



**International Convention on
the Elimination
of all Forms of
Racial Discrimination**

Distr.
GENERAL

CERD/C/SR.1743
6 March 2006

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Sixty-eighth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1743rd MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 28 February 2006, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. de GOUTTES

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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)

Third to fifth periodic reports of Uzbekistan (CERD/C/463/Add.2; HRI/CORE/1/Add.129)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, the members of the delegation of Uzbekistan took places at the Committee table.
2. Mr. SAIDOV (Uzbekistan), introducing his country's third to fifth periodic reports (CERD/C/463/Add.2), said that the Committee's previous concluding observations (CERD/C/304/Add. 87) following examination of the initial and second reports (CERD/C/327/Add.1) had been taken into account in Uzbekistan's efforts to give effect to the Convention. Information on those observations had been conveyed to a broad range of institutions, including government bodies, educational establishments, NGOs and the media. The Government's efforts had also been guided by the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the United Nations Millennium Declaration. In keeping with the importance attached to social partnership with civil society and the media, the report had been prepared on the basis of information gathered by more than 13 government bodies and 10 NGOs.
3. Uzbekistan was a multi-ethnic, multi-faith and multicultural society with a high level of tolerance for ethnic groups, faiths, cultures and languages. Mechanisms for their cooperation and co-existence had been developed over centuries. Harmony and stability among its people were considered by the Government to be fundamental objectives of public policy and social development, and the principle of non-discrimination was viewed as a priority in the legislative, administrative and judicial spheres.
4. It was noteworthy that since its independence, Uzbekistan had not recorded a single case of inter-ethnic or inter-faith conflict, despite the difficulties of the transition period and the geopolitical situation of the region. Uzbekistan had guaranteed political stability, inter-ethnic peace and stable economic development, which had created the necessary conditions for the promotion and protection of human rights.
5. The Constitution and other legislative instruments reflected the trend in international law to give priority to ensuring individual rights over collective rights. Article 18 of the Constitution proclaimed the principle of equality of citizens irrespective of race, ethnic origin, language or other attributes. Pursuant to article 15, all citizens, irrespective of their national or ethnic origin, had equal rights as citizens and were protected by the Constitution and the laws stemming from it. Despite the fact that the concept of "national minority" was not defined in Uzbek legislation, there were numerous provisions that regulated the status of ethnic groups living in Uzbekistan. Pursuant to article 4 of the Convention, the State had established provisions to ensure respect for the languages, customs and traditions of ethnic groups and peoples living in its territory, not only recognizing their existence but also guaranteeing protection for their rights.

6. Government policies were characterized by efforts to maintain a balance between the interests of the State, society and the individual. Such policies were based on the rule of law, a strong civil society and respect for human rights. Various reforms had been undertaken in the social, political and economic processes of transition to an independent nation, one of the major achievements of which had been the maintenance of inter-ethnic harmony. In its efforts to give effect to the Convention, the Government had adopted a policy of openness, transparency and constructive cooperation and had attached great importance to multilateral relations and international cooperation. It firmly complied with its international human rights commitments and in the past two years had submitted more than 10 periodic reports to various treaty bodies.
7. Parliament had enacted more than 300 laws relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms. Nearly all laws contained provisions prohibiting discrimination and established mechanisms to ensure that that prohibition was complied with. The Convention had been adopted by Parliament and its provisions incorporated into national law. It was noteworthy that even before ratification of the Convention, there had not been any legislative provision that conflicted with the Convention. No cases involving violations of the Convention had been brought before the courts.
8. Pursuant to the provisions of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, Uzbekistan had streamlined the institutional basis for the protection of human rights, including its judicial system. Its national human rights institutions consisted of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights or ombudsman, who examined individual complaints; the Constitutional Court; the National Human Rights Centre; the Parliamentary Institute for Monitoring Legislation in Force; and a special department of the Ministry of Justice. For the past five years, there had been no complaints of violations of individual rights involving discrimination.
9. Numerous public awareness and information activities had been undertaken to publicize the Convention. Teaching materials, monographs and scientific research had been developed, and a broad variety of publications were available in many languages, including legal journals devoted exclusively to human rights issues. Basic human rights literature was available to students at universities and to NGOs. The Government regularly carried out social surveys and research on inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations in an effort to monitor the level of tolerance in Uzbek society. Human rights training programmes were provided for government officials, judges, lawyers, police officers, and prosecutors.
10. The literacy rate in Uzbekistan was almost 100 per cent. Citizens had the right to free choice of language in communication and upbringing. Schools that provided education in minority languages conformed to State educational standards.
11. One of the priority areas of social and political development was the establishment of civil society organizations, whose number had doubled to nearly 5,000 over the past five years. In conjunction with UNDP, a project had been set up with the objective of enhancing the partnership between Government and civil society in promoting human rights.

12. There were currently more than 140 national cultural centres for ethnic groups living in Uzbekistan, and an umbrella organization had been established to provide support and coordination for those centres. Religious diversity had existed in Uzbekistan for thousands of years. All citizens were guaranteed the constitutional right to freedom of conscience, and any violation of that right, including incitement to hatred on grounds of religion or the desecration of religious sites, entailed criminal liability.

13. Uzbekistan was a party to more than 60 international instruments, including 6 core United Nations human rights treaties. It had also signed bilateral cooperation agreements with a large number of States that included provisions prohibiting discrimination against national minorities. In conjunction with UNDP, the Government had developed a draft national plan of action to implement the recommendations of various human rights treaty bodies. It was determined to continue its close cooperation with the Committee and to provide complete information on efforts to encourage the enjoyment of human rights and their outcomes. To that end, it had provided the Committee with the following information: a report on the activities of the Ombudsman in the period 2000 to 2005; a report on social development in Uzbekistan; measures taken by the Government to promote and protect human rights; an ethnic and confessional atlas of Uzbekistan; information on the education system; and a comprehensive illustrated map reflecting the participation of women in Parliament and Government. Those documents and reports had been drawn up by the Government with the help of civil society organizations and Uzbekistan's international partners.

14. Mr. VALENCIA RODRÍGUEZ, Country Rapporteur, said that with its 27 million inhabitants, Uzbekistan was the most populous country in Central Asia and lay on the former Silk Road. That had accounted for the existence of some 136 national and ethnic groups, which added to the importance of implementing the Convention in Uzbekistan.

15. More than 60 per cent of the population lived in densely populated rural areas, principally in the south and east of the country. Uzbekistan was the world's second biggest exporter of cotton; it also produced gold, petroleum, chemical products and machinery. It had a low unemployment rate of 0.6 per cent and an underemployment rate of 20 per cent. The Uzbeks were the dominant ethnic group; other major groups included Russians, Tajiks, Koreans, Kazakhs, Karapalpaks, and Tartars. In accordance with the Committee's requests, he suggested that a new census should be conducted to update the 1989 census.

16. He had received information indicating the existence of certain ethnic tensions between the Russian population and the Uzbek majority. Ethnic Russians had evinced a reluctance to learn the national language and to adapt to the post-Soviet system. Because they were seen as colonizers, Russians were sometimes regarded with fear by other members of the population.

17. Nevertheless, it was gratifying to note that in a sociological study carried out by an NGO, the vast majority of ethnic groups had agreed that the most valuable assets of independent Uzbekistan were peace and stability, and harmony between nationalities and citizens. It was also significant that a majority of those groups had recognized Uzbekistan as their own and only homeland. That indicated that profound ethnic integration had been achieved, which was a

positive development. He requested information on the level of independence of the Ijtimoi Fikr Centre for the Study of Public Opinion, which had carried out the above-mentioned study. He would like to know what method had been used to compile the information included in the study. He suggested that, on the basis of its conclusions, further efforts should be undertaken to maintain social cohesion. He would appreciate additional information on the activities of the Uighur minority, which consisted of a group of refugees and whose activities had reportedly been restricted.

18. He would appreciate information on the situation of the estimated 28 per cent of the population who lived in poverty, and also clarification of reports that the level of poverty among all minority groups had recently increased, creating certain inequalities in access to basic services. He noted with satisfaction that international treaties approved by Parliament took primacy over domestic legislation, which meant that any citizen could invoke the Convention before the courts.

19. According to the Human Rights Watch World Report 2005, there had been numerous human rights violations that had resulted in restrictions on the freedoms of religion, expression and assembly of certain ethnic groups. The Commission on Human Rights had imposed a monitoring mechanism and appointed an independent expert to conduct a human rights assessment. He asked what measures had been taken and whether any improvements had been made, particularly with regard to the maintenance of harmony between the ethnic groups involved and the exercise of the freedoms mentioned.

20. The reporting State should indicate whether there had been an independent inquiry into the killing of demonstrators in Andijan by government forces on 13 May 2005, and how that incident had affected different ethnic groups. Given that law enforcement authorities had used excessive force on numerous occasions, particularly against refugees and asylum-seekers, the State party should provide human rights training for those authorities, particularly on the rights protected in the Convention.

21. It would be useful to have details of any cases of discrimination in which article 6 of the Labour Code had been invoked. What had the outcomes of those cases been? It was unclear whether article 42 of the Code of Administrative Law gave parents or educational authorities a free choice of language in children's upbringing and education.

22. The Government should take measures to ensure that domestic legislation was fully in line with the provisions of article 4 of the Convention, as recommended in paragraph 12 of the Committee's previous concluding observations. The delegation should provide examples of the implementation of existing legislation relevant to the obligations under article 4, and in particular, details of any cases in which that legislation had been invoked.

23. Given that people who were subject to proceedings for administrative offences had the right to speak their native language in court and to employ an interpreter, the reporting State should clarify whether the State paid the interpreters' fees.

24. Additional information should be provided on the level of representation of the different ethnic groups in Government, particularly in Parliament, and in regional and local government bodies. Did any legislation currently regulate such representation? The State party should consider amending the law on the designation of members of Parliament in order to increase representation of ethnic minorities in that body.

25. It would be useful to learn whether members of all ethnic groups enjoyed the same right to obtain passports and residence permits. Did nationals of any particular State receive preferential treatment in obtaining such permits? Freedom of movement, particularly for members of ethnic minorities, was seriously restricted by the need for a permit to change abode within the State party and an exit visa to leave. The Government should consider abolishing those documents.

26. Given the high number of refugees in the State party, the Government should ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol, the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Domestic legislation on asylum applications should conform to international instruments.

27. Reports had been received of violations of the right to freedom of expression, religion and conscience, particularly of Muslim communities. It would be useful to learn whether such violations had ceased and whether all ethnic groups now enjoyed those freedoms without any limitations.

28. The delegation should clarify whether the requirement for continuous residence in Uzbekistan for five years prior to applying for citizenship allowed the applicant to leave the country for short periods if necessary. Further details on that stipulation with regard to persons who had been born in Uzbekistan should be provided. Were children born in Uzbekistan to an Uzbek father or mother automatically granted Uzbek nationality? More information on the naturalization of refugees would also be welcome.

29. The Committee would appreciate additional information on the scope of the restrictions that had allegedly been placed on international NGOs. Details of NGOs working in the field of human rights, particularly the rights protected under the Convention, would be useful. Could NGOs make recommendations regarding their area of competence, and if so, how were those recommendations received? He asked whether members of all ethnic groups and foreign workers enjoyed the same right of association as Uzbek nationals.

30. The delegation should indicate what measures had been taken to ensure that hospitals had sufficient supplies of basic medicines and vaccines. What steps had the Government taken to reduce drug addiction and alcoholism, particularly among some ethnic groups? Did stateless persons and foreigners require legal residence status in order to be eligible for health care?

31. While commending the State party for its achievements in education, he noted that teaching materials, methods and curricula were often outdated and many schools were in a poor state of repair. There was also reported to be a degree of discrimination against

Muslims in schools. The delegation should indicate how that situation affected ethnic groups and what measures the Government planned to take to improve the level of education for all children.

32. He wished to know to what degree the judiciary was independent, and whether its independence was effectively guaranteed. In order to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Convention, particularly article 6, Parliament, rather than the President of the Republic, should appoint magistrates.

33. He congratulated the State party on its efforts to strengthen peace and friendship among different ethnic groups, and to widen access to dramatic arts and museums. The National Human Rights Centre should increase its work to raise awareness of human rights. Were the main ethnic groups represented in that Centre? Could the Centre submit recommendations to the authorities, and if so, did they act on them?

34. What steps had the Government taken to raise public awareness of the provisions of the Convention? Had the Convention been translated into the country's main languages? Did the Government plan to make the declaration provided for in article 14 of the Convention?

35. Mr. PILLAI asked for confirmation that the number of NGOs had risen from 4,000 in January 2005 to 5,000 at present. If that was true, it would be useful to learn why so many such organizations were being set up in the reporting State. Was there any classification of NGOs according to their area of expertise? Did any NGOs work specifically in the area of racial discrimination? The State party should provide additional information on the enactment of any new legislation relating to the registration of NGOs.

36. It would be interesting to have a full account of the process that had led to the incorporation of the provision on social and economic genocide in the Criminal Code. What did the Government consider to be a crime of economic genocide?

37. The current number of national cultural centres should be clarified. Given that there appeared to have been a significant increase in the number of such centres, it would be interesting to know why they had become so popular. Additional details on the work of any of those centres and on their role in the education of ethnic minorities would be welcome.

38. It was unclear whether the criminal cases cited in paragraphs 140 and 141 of the report were one and the same. Were any other cases related to discrimination on grounds of nationality or ethnicity currently being investigated or tried?

39. The delegation should provide details of any cases in which article 42 of the Code of Administrative Law on the right to free choice of language in upbringing and education had been invoked.

40. It would be interesting to learn what role the National Human Rights Centre had played in the preparation of the report, and whether it had been regarded as a government body during that process. If so, did the Government appreciate the need for an independent human rights

institution? Given that the mandate of the Ombudsman seemed to be somewhat restricted, it would be useful to know what degree of independence the National Human Rights Centre enjoyed in the promotion and protection of human rights.

41. Mr. SICILIANOS requested additional information on the current situation of refugees and asylum-seekers in the State party. Did the Government intend to ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and to develop adequate domestic legislation in that field?

42. Given that about 40,000 Tajik citizens had reportedly become stateless having fled to Uzbekistan, it would be useful to learn whether the State party planned to ratify the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Did the Government intend to draw up domestic legislation in that field?

43. Mr. AVTONOMOV commended the State party for its prompt submission of the report and the level of participation of NGOs in its preparation.

44. He requested information on the number of Roma living in Uzbekistan and on their situation, particularly with regard to the Committee's general recommendation XXVII on discrimination against Roma.

45. It would be useful to have further details on any cases of discrimination in the labour market, since it was not clear to what degree the legislation on non-discrimination in employment had been enforced. Additional data on the number of persons from different ethnic groups working in particular professions, such as the police force, would be appreciated.

46. He requested more information on the registration of NGOs. What problems had there been with that process in the past, and when had they occurred? The delegation should provide statistics on NGO registration. Had new legislation been adopted in that regard, and if so, when?

47. The report had made repeated mention of the State Language Act, whose existence was reasonable. However, he wondered whether there were any regulations governing the use of the other languages, whether those languages could be used in court, or whether the situation was such that regulation was not necessary since there were neither restrictions nor obstacles to their use. He asked the delegation to state its position in that regard.

48. Mr. TANG Chengyuan praised the delegation for its clear and succinct report, which showed that Uzbekistan had clearly made a tremendous effort to build up its system of human rights legislation since acquiring national sovereignty. The incorporation of corresponding provisions of the Convention into its domestic laws also demonstrated the Government's commitment to fulfilling the requirements under the Convention.

49. His query concerned the issue of the freedom of the press in Uzbekistan and alleged discriminatory action against sectors of the Tajik population. According to reports, a Tajik broadcasting station had been closed down, and the activities of two Tajik newspapers had been curtailed by the Government. Referring to paragraph 24 of the report, which related to the ban on the use of the media for propagating national, racial or religious hatred under the Mass Media

Act, he asked what criteria the Government had used in taking action against the above-mentioned media. Moreover, with reference to reports of the forced displacement of 1,300 Tajiks from their homeland to desert areas, he had understood that the group concerned had not been adequately compensated for the financial losses it had incurred. He therefore asked about the circumstances that had led to that action by the Government and what remedial measures had been taken since then.

50. Mr. KJAERUM expressed interest in the fact that the concluding observations and recommendations of treaty bodies had been incorporated into domestic human rights provisions. It was still a relatively new and welcome practice for States to take such action, and he looked forward to hearing more about the Government's experience in using the concluding observations as key indicators.

51. He enquired about reports that, in practice, permanent residence permits were granted to guests of honour of Uzbekistan only, and that others, including spouses of Uzbek nationals, were not eligible for citizenship and were granted temporary residence permits on a discretionary basis. In that connection, it would be useful to have further information on the number of persons granted Uzbek nationality, disaggregated by national origin, and on the number of foreigners to whom residence permits had been issued.

52. Given that citizens were equal before the law and that aliens and stateless persons were governed by international law, it was unclear what level of rights were enjoyed by non-citizens.

53. In 2005, the Human Rights Committee had expressed concern at the lack of regulations on the expulsion of foreigners, who were often put at risk of mistreatment or torture by receiving countries. He asked whether measures had been subsequently adopted to prevent the extradition or deportation of persons to countries where they might be placed at risk. Furthermore, were there any mechanisms to which applicants could appeal against deportation decisions?

54. He echoed the sentiment expressed earlier, urging Uzbekistan to ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and to develop procedures and legislation applicable to asylum-seekers and refugees. He asked for information on the establishment of human rights institutions to fulfil the criteria of the Paris Principles relating to the status of international institutions, adopted by the General Assembly in 1993.

55. The CHAIRMAN asked whether the implementation of anti-terrorism measures had had any negative repercussions in relation to racial or ethnic discrimination.

56. Mr. ABOUL-NASR, commenting on the ethnic composition of the population of Uzbekistan, said he was surprised by the number of Koreans recorded in the table in paragraph 13 of the report. He was curious to know why there was such a large representation of Koreans, and conversely, why there were no statistics on persons from Arab countries or Iran, for example. He would have thought that geographic proximity, among other things, might have prompted persons from the Middle East to settle in Uzbekistan.

57. Mr. SAIDOV (Uzbekistan), responding to the questions raised by members of the Committee on the status of the National Human Rights Centre and the Ombudsman, said that on the basis of the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the Paris Principles, Uzbekistan was the first country in Central Asia, and one of the first of the former republics of the Soviet Union, to establish a system of national human rights institutions, including the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman), the National Human Rights Centre and the Parliamentary Institute for Monitoring Legislation in Force.

58. With specific reference to the Office of the Ombudsman, which had been established in 1995, he said a commission to protect the constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens reported to the Ombudsman. The legislation on the Ombudsman, adopted in 1997, was the first of its kind in a former Soviet republic. Until 2004, the Ombudsman had reported to the single-chamber Parliament, but since 2000, 14 regional branches of the Ombudsman's Office had been set up throughout Uzbekistan.

59. On the recommendation of the international treaty bodies, a new version of the Act governing the functions of the Ombudsman had been adopted in 2004. Under the Act, which established provisions governing the regional offices, the Ombudsman was elected by the two-chamber Parliament, which comprised the Senate and the lower House. The position thereby acquired greater independence since the incumbent was not a member of Parliament, as had been the case previously, and was duty-bound to report to both Houses.

60. The office of Ombudsman was very important in the Uzbek system of human rights institutions, and the consideration of complaints and proposals by citizens was his main responsibility. The number of complaints handled by the Ombudsman had increased annually, reaching 6,000 in 2005. The Committee had before it a five-year report by the Ombudsman, which detailed statistics, measures adopted, and issues handled by the Office, as well as a separate report for 2005 alone. He wished to highlight the role of the Ombudsman in the preparation of the current periodic report and in the implementation of recommendations by treaty bodies.

61. Turning to the status of the National Human Rights Centre set up in 1995, he said that it had considered 718 individual complaints in 2005. Its basic task was to develop national strategies for the protection of human rights. In support of the Centre and in his personal capacity, Mr. Kjaerum had held a meeting with European human rights institutions, at which specific and useful recommendations had been adopted. As a result, with the support of UNDP, Uzbekistan had pioneered the formulation of a National Plan of Action for the promotion of human rights. Subsequently, his Government had held discussions with its international and State partners and NGO representatives on the formulation of specific plans for the implementation of each of the basic human rights instruments.

62. Uzbekistan had drawn up the first national plan of action with a view to the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2000. It had been presented to that Committee in 2005, and the Government expected to submit its periodic report in 2006. The second experience with the development of national plans of action (in 2001) had related to the

Committee on the Rights of the Child, to which it was also expected to report in 2006. A specific national strategy to implement treaty body recommendations had been put into practice, and that approach had been enthusiastically welcomed by State bodies and civil society. Work had been done on other plans of action in 2005 in relation to the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

63. He outlined the year-long process leading to the adoption of the plans of action, from the initial stage of informing State bodies, the NGO community, media, and civic groups of the observations of the relevant Committees, and inviting comments and recommendations from all stakeholders, to their incorporation in the final document. He made specific reference to work relating to the Committee against Torture, and said that all 22 recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Torture had been incorporated in the corresponding plan of action in 2004. Since then, 20 of those recommendations had already been fully implemented.

64. Praising the participation of the State bodies, NGOs and the media in that regard, he said collaboration on the plans of action had constituted an effective means of combining the efforts of the State and civil society. He assured the Committee that its recommendations would be treated in the same manner and would also form the basis for a national plan of action.

65. With regard to the role of the National Human Rights Centre in drafting periodic reports, he said that the Centre was the coordinating body in the preparation of all national reports, working in close cooperation with State bodies and departments, and NGOs. The Centre did not have all necessary data to hand, but it invited competent bodies to provide such data, and later invited NGOs to submit their recommendations and comments for further discussion. The involvement of civil society in the process had initially been difficult, but through extensive cooperation with international agencies, training courses had been organized for them to learn to draft alternative reports and to participate in the preparation of State reports.

66. The National Human Rights Centre trained NGOs in the preparation of reports; in 2005, Uzbek NGOs had submitted five alternative reports to the eighty-third session of the Human Rights Committee. In 2004 and 2005, the Centre had conducted a series of capacity-building activities for national human rights NGOs in cooperation with UNDP, in particular in relation to the implementation of international instruments and treaty body recommendations.

67. Awareness-raising and dissemination activities by the National Human Rights Centre included the translation into Uzbek of over 100 international documents relating to human rights; the publication of a brochure on the prevention of torture; and the dissemination of the comments and recommendations of treaty bodies. The Centre also published two quarterly journals entitled Democratization and Human Rights and Public Opinion and Human Rights in Uzbek, Russian and English, which covered developments in the areas of legalization, social relations and human rights.

68. The Centre performed a number of important functions in the field of human rights education. A review of human rights education in Uzbekistan conducted in 2004 had revealed that approximately 6.5 million people had received some form of human rights education over

the previous decade. All law enforcement officials were trained in the provisions of the main United Nations human rights treaties, and the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights, Peace, Democracy, Tolerance and International Understanding offered courses in human rights education at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent. In 1997, Uzbekistan had embarked on far-reaching educational reforms that had resulted in the adoption of new educational standards; the extension of compulsory education to 12 years; and the incorporation of human rights education modules in all curricula. The reforms had been modelled on international experience. In the light of the above, the allegation that educational curricula in Uzbekistan were outdated was unfounded.

69. The National Human Rights Centre was authorized to propose draft legislation to Parliament and participated actively in the formulation of legislation pertaining to individual rights. In 2005, the Centre had prepared draft legislation on the rights of the child, equal opportunities for men and women, and juvenile justice; its provisions had been based on the recommendations of the relevant treaty bodies. Interested State and non-governmental bodies had participated in the process. Bills were currently being prepared on freedom of conscience, non-commercial organizations, the mass media, public funds and the Ombudsman.

70. The National Human Rights Centre was competent to receive individual complaints of human rights violations and thus complemented the work of the Ombudsman. It also provided free legal assistance and acted as a public defender in cases involving grave violations of human rights. Each person seeking the Centre's assistance was requested to complete an anonymous questionnaire; the information provided was used in assessing the overall state of human rights in Uzbekistan. The findings had confirmed that most victims of violations were unaware of the different avenues for redress and had little confidence in public servants working in State institutions.

71. International cooperation was another key element of the Centre's mandate; its international partners included State representatives, international organizations and human rights NGOs.

72. The Parliamentary Institute for Monitoring Legislation in Force had been set up to monitor conformity of domestic legislation with Uzbekistan's international obligations. The National Human Rights Centre was currently examining a number of issues relating to the Committee's recommendations, including the feasibility of making a declaration under article 14 of the Convention, ratifying the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol, and acceding to a number of ILO Conventions. Its findings would be submitted to the Parliamentary Institute for comments.

73. Unfortunately, the human rights standards derived from international law were not always implemented in practice. Judges and lawyers were often unaware of the relevant provisions and, consequently, the Convention had never been invoked in domestic court proceedings. Public servants at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and members of the police force were similarly uninformed. The National Human Rights Centre had therefore launched a far-reaching campaign to publicize the provisions of international human rights instruments and

requested Uzbekistan's international partners to provide technical assistance in the training of judicial personnel. The National Programme to Promote Legal Literacy launched in 1997 aimed at raising public awareness of legislation and rights; State institutions and the National Human Rights Centre were participating actively in the implementation of the Programme.

74. The majority of the Roma population were sedentary and spoke Tajik or Uzbek; inter-ethnic marriages between Roma and non-Roma were increasingly common. Most Roma lived in the Fergana valley and their children were enrolled in schools; 573 studied in one school alone. The Fergana region was also home to other ethnic minorities, including Iranians, Bulgarians, Germans and Hebrews. Uzbekistan had a vibrant Korean community, which operated several Korean cultural centres. Most Koreans were fluent in Uzbek. Uzbekistan had also long been home to the Uighur minority and no particular problems had arisen with regard to that population group. A considerable number of persons living in Uzbekistan were of Arab descent; many Arabs had come during the Soviet era to study in Uzbek universities. An influential Arab cultural centre offered a wide range of activities.

75. The Centre for the Study of Public Opinion set up in 1998 conducted a variety of sociological surveys in cooperation with international organizations. The reliability of information gathered by the Centre was internationally recognized and its findings, which were often of a critical nature, were published in the press.

76. The CHAIRMAN noted with interest the innovative nature of the activities of the National Human Rights Centre. Its formulation of action plans pursuant to the recommendations of treaty bodies, its role as an intermediary between State institutions and NGOs, the training it provided for NGOs, and its activities in the field of human rights education were particularly noteworthy.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.