The remaining 441,000 persons were Christians or professed another or no religion. At the end of 2017, the Ethiopian population had stood at 148,700. Of those, 87,000 had been born in Ethiopia and 61,700 in Israel. The Muslim population had increased by 2.3 per cent since 2017. At the end of 2018, the Druze population had comprised approximately 143,000 persons. As at October 2019, 32,090 persons had entered Israel illegally; 102,450 foreigners were working in Israel legally, as against 70,485 illegal workers.

8. Israel had received a large number of asylum applications in relation to its size. Since 2009, approximately 17,000 applications had been submitted; outstanding applications at June 2019 had numbered nearly 37,000. The Population and Immigration Authority was working to improve the services provided and shorten application processing times. Applications could be filed from various locations, including when in custody, and were processed in accordance with relevant domestic legislation, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto. The Population and Immigration Authority was required to make details of asylum procedures available in places of custody, in its office and on its website; they included a manual on submitting applications, a description of the processing procedure and information on the rights and obligations of asylum seekers. The Population and Immigration Authority had a designated unit for handling asylum applications in Israel. A computerized appointments system was in place to shorten waiting times. Asylum seekers were not held in custody after submitting an asylum request and would not be removed from Israel until completion of the review of the request, in line with the principle of non-refoulement. Decisions of the Minister of the Interior to deny asylum applications could be appealed to the Appeals Tribunal, district courts and, with the latter's approval, the Supreme Court.

9. Israel had experienced an influx of people entering its borders from Egypt. The Government had sought a suitable solution for refugees that complied with its duties under the principle of non-refoulement, as set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention. All relocations were to countries that were parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention and other major human rights conventions and which met the Attorney General's criteria. Israel had reached agreements with two "third countries" for the safe relocation of persons from Sudan and Eritrea who had entered Israel illegally through the Egyptian border. The Supreme Court had rejected the argument that one of those two third countries was unsafe. The State of Israel ensured that relocations were carried out in accordance with the agreement reached and with international law. Migrants' rights were guaranteed, including the right to receive the appropriate papers. Any person who wished to relocate voluntarily to one of those countries could do so with State assistance. The Population and Immigration Authority had not detected any violations of the principle of non-refoulement.

10. Under section 13 (a) of the Entry into Israel Law (1952), any person in Israel without a residence permit could be deported. In implementing the provision, the Population and Immigration Authority took into consideration its obligations under international human rights conventions and Israeli law. In 2018, the Population and Immigration Authority had given 30 families special permission to stay in Israel for a few months without a residence permit so that the children could finish their schooling. Most had not left the country voluntarily at the end of that period.

11. If a migrant who had children refused to cooperate with a deportation order, the Population and Immigration Authority's enforcement unit would intervene only as a last resort, subject to the child's best interest. Children over the age of 12 could express their position in a hearing. While in custody, the family was visited by a social worker and had the right to appeal against their custody and deportation.

12. Persons who had entered Israel illegally from Egypt had to deposit 20 per cent of their wages into the Foreign Workers Fund, with their employers depositing an additional 16 per cent. The fund had been introduced based on provisions in Chapter 4 of the Foreign Workers Law (1991). The money was refunded to employees when they permanently left the country. The accumulation of money in the fund created an incentive for the persons not to stay in Israel illegally. Employees could see the amount deposited by their employers on their payslips and could access the information online. Almost 2,000 people had collected deposits amounting to more than NIS 27 million. Since 1 November 2018, some people, including minors, persons over 60, women and victims of human trafficking or slavery, paid a reduced contribution of 6 per cent. Around 31,000 people had qualified for the reduced rate and 1,478 of them had been reimbursed a total of more than NIS 10 million. The Law was currently under judicial review.

13. The Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Provision) (2003) had limited the granting of citizenship or permanent residency to persons from the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, including through family reunification, because dozens of Palestinians had used the mechanism to engage in terrorist activities. Even though Palestinians continued to take advantage of the mechanism to engage in terrorism, family reunification was still possible. A family-stay permit could be granted to persons deemed to be a low security risk. Entry to Israel for up to six months was also possible for medical reasons or on employment or other grounds. Permits could also be granted for humanitarian reasons to certain persons if they identified with the State of Israel and its goals. The Law had been upheld by the Supreme Court and extended until January 2020. Temporary residents had been allowed to renew permits for two years, rather than one. In addition, holders of temporary residence permits whose family reunification applications had been submitted before 2003 would have temporary residence permits issued to their families and children, which would entitle them to access social security benefits and national health insurance and to receive Israeli identity documents.

14. **Mr. Salmon** (Israel) said that, in 2010, the Government had made a formal decision to eliminate all racism, discrimination and inequity in the health system. As part of a multi-year programme, a national committee had been formed that worked with civil society organizations to establish guidelines, programmes and teaching schemes to that end. The committee's comprehensive report gave guidance on actions that might constitute discrimination. Medical institutions were required to offer translation in at least four common languages and to train staff on bridging cultural differences. A programme had been introduced on the elimination of racism and discrimination; it was compulsory in all nursing schools. While acknowledging that, as in all societies, prejudice and discrimination existed in Israel, the Government was trying to find solutions to cases that occurred.

15. Contraceptive injections given to Ethiopian women were not a form of sterilization or castration. The injection was available around the world and was one of the contraceptive methods recommended by the World Health Organization. More than half of women using hormonal contraception in Ethiopia would rather use injections than oral contraceptives. Enquiry committees had been set up to investigate whether the women had been offered the opportunity to give proper informed consent. The Director General of the Ministry of Health at that time had introduced regulations regarding how women should be offered contraceptives, what kind of discussions should take place and how informed consent should be obtained.

16. Although Jews who had come from Ethiopia had previously been excluded from giving blood, new guidelines introduced in 2016 applied the same rules to all potential blood donors, allowing them to give blood unless they had stayed in certain areas in the previous 12 months. The Ministry of Health had also introduced new screening methods, approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration, to reduce the HIV risk.

17. Although the Israeli Ministry of Health would like to treat all Palestinian patients, the situation in the Gaza Strip was complex. The Ministry of Health would still treat complex cases where no treatment was available in Gaza. Cases had to be approved by the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health for patients to be reimbursed. Following security checks, the vast majority of patients were approved, but accompanying family members

were sometimes refused permission to cross the border. If a child could not be accompanied by his or her parents, the Israeli Government would seek alternative arrangements.

18. Fewer Palestinians were being treated in Israel since the President of the Palestinian Authority had changed its policy for political reasons in March 2019. The Israeli Ministry of Health was looking for solutions, as medical treatment was an important source of income for some Israeli hospitals. More than 300 Palestinian physicians had spent between one and five years receiving training from the Israeli Ministry of Health and had been paid a salary during their training. The programme represented a bridge to cooperation and peace and allowed medical information to be shared. It also helped the Palestinians to improve their services in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

19. Hundreds of tons of medical equipment crossed the border into the Gaza Strip through procedures carried out in accordance with the Oslo Accords and the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations. The Government had made vaccinations exempt from customs regulations, thus allowing any vaccinations sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) or the World Health Organization to enter the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

20. **Mr. Neuman** (Israel) said that, to comply with its human rights obligations while using artificial intelligence, the Government had launched the National Digital Israel Initiative and established the Digital Israel Bureau within the Ministry of Social Equality. There was also a multi-stakeholder committee, whose role included ensuring compliance with human rights values.

21. Israeli law defined racism as "persecution, humiliation, vilification, the display of enmity or violence, or the causing of animosity towards a community or parts of the population, by reason of colour, racial origin or national-ethnic origin". Provisions existed to punish certain specific acts, such as calls for violence, incitement to violence and publishing with the intent to incite racism. Under a 2019 amendment to the Penal Law, racism or hostility had been defined as an aggravated circumstance in homicide offences. To safeguard freedom of expression, every indictment for incitement to violence or racism had to be approved by the Attorney General, and district state attorneys were asked to supervise cases and take part in all stages of decision-making.

22. Since 2014, there had been over a hundred prosecutions for racially motivated crimes against Arabs, Jews and other persons. The number of prosecutions was falling, which showed that the legislation was an effective deterrent. Investigations had been conducted into statements made by several rabbis, and one religious school had been closed because of its racist educational content. Only the previous month, the director of the anti-miscegenation organization Lehava had been charged with incitement to violence, racism and terrorism. He had also been prevented from standing for election owing to his illegal incitement.

23. *Mr. Murillo Martínez (Vice-Chair) took the chair.*

24. Noting that some politicians had made comments about certain persons or populations, he said that politicians around the world often wrote controversial messages in social media. The Israeli courts had upheld the right to freedom of political opinion and expression, including opinions despised by the majority. Israeli law also granted members of the Knesset substantive immunity for their words and actions inside parliament and, if in the course of their duties, outside parliament.

25. Differences existed in the laws that applied to Israel, the eastern part of Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the sovereign territory, including the Golan Heights and the eastern neighbourhoods of Jerusalem, the law of the State applied to everyone, regardless of their origin, as envisaged in article 1 (2) of the Convention. In the West Bank, however, customary law of belligerent occupation and the humanitarian provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention applied. Article 43 of the 1907 Hague Convention respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land obliged the authorities to take responsibility for enforcing local laws, which in the West Bank were drawn from Jordanian law, British Mandate law and Ottoman law. The military commander must respect those laws, but they could also be amended by military ordinance as required,

in order to meet the obligation to maintain public order and security. Such ordinances must comply with international and Israeli law and observe basic legal principles such as non-discrimination, reasonableness and fairness.

26. The relationship between Israel and Gaza, on the other hand, had been regulated by the Law of Armed Conflict since the violent coup by which Hamas had seized control of the Gaza Strip from the Palestinian Authority in 2007. Ever since the Israeli disengagement in 2005, Hamas and other terrorist organizations had used their military capabilities against the Israeli and civilian population; during the conflict in 2014 more than 4,500 mortars and rockets had been fired, around 4,000 of them directed at Israeli towns, cities and residential communities, and only the previous week 500 rockets had been fired against civilians settled in Israel.

27. One of the measures applied in Gaza in order to maintain security and curtail the threat of terrorist activities was the naval blockade imposed to suppress the smuggling of arms into Gaza. The blockade had been found, by the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry into the flotilla incident that had occurred on 31 May 2010, to be a legitimate security measure in order to prevent weapons from entering Gaza by sea; its implementation complied with the requirements of international law.

28. As to entry to Gaza by land, it was important to note that Israel did not operate all the border crossings; the Rafah crossing was operated by Hamas on one side and Egypt on the other. The interim agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization governed certain aspects of relations, such as the provision of water to Gaza and the collection of taxes for goods transferred through Israeli ports.

29. **Mr. Bloch** (Israel) said that the ongoing armed conflict had prompted the Israeli Government to impose restrictions on the passage of goods and the movement of persons in and out of the Gaza Strip via Israeli sovereign territory. In order to avoid a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and in the interests of Gazans' well-being, the restrictions would be implemented only after an examination of the humanitarian situation and the relevant legal rules. The policy was carried out in accordance with international law and the State's sovereign rights over its borders, as confirmed by the Supreme Court. However, Israel allowed the passage of goods of a humanitarian nature above and beyond its international obligations.

30. In 2010, the State had changed its policy. All goods were allowed to enter the Gaza Strip freely, with the exception of goods that might pose a security risk to Israel, such as dual-use materials – i.e., materials that could also be used in the construction of weapons or other military materiel – which required authorization. The capacity of the Kerem Shalom crossing had been increased, permitting the transfer of hundreds of truckloads daily, and the restrictions had been eased in respect of projects funded by the international community, permitting the entry of dual-use goods subject to appropriate supervision.

31. Despite the suffering inflicted on Israel during the hostilities in 2014, endeavours had been made, by agreement with United Nations agencies and Palestinian Authority personnel, to facilitate the repair of damaged areas in the Gaza Strip. Accordingly, under the Gaza reconstruction mechanism, since 2014 some 30,000 new housing units and reconstruction projects and more than 1,200 public projects in the health, education and infrastructure sectors had been approved, and Israel had facilitated the passage of over 13 million tons of material into the Gaza Strip, permitting the completion of more than 770 projects. Any item that did not appear on the dual-use list could be transferred freely. However, Israel had also authorized the transfer of tons of dual-use material under the reconstruction mechanism.

32. Reconstruction efforts had nevertheless been hindered by forces beyond his Government's control. Under the mechanism, the Palestinian Authority, international bodies and the private sector were responsible for reconstruction, but Hamas refused to allow the Palestinian Authority to take responsibility for security on the Palestinian side of the border crossings between Gaza and Israel, and it continued to misappropriate construction materials for the benefit of terrorist infrastructure, thus delaying projects.

33. Since the 1994 Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, all water supply and sewage systems had been under Palestinian management and maintenance. The main source of water in the Gaza Strip was an aquifer over which Israel had no control. In addition, Israel provided 10 million m³ of water a year to the territory, half of it in accordance with the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The quality of water supplied by Israel was identical to the quality of the water provided within Israel.

34. Immediately after the disengagement of Israel from the Gaza Strip in 2005, over 6,000 unapproved wells had been drilled, causing a severe drop in water levels, seriously harming the quality of water in the Gaza aquifer, possibly irreversibly. Desalination, with support from the international community, appeared to be the only viable solution to the problem.

35. Israel was not involved in the treatment of waste water from Gaza but was affected by negligence on the part of the local authorities. Around 80,000 m³ of waste water flowed into the sea every day, according to Palestinian data. The remainder penetrated the groundwater of the Gaza aquifer. Raw sewage entering the sea only 6 km from the desalination plant could potentially pollute the water in the plant itself.

36. **Mr. Heumann** (Israel) said that the Study Books Branch of the Ministry of Education was required to ensure non-stereotyped representation of all sectors of Israeli society. His Government was not aware of any material in school textbooks that might incite to hatred. In addition, in civic studies and other programmes, pupils were taught about democracy, equality and freedom and the relationships between the three monotheistic religions.

37. What was a matter for concern, however, was the incitement to violence and hatred expressed in textbooks and official statements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, whereby Palestinian teenagers were brainwashed into committing terror attacks. Expressions of anti-Semitism and glorification of the murder of Jewish and Israeli nationals were prevalent in Palestinian educational, cultural and religious institutions and the media. Jews and Israelis were demonized and not portrayed as ordinary human beings.

38. The main challenges faced by the 2,500-strong Roma community in Jerusalem were social exclusion, prevalence of violence within the community, high dropout rates and a lack of employment stability. Roma were entitled to all welfare and social services provided to Israeli nationals and those of limited financial means were entitled to exhaustion-of-rights services, but displayed little inclination to cooperate with the municipality's social services department. Nevertheless, that department was working with three of the schools where Roma children were enrolled and had set up specialized services and programmes for the community, including music classes for children, parenting workshops for mothers and fathers, and a programme to promote the participation of women in the labour market.

39. **Mr. Roodzyner** (Israel) said that great efforts had been made in recent years to design a national human rights institution in compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions (Paris Principles) and discussions within Government and academia were ongoing. In the meantime, various national institutions provided the services needed to protect human rights, including the State Comptroller and Ombudsman, the health ombudsman and several commissions on equal opportunities, the status of women and persons with disabilities, as well as a unit to coordinate the fight against racism.

40. Since 2007 there had been a steady increase in the representation of the Arab population, including Bedouin, Druze and Circassians, in the civil service, and in December 2018 they had accounted for 11.7 per cent of employees. That figure could be expected to increase further, given that there were hundreds of positions in the civil service specially designated for members of the Arab population. As to political representation, there had been 18 Arab members of the Knesset as of January 2019 and 14 as of October 2019.

41. His Government did not encourage the forced transfer and displacement of Bedouins. On the contrary, it provided incentives for any of the Bedouin diaspora to move to regulated localities, by granting land free of charge or at low cost, or by granting

compensation for the demolition of unauthorized dwellings. The majority of those currently residing in unauthorized areas would be able to remain there, but within regularized localities.

42. Unauthorized building caused difficulties in terms of service provision, and such structures could be dangerous to the residents themselves. Israel could not overlook the disregard of planning and zoning rules and was thus compelled to issue demolition orders in such cases. Enforcement applied, however, only to structures built after 2010 in areas not subject to any local authority and was conducted in accordance with legal procedures. In 2009, 968 demolition orders had been issued concerning, for the most part, makeshift structures, while in 2019 over 85 per cent of demolition orders had been implemented by the owners.

43. In recent years, Israel had taken extensive measures to prevent violence in general and violence against Palestinians in particular. Efforts had been made to investigate complaints and prosecute perpetrators. The Israeli Police operating in Israeli-controlled areas of the West Bank were responsible for investigating all offences, including those committed by Israeli citizens. More than 1,000 police investigators were fluent in Arabic. In the Judea and Samaria police district, a special unit set up to investigate ideologically motivated offences worked closely with police and security agencies in Israel. During the current year, up to July, 31 allegations of ideologically motivated offences by Israelis had been investigated; of the total number investigated since 2001, 21 had involved allegations of nationalistic offences by Israelis against Palestinians and others, and indictments had been served in 2 of those cases. Two of those cases were currently under review by the State Attorney's Office, nine were still under investigation and nine had been closed as no offender had been identified. In the first half of 2019, restraining orders had been issued against 16 Israelis, 4 of them minors, banning them from the West Bank, and a further 7 Israelis, 2 of them minors, had been banned from specific areas of the West Bank.

44. The hotline against discrimination and racism had now been replaced by the Ministry of Justice's unit to coordinate the fight against racism, which was accessible through its website, by telephone, by email and in person.

The meeting was suspended at 11.55 a.m. and resumed at 12.10 p.m.

45. *Mr. Amir (Chair) resumed the Chair.*

46. **Ms. Izsák-Ndiaye** thanked the delegation for its comprehensive replies. She said that a number of concerns remained, however, such as the fact that the State party had no general legal provision on equality, and in particular no specific prohibition of racial discrimination. In addition, it did not provide a definition of racial discrimination in accordance with the Convention. She would appreciate hearing the delegation's comments.

47. She would be interested to know whether the Ministry of Minority Affairs was still in existence and, if not, whether there was a government body specifically responsible for the protection of minorities and the elimination of discrimination. She would welcome the delegation's comments on the fact that minority communities within the Jewish population, such as Mizrahi Jews, were underrepresented in employment and education, and that women in certain minority Jewish groups were suffering discrimination. She would also appreciate receiving information on statelessness among the Bedouin population.

48. The Committee would welcome an update on the situation with respect to two subjects of concern that it had raised in its previous concluding observations ([CERD/C/ISR/CO/14-16](#)), namely the existence of two mutually inaccessible systems of education and of separate Jewish and minority municipalities.

49. It had been encouraging to hear the success story recounted by an Arab member of the State party's delegation, but it also served to highlight some of the systemic difficulties faced by Arabs in Israeli society. School dropout rates among Arabs were double those among Jews, life expectancy was lower and infant mortality rates higher. Similar issues of life chances and opportunity gaps affected other minorities also. How was the State party working to narrow those gaps?

50. The media, too, appeared to have mutually impermeable programming, with separate Jewish and Arabic television channels, for example; had the State party given any thought to mixed programming?

51. She had been surprised to learn that Haifa University observed Druze, Christian and Muslim religious holidays, and wondered why that was not a nationwide practice. Had there been any discussion of protecting and promoting religious identity by the simple expedient of granting such religious holidays?

52. **Mr. Avtonomov** said that the State party should address three points in its next periodic report: first, whether it had considered ratifying the amendment to article 8 of the Convention; secondly, whether it had considered making the declaration under article 14 of the Convention on the submission of individual communications to the Committee and if not, for what reason; and thirdly, given the presence of Jews from Ethiopia in Israel, what actions it was planning in the context of the International Decade for People of African Descent.

53. **Mr. Kut** said he had been struck by the fact that the State party's report contained just one reference to the Palestinian population (para. 138). He would be interested to know why the State party had elected to refer to a more general "Arab population", which, somewhat surprisingly, also seemed to include the Bedouin, Druze and Circassian populations.

54. He wondered what had prompted the Government to enact the Basic Law: Israel – the Nation-State of the Jewish People, under which Hebrew had been declared the official language of the country and Arabic had seemingly been downgraded from an official language to a language with special status. The delegation should also comment on the fact that road signs in Hebrew, Arabic and English were being replaced with signs in Hebrew with transliterations into the Arabic and Latin scripts. It would be interesting to know what effect that had had on persons whose mother tongue was Arabic, including the Mizrahi Jewish population.

55. **Mr. Murillo Martínez**, welcoming the information provided by the delegation regarding the use of artificial intelligence and its impact on human rights, said that he would be interested to know what measures were being taken or were envisaged to combat the global rise in extremism, which often affected certain social or ethnic groups whose human rights must be protected.

56. In the light of the International Decade for People of African Descent, he wished to know what action the State party had taken to abide by its international obligations pursuant to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. While the Committee had noted the State party's objections to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action itself, it was important to know how the State party approached the issue of racial discrimination against ethnic minorities, in general, and persons of African descent, in particular.

57. **Mr. Diaby** said that he would be interested to know whether the Government had assessed the impact of Resolution No. 1300 of 2014, which concerned the creation of a mechanism to combat racism against Israeli citizens of Ethiopian origin, and, if so, whether any statistics could be provided in that regard. He would also like to know whether the Government had any plans to turn that resolution into a binding law aimed at strengthening the legal and institutional framework to ensure that the rights of Israeli citizens of Ethiopian origin were better protected.

58. **Mr. Roodzyner** (Israel) said that the responsibilities of the now defunct Ministry of Minority Affairs had been transferred to the Ministry of Social Equality, among other institutions. Equality before the law and non-discrimination were the basic principles of the Israeli legal system, while the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty of 1992 served as the cornerstone for the prohibition of racial discrimination and as the guiding principle for all laws on equality and non-discrimination. In many of its rulings, the High Court of Justice had noted that the principles of human dignity, liberty and equality had been accorded a higher, almost constitutional, status in the Israeli legal system by the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty and the Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation. In addition, a number of laws emphasized the principle of equality and prohibited discrimination, including racial

discrimination. For example, the Prohibition of Discrimination in Products, Services and Entry into Places of Entertainment and Public Places Law prohibited discrimination on grounds such as sex, age, race, religion, religious affiliation, nationality, sexual orientation, country of origin, parenthood and political affiliation. Similarly, the Pupil Rights Law prohibited discrimination by educational establishments against pupils on grounds of ethnic origin, national origin, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation or the political views of the student or of his or her parents.

59. **Mr. Heumann** (Israel) said that all children in Israel were entitled to a public education. Israel had made concerted efforts to promote equal opportunities and access to education for all. The Ministry of Education had taken measures to improve education in Arab localities, resulting in an increase in the number of Arab pupils who had sat – and passed – matriculation examinations for entry to university. Attendance officers also visited schools, including in Arab localities, to ensure regular attendance by pupils and prevent school dropouts. Consequently, the dropout rate among Arab students had fallen from 2 per cent in 2015 to 0.7 per cent in 2018. There had been a steady increase in the number of schools in the Hebrew and Arab education systems, and further investments had been made in order to build additional classrooms in Arab and Bedouin localities. Fifty career guidance centres had been established in high schools in the Arab community, and a similar number of centres for preparing Arab pupils for the psychometric tests used for admission to Israel universities. Such tests were evaluated for cultural fairness, with sensitivity to gender, population and religion. A multi-year plan 2011–2016 had made higher education more accessible to minority populations. Scholarships and other forms of assistance were available to assist pupils from deprived families, including those from the Arab population. Funding for education was allocated in a clear and transparent manner to ensure equal treatment. Additional resources were designated for peripheral or disadvantaged areas.

60. **Ms. Marks** (Israel) said that, in recognition of disparities between the educational achievements of Bedouin students and the general population, a number of programmes had been put in place to close the gap. A five-year plan for the socioeconomic development of the Bedouin population, covering the period 2017–2021, contained measures to create new classrooms, prevent school dropouts, improve teaching quality, enhance language skills and encourage excellence. The plan, which had been tailored to the needs of the Bedouin population and had been allocated a budget of more than \$800 million, also sought to strengthen social welfare services, prevent violence and promote equality in education. An initiative to reduce the dropout rate of Bedouin pupils had successfully encouraged many at-risk students to remain in school. Classes on the customs and history of the Bedouin people formed part of the school curricula. More than 200 additional classrooms had been built each year in Bedouin schools in the period 2017–2019, and a further 521 classrooms would be built by 2021.

61. **Ms. Granevitz Buzy** (Israel) said that, with reference to the citizenship of the Bedouin population, the Population and Immigration Authority had examined a number of cases in which Bedouin persons had erroneously been registered as citizens rather than as permanent residents. The affected persons had been invited for interview and, if it had been found that they had registered as citizens by mistake, they would be offered the opportunity to apply for naturalization. According to the data, none of the associated applications had so far been refused under the accelerated procedure that had been established for the purpose.

62. **Ms. Izsák-Ndiaye** said she hoped that the delegation would take the opportunity to submit written replies to the many questions that, owing to time constraints, remained unanswered. The Committee would carefully consider all the information in the preparation of its forthcoming concluding observations. Admittedly, the situation was a complex and sensitive one; discussions around issues of ethnicity, language, religion, culture and belonging were often charged with emotion. Israeli society was fragmented and, since the Jewish population was in a position of dominance, the Government must help minority and other vulnerable groups by removing the structural challenges they faced, safeguarding their rights and protecting their distinct identities, while enabling them to feel that they belonged. Jerusalem, the home of three major monotheistic religions, had laid the spiritual foundations for humanity and inspired the search for a better world.

63. **Ms. Raz Chechter** (Israel) said that her delegation had welcomed the opportunity to take part in the constructive dialogue with the Committee and to provide Committee members with specific examples of how the Convention was being implemented in Israel. Given the lack of time, her delegation would endeavour to provide additional information in writing. She wished to emphasize the importance that Israel attached to respect for human rights and the principles of justice, equality and freedom. Her country would continue its efforts to ensure the full inclusion of all its citizens in the diverse and pluralistic society of Israel, to ensure that no one was left behind and to prevent anyone from feeling deprived of his or her rights or subjected to discrimination.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.