



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
20 February 2024

Original: English

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Eighty-seventh session

Summary record of the 2044th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 7 February 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Akizuki (Vice-Chair)

Contents

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

Fourth periodic report of Oman (continued)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.



Please recycle A small recycling symbol consisting of three chasing arrows forming a triangle.

In the absence of Ms. Peláez Narváez, Ms. Akizuki (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

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

Fourth periodic report of Oman (continued) (CEDAW/C/OMN/4; CEDAW/C/OMN/Q/4; CEDAW/C/OMN/RQ/4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Oman joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Oman** said that the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, which was chaired by a woman, had devised action plans to combat trafficking in persons and had organized training sessions for officers in all relevant law enforcement agencies. A 24-hour hotline had been set up to receive complaints regarding trafficking in persons. The Oman Human Rights Commission was fully independent. The Social Protection Fund established under the Ministry of Social Development had been tasked with promoting the economic integration of women.
3. **A representative of Oman** said that the rapid intervention task force had been established in 2019 and was still in operation. The Ministry of Social Development, the Royal Oman Police and the Ministry of Labour received complaints through their respective hotlines. Complaints could also be submitted to the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking via its website.
4. **A representative of Oman** said that the Public Prosecution Service had investigated 47 human trafficking cases involving 76 women between 2021 and 2023, all of which had been referred to the relevant courts. The investigations had been carried out by trained public prosecutors who were experts in the field of trafficking in persons.
5. **A representative of Oman** said that Omani women who married foreign nationals could retain their Omani nationality, and the children of such couples could apply for Omani nationality upon reaching 18 years of age.
6. **A representative of Oman** said that the Ministry of Education organized awareness-raising sessions for students and their parents to ensure that children continued their schooling and had established an ad hoc committee involving various stakeholders to gather statistics on and examine the reasons for dropout, which might include marriage, disability, employment or health concerns. Women's committees in the various governorates constantly worked to raise awareness of the importance of education for women and girls. During the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Government provided computers and set up education platforms to allow all children to continue their education. Strict measures were in place to ensure attendance.
7. The percentage of women in science and technology-related fields had increased, although restrictions on work in the oil and gas sector remained in place. Female students outnumbered male students in the natural and physical sciences and information and communications technology courses. In schools, students were taught about participation in local elections and political life, and women and girls were always encouraged to participate. In the 2022/23 academic year, the number of female students had far exceeded the number of males in both university education and vocational training. Science and innovation centres were collaborating with the Ministry of Education to promote the participation of women and girls.
8. Codes of conduct had been adopted in public and private schools to protect students from violence and abuse, and expert support was available to students and their parents. All cases of violence against children were reported to the appropriate authorities.
9. **A representative of Oman** said that the State had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1996 and had passed the Child Act in 2014. Child protection committees, which comprised representatives of various government entities, had been established in the 11 governorates. Complaints were received from individuals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other entities over the child protection line, and

appropriate action was taken by social workers responsible for child protection at the governorate level.

10. **A representative of Oman** said that efforts were under way to accelerate the integration of women with disabilities, based on the principle of equality for all as enshrined in the Basic Law of the State. As part of a national strategy implemented in cooperation with strategic partners, training and outreach events had been organized on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and a forum had been held to exchange views and ideas about the role of persons with disabilities in the implementation of Oman Vision 2040. Various measures had been taken to encourage persons with disabilities to participate in public life and the labour market, including an initiative launched by the Ministry of Social Development to integrate 500 persons with disabilities into the labour force by 2027.

11. **Ms. Al Najjar** (Oman) said that most recipients of vocational training under the Ministry's initiative had subsequently taken up employment; one had even been appointed to a position at the Central Bank of Oman. Given the initial success and the increasing willingness of companies to hire persons with disabilities, the Ministry planned to expand the initiative across the country.

12. The smart city had been planned in consultation with various stakeholders in the public and private sectors, including many women, to determine the needs of different members of society. Accessibility was an important criterion in the planning process, and the city's transport and amenities would cater to the specific needs of women, children, older persons, families and persons with disabilities. A centre would be established to provide women and children with all relevant services. At another centre, training would be given to families on how to care for persons with disabilities and experts would conduct examinations to assess whether children with disabilities would be best suited to attend mainstream or special schools.

13. A number of initiatives aimed to leverage state-of-the-art technology for the economic empowerment of women. The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology had launched a programme in cooperation with other ministries, the private sector and the Authority for the Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises to train a large number of young men and women to use the latest technology and enable them to enter the digital economy.

14. **A representative of Oman** said that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources had launched a series of programmes to allow women in the agricultural sector to increase their productivity, reduce waste and adapt to climate change through the use of integrated technologies, including a programme to train rural women on the use of artificial intelligence to market their products. The programmes had been allocated a budget of 122,000 Omani rials and over 700 women had benefited.

15. **A representative of Oman** said that extensive studies had been carried out on the empowerment of women. Electronic platforms were being used to empower a significant number of women in the agricultural production and food processing sectors.

16. **A representative of Oman** said that there was no discrimination in the granting of loans. Six lending programmes were available for different purposes, including one for entrepreneurs and another to support small and medium-sized enterprises led by women.

17. **A representative of Oman** said that the new Labour Law had entered into force the day after the publication of its implementing Royal Decree. The discrepancy in parental leave for mothers and fathers was large owing to their different needs. Additional allowances and sick leave had been introduced to increase the participation of women in the labour market.

18. The labour rights of all workers were protected. The "no-objection" certificate had been abolished and the Ministry of Labour had updated its electronic services in order to allow migrant employees to change employers without permission. Discrimination based on colour, gender or any other grounds was fully prohibited under the new Labour Law. The Minister of Labour had established a committee to examine relevant labour provisions with a view to bringing them into line with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), and Arab Labour Organization standards.

19. **Ms. Manalo** said that she wished to know whether women had become ministers of defence, high-ranking military officers, ministers of foreign affairs, ambassadors, diplomats, judges or supreme court justices and, if so, how many. She wondered whether women had founded any political parties and, if they had, to what extent they had been successful and attracted the support of male politicians. She would be interested to learn whether any woman had chaired the lower or upper houses of the Council of Oman.

20. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she wondered whether the State party would consider including provisions on sexual harassment, especially quid pro quo harassment, in the Labour Law. She wished to know what mechanisms existed to ensure access to justice for domestic workers who had been victims of sexual violence or other forms of abuse, and how the State party would incorporate into the Labour Law the strong anti-discrimination provisions contained in other regulations on domestic work.

21. **Ms. Mikko** said she recognized that the State party had implemented various measures to provide women with access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, which had been integrated into primary care facilities across the country. Those measures included continuous monitoring before and after childbirth and the promotion of birth spacing. She particularly applauded the fact that the maternal mortality rate had fallen and that all births took place under medical supervision. In addition, women had access to safe abortion and post-abortion care, irrespective of the legal status of the abortion, and family planning services, including modern contraceptives, were available free of charge.

22. She wondered what initiatives were in place to monitor the effect of family planning services and to ensure the continued availability of modern contraceptives. She asked how the authorities ensured that such services were also available in remote areas. She wished to know how Oman balanced the right to health services with the requirement for spousal consent for women who underwent certain reproductive surgeries, as outlined in Royal Decree No. 75/2019.

23. The Committee would be interested to learn about any awareness-raising campaigns to educate women about the importance of early detection of breast and cervical cancer. She would also appreciate information on steps taken to enhance adolescent-friendly services in primary health care institutions and how those services were tailored to address the specific needs of girls.

24. She wished to know how Oman sought to address challenges related to mental health, particularly in the context of harmful practices affecting women, and what specialized clinics or services were available. In that regard, she would appreciate specific information about the mental health of domestic workers, which was a matter of particular concern to the Committee. Lastly, it would be useful to hear about the factors contributing to the decline in registered abortion rates and the effectiveness of counselling and post-abortion care.

25. **A representative of Oman** said that workplace sexual harassment was directly addressed in article 41 (3) of the Labour Code. Victims of harassment could request the early termination of their contract of employment. Sexual harassment was a crime and was addressed as such in the Criminal Code, which had recently been amended with the introduction of more severe penalties for sex offences.

26. **A representative of Oman** said that family planning services had first been launched in Oman in 1994 and were assessed on a regular basis. Thanks to those services, average birth spacing had increased and overall birth rates had fallen, reaching 3.2 children per woman aged between 15 and 49, as of 2022. The services had also had a positive impact on maternal mortality rates and 79 per cent of women registered with the health authorities within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. The decline in abortion rates was also to be attributed to improved family planning services. Family planning was provided free of charge and unconditionally, and did not require the consent of a spouse or guardian. The requirement for spousal consent envisaged in Royal Decree No. 75/2019 concerned only surgery that would lead to infertility.

27. Oman followed the strategies developed by the World Health Organization to raise awareness about the importance of early detection of breast and cervical cancer. A screening programme for breast cancer had been in place since 2008 and campaigns were run on a

regular basis. Through those campaigns, women were trained in self-examination techniques and informed about the clinical services available, which they could access at primary care facilities across the country. More than 13,000 women had availed themselves of screening in 2020 and the early detection of breast cancers had increased by 45 per cent. Studies had been conducted into the incidence of human papillomavirus infections, with a view to the early detection and treatment of cervical cancer.

28. Under the current five-year plan for health development, adolescent-friendly reproductive health services had been improved and, since 2021, were available at primary care centres. There were 191 such centres across the country, which meant that health-care services were universally accessible, including in remote and rural areas. Primary care facilities were also equipped to deal with mental health conditions and to refer patients for specialized treatment. Under the Labour Code, employers were responsible for providing their domestic workers with health insurance and ensuring they received adequate care.

29. **Ms. Al Najjar** (Oman) said that there were several female ministers in Oman and, although no woman had yet occupied the post of Minister of Defence or Minister for Foreign Affairs, there were no obstacles to prevent them from doing so in the future. Women were also active in the country's diplomatic service, and there were currently eight female ambassadors. Women headed civil society organizations on an equal footing with men. The Ministry of Labour had recently launched an online performance appraisal system for staff in State-run institutions, which could also be used by staff to report instances of discrimination or sexual harassment.

30. **A representative of Oman** said that four women had recently been elected as members of the governing board of the General Federation of Oman Workers and women accounted for 21.4 per cent of the staff of the Oman Human Rights Commission. Women also held important roles in national institutions of higher education.

31. **A representative of Oman** said that there was nothing to impede the advancement of women in the judiciary. There were a number of female judges, although no woman had yet become a member of the Supreme Court, which had been established in 1999.

32. **A representative of Oman** said that, as of 2023, there were 675 female lawyers practising law in Oman. Four female ambassadors had been appointed in 2022.

33. **Ms. Mikko** said that she hoped that her outstanding question concerning the mental health of domestic workers would be provided in writing.

34. **Ms. Bethel** said that the Committee commended the State party for its Tenth Five-year Development Plan (2021–2025) and wished to know whether women were involved in its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Had the plan led to any measurable gains for women in terms of social empowerment, such as direct employment, training or assistance with starting their own projects? The Committee also welcomed new arrangements which ensured equal access to credit for men and women, and hoped the delegation could explain if there were any specific conditions women had to fulfil in order to take out loans through the Oman Development Bank or the Authority for the Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises.

35. She would be interested to know what steps were taken to ensure that economic empowerment programmes, especially those aimed at low-income families, were reaching women effectively. She would also appreciate details on the emergency financing programme launched during the COVID-19 pandemic to assist small and medium-sized enterprises, including the number of women entrepreneurs who had benefited from them. What mechanisms existed to monitor and evaluate the success and sustainability of enterprises supported by the social security pensions envisaged in Ministerial Circular No. 2/2018?

36. She wished to know how the financing strategy adopted by the Rafd Fund – which included initiatives such as a rural women's programme inaugurated in 2017 – ensured that women had access to funding and support on terms of equality with their male counterparts. Did the State party's efforts to improve financial literacy among school students lay particular emphasis on girls' financial literacy? A 2021 initiative of the Central Bank had sought to provide digital solutions to facilitate access to loans and other banking services for women

with disabilities, and she hoped the delegation could inform the Committee about how successful the initiative had been and how many women had benefited, with figures disaggregated by type of disability. Lastly, she would be interested to hear about any insurance benefits specifically tailored for women with disabilities.

37. **Ms. Akia** said that she wished to commend the authorities in Oman for their efforts to advance the rights of disadvantaged women, including through the Rifi programme, and to monitor progress towards gender equality. The Committee would be interested to hear more about how the Rifi programme supported rural women's projects, also via access to soft loans, and how the Department of Rural Development, actively promoted economic and social empowerment for women and girls in agricultural and rural communities. She also wished to know how marketing platforms for rural women's products operated and how effective they were. She asked how Oman ensured that women played leading roles in climate change action. Specifically, what role did Omani women play in supervising data collection on greenhouse gas emissions? She would appreciate examples of specific measures to protect rural women from harsh climatic conditions, especially with the adoption of modern technology.

38. The Committee was concerned by reports that female migrant domestic workers continued to face exploitation, abuse and unequal access to medical care and health insurance. If that was the case, she wished to know what efforts the State party was making to enforce its laws effectively and thus protect the rights of such workers. She hoped to hear about rehabilitation services for girls with disabilities and how such services contributed to their integration into schools. She would also be interested to learn more about quotas for persons with disabilities. What efforts were made to ensure non-discriminatory access to health care for women with disabilities? Lastly, she wondered whether social and financial support for persons with disabilities was available in the form of special parking, fee exemptions and housing assistance.

39. **A representative of Oman** said that mental health conditions, including those arising from the impact of harmful practices, were addressed in primary and secondary care facilities. Health care professionals received training in how to identify, treat and make referrals in cases of abuse of women and children. A social stigma still surrounded mental health conditions, which meant that many persons refused to acknowledge that they had a problem or seek treatment. Another challenge was the lack of mental health specialists, which was being addressed by providing training to doctors and other medical staff.

40. **A representative of Oman** said that the Rifi programme, which had funding of \$31.2 million from the Oman Development Bank, aimed to encourage female entrepreneurs in rural areas. So far, 195 women had benefited, receiving not only loans but also training to develop their business skills. The programme had included 22 campaigns to promote Rifi products and 11 to raise women's awareness of the right to social insurance and 168 technical training courses tailored to the needs of participants according to the kind of business they were running. An online platform had been created to market rural women's products both across Oman and in neighbouring States. Women were also provided with support to ensure that their products met the requisite standards of quality and safety.

41. The Government had taken action to empower women to deal with the impact of climate change. Members of women's associations, female university students and rural women were all involved in drafting and monitoring strategies to promote agricultural development and tackle climate change. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources had set up a risk management department that was developing a strategy to forecast, address and prevent climate-related challenges, which chiefly consisted in higher summer temperatures and limited groundwater. The Ministry also provided modern technologies to help women entrepreneurs in rural areas continue to maintain production despite the effects of climate change. For example, products that had previously been produced in a single season could now be produced all year round.

42. **A representative of Oman** said that women had a strategic role in the management of protected areas and nature reserves in Oman. The head of the net zero emissions initiative was a woman and women played important roles in blue carbon and green hydrogen and other environmental projects.

43. **A representative of Oman** said that 22 prominent rural leaders had been trained to raise awareness among women regarding entrepreneurship and combating climate change.

44. **A representative of Oman** said that there was no discrimination against persons with disabilities in terms of access to health care. Persons with disabilities were given priority in obtaining appointments for medical consultations, surgery and rehabilitation services under a decision of the Minister of Health of 2023.

45. **A representative of Oman** said that the Social Protection Law made clear that the role of the Ministry of Social Development and the competent authorities was to provide social and rehabilitation services and to oversee social care homes and programmes for the socioeconomic inclusion and promotion of the rights of children, women, persons with disabilities and other groups. The Law expressly provided that persons with disabilities, including mental disabilities, should have access to services provided for by law, such as speech therapy and physiotherapy.

46. **A representative of Oman** said that the school curriculum was standardized and offered to both sexes without exception. Financial literacy education was prescribed for both male and female students in the tenth grade and taught in all schools. A programme launched in 2022 in partnership with government agencies, the United Nations Childrens Fund, the Oman Autism Association and the Association for the Care of Children with Disabilities aimed to achieve comprehensive education by integrating persons with disabilities, including the provision of vocational training. The programme also aimed to improve access to early education, promote academic achievement and increase the number of students with disabilities who completed school education.

47. **A representative of Oman** said that recruitment offices made unrealistic promises of high salaries to attract domestic workers from abroad. The Ministry of Labour was currently drafting regulations aimed at bringing the Labour Law more closely into line with international standards.

48. **A representative of Oman** said that women, selected on the basis of merit and competency, had participated in all stages of the Tenth Five-year Development Plan, including its preparation, design and analysis of gender-sensitive indicators.

49. **A representative of Oman** said that the Authority for the Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises provided assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises and the craft industry sector, including specialized training and business incubation and consultancy services. It had launched a programme to help prepare both male and female entrepreneurs, the aim of which was to increase their financial, administrative and marketing skills, knowledge of relevant legislation and capacity to manage crises and utilize innovative technologies.

50. It also ran an online platform to provide training for entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium-sized enterprises and craft workers, both women and men, to teach them basic business management skills. In collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development, it had extended social security to enable workers to receive continuous training throughout their careers.

51. The Oman Development Bank provided funding to micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises to afford opportunities to young people. Priority areas had been identified, including small-scale producers and street vendors. In assisting enterprises that had been affected by Cyclone Shaheen, it had granted loans worth 10 million Omani rials, irrespective of gender.

52. **A representative of Oman** said that female artisans made up a large share of the loans given in the craft industry sector. Women also accounted for more than a third of all licenced small and medium-sized enterprises.

53. **Ms. Manalo** said that she would like to know if and how artificial intelligence was being used to assist women agricultural workers in food production.

54. **Ms. Akia** said that she would appreciate information on how different organizations were raising public awareness about the rights of disadvantaged women such as migrant

workers and the challenges they faced and also the relevant comprehensive legislation that the delegation had detailed earlier in the meeting.

55. **Ms. Bethel** said that she would be grateful if the delegation could provide information on the categories of persons with disabilities benefitting from banking services assistance and the types of benefits insurance companies were providing to women with disabilities.

56. **Ms. Haidar**, commending the State party on lifting the reservation to article 15 of the Convention, said that the Committee was concerned about the Personal Status Law, which appeared to provide that, in marriage, the wife was expected to be subservient to her husband in exchange for maintenance and protection. The law stated that the wife was responsible for household work and childcare and that she could lose her financial maintenance under certain circumstances, such as refusing to move into the marital home or leaving the home without a legitimate excuse.

57. She asked what legislation pertaining to women's rights the State party intended to change in line with the principle of equality laid down in the Basic Law. Did the State party intend to amend the Personal Status Law to ensure spousal equality in marriage, instead of basing the marital framework on the principle of "reciprocal" or "complementary" rights? She also wondered whether the provisions of the Personal Status Law regarding the wife's childcare and household duties and the requirement to obtain the permission of a male guardian to enter into marriage would be repealed.

58. She would be grateful if the delegation could indicate whether a marital property regime, whereby women received equal rights to property acquired by the spouses during marriage upon the dissolution of marriage, was envisaged. Were women granted equal rights with men with regard to divorce and inheritance?

59. Regarding polygamous marriages, she would like to know if the State party planned to introduce the requirement of the consent of the first wife to polygamous marriages and to grant her a specific option for divorce in case her husband married a second wife. Would it also envisage granting equal rights to mothers and fathers for guardianship and custody of their children?

60. **A representative of Oman** said that the Personal Status Law promulgated in 1997 was due to be reviewed to reflect societal changes, while respecting sharia. Article 36 of the Law provided that both spouses were responsible for care and household duties. Under the Law, both spouses had financial independence and, in the event of separation or divorce, each maintained ownerships of goods and assets he or she had acquired during the marriage. Practice varied, particularly when proceedings were conducted in good faith, but in cases of disputes, former spouses could turn to the courts for mediation.

61. **A representative of Oman** said that the Government was currently conducting a review of all legislation, including the Labour Law and the School Education Law.

62. **Ms. Al Ajjar** (Oman) said that the increasing divorce rates were a reflection of societal change and were more prevalent among younger couples who had married more recently. To reduce the risk of divorce, the Ministry of Social Development offered marriage preparation training to couples, which included guidance on equal contribution to household work and childcare. Changes in the labour market had led to more equitable sharing of household and care responsibilities. The growing number of women employed in shift work in hospitals, for example, had meant that the husband was increasingly required to look after the children while his spouse was at work.

63. In child custody cases, the best interests of the child were given due consideration. A husband was obliged to provide alimony and child support in case of divorce or separation, under the social protection and child protection laws. Women were free to seek divorce and any woman who wished to marry without assent from a guardian could apply directly to a judge to enter into marriage.

64. **A representative of Oman** said that a circular from the Central Bank of Oman provided that persons with disabilities should be given access to banking services without discrimination. Reduced interest rates, as low as 0.25 per cent, were applied by some banks

to loans for persons with disabilities. Provision of telebanking and other measures were being implemented to ensure persons with disabilities had adequate access to banking services.

65. **A representative of Oman** said that around 20 studies had been conducted on improving and increasing women's empowerment. The circular on enhanced credit facilities for persons with disabilities covered loans for purposes such as the acquisition of specially adapted vehicles and reduced healthcare and travel insurance premiums.

66. **A representative of Oman** said that artificial intelligence was being used to increase productivity for women in farming, including, for example, through better forecasting. It also helped to schedule the use of pesticides and herbicides and automate equipment, saving women time. Applications such as ChatGPT were being used to help women market their products and reach a wider market. It was important to emphasize that artificial intelligence did not replace women rural workers, but rather represented a tool that enabled them to improve their productivity.

67. **Ms. Al Ajjar** (Oman) said that the National Commission for Family Affairs was examining the possibility of introducing a law on the family, which would contain a chapter on child protection, the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and the protection of women and older persons. She wished to thank the experts for the enriching constructive dialogue, which she trusted would help guide her Government in working towards the further empowerment of women in Oman.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.