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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIFTEENTH MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 8 May 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. TEXIER

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (agenda item 6) (*continued*)

Combined second, third, fourth and fifth periodic reports of India (E/C.12/IND/5); concluding observations of the Committee on the initial report of India (CESCRE/1990/23); list of issues to be taken up (E/C.12/IND/Q/5); replies by the Government of India to the list of issues to be taken up (E/C.12/IND/Q/5/Add.1 and E/C.12/IND/Q/5/Add.2) (continued)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of India resumed their places at the Committee table.*

Articles 1 to 5 of the Covenant (continued)

2. Mr. SEN (India) gave a brief overview of the eleventh five-year plan, covering the period 2007-2012. That plan detailed 27 objectives, grouped into six categories. The first of those categories concerned incomes and poverty. The Indian Government was planning for annual growth in GDP of 9 per cent over the period covered by the plan, and anticipated that 17 million jobs would be created. The real wage for unskilled workers should rise by 20 per cent and the overall poverty rate, currently 26 per cent, should be reduced to 16 per cent. The second category concerned education. Among the objectives in this field were a reduction of around 30 per cent in the primary school dropout rate, the issuance of standards on minimum pedagogical objectives in primary schools, and an increase in the literacy rate of children over seven years of age, to 85 per cent. The third category of objectives had to do with health. In this area, the Government hoped to reduce child and maternal mortality rates, lower the overall fertility rate from 2.6 to 2.1, ensure universal access to drinking water, and reduce the malnutrition rate by half among children ages 0 to 3 years. The fourth category concerned women and children: the objectives here included ensuring that at least 33 per cent of the direct and indirect beneficiaries of all public programmes were women and girls, and that no child would be exposed to risks or subjected to forced labour. The fifth series of objectives dealt with infrastructure. These included connecting all villages to the power grid, providing serviceable, all-weather road access to all villages, and increasing the pace of housing construction for the rural poor so as to cover needs fully by 2016-2017. The last category of objectives concerned the environment. In this area, the Government hoped to meet WHO air quality standards in all major cities, treat all urban wastewater, and enhance energy efficiency by 20 per cent by 2016-2070. It should be noted that the mechanisms used to achieve these objectives were being implemented at the state level, and consequently many of these objectives had been adapted to local conditions and thus varied widely from one state to another.

3. Mrs. GAIROLA (India), recalling that the scheduled castes had historically been relegated to the margins of Indian society and its social and economic development, said that their participation in the political process was an effective means of promoting their social integration. The Indian Government, aware of the need to protect the scheduled castes and improve their living conditions, had included numerous provisions to this end in the Constitution. Those provisions sought to ensure suitable representation of caste members in education and in the public service, and to guarantee their participation in policy decisions at different levels. By virtue of

paragraph 1 of article 341 of the Constitution, the President, after consultation with the governor of a state or Union territory, would determine which castes, races or tribes were deemed to be scheduled castes in relation to that state or territory. Today, 1,208 communities were classified as scheduled castes and the number of persons belonging to these castes stood at 166 million in 2001, representing 16.2 per cent of the national population. Among the most important provisions of the Constitution relating to the scheduled castes was article 46 on the guiding principles of Government policy, which provided that policy must seek in particular to promote the educational and economic interests of scheduled castes and tribes and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. Under the Constitution, positions were reserved for them in the public service and in education institutions, in a proportion that corresponded roughly to their weight in the total population. Seats were reserved for them in the democratic decision-making bodies at various levels, from the village panchayats to Parliament.

4. Legislation adopted to encourage the social emancipation of scheduled castes included the 1955 Civil Rights Act, giving effect to article 17 of the Constitution which abolished "untouchability" and prohibited its practice in any form, and made it a crime to enforce any disability arising from the status of untouchable, and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, which sought to prevent crimes against members of scheduled castes or tribes. Violators of these two laws were liable to severe punishment. The Indian Government, meanwhile, was attempting to assist the victims of atrocities and promote their social reintegration. The Government was also determined to eliminate the practice of manual scavenging, and had adopted multiple laws and programmes to this end.

5. Many programmes had been implemented to foster the social, economic and educational development of marginalized sectors of society, including the scheduled castes, with the objective of bringing them up to the same level as other population groups. Sub-plans had also been adopted within the general strategy to promote the economic development of scheduled castes. Thus, resources were to be earmarked for programmes of direct benefit to those groups, in amounts proportionate to their share of the population. Finance and development companies had been created to provide financial assistance to members of scheduled castes seeking to establish an independent enterprise. One of the most important aspects of the strategy for empowering the scheduled castes related to education. Scholarships, school support and housing programmes had been instituted to help members of these castes pursue their studies, from elementary school to university. Finally, measures to encourage inter-caste marriage had been adopted to promote the social integration of scheduled castes.

6. The Indian Government's efforts in the various fields described above had borne fruit. The literacy rate among scheduled caste members (particularly women) had increased substantially, from 10.3 per cent (3.3 per cent) in 1961 to 54.7 per cent (41.9 per cent) in 2001, respectively. The school enrolment rate for children of scheduled castes had also improved significantly. The proportion of scheduled caste members employed in the public service was rising steadily, while the percentage of these groups living below the poverty line was declining and the gap between them and other segments of society was narrowing.

7. Mrs. PANT (India) explained that the scheduled tribes differed from indigenous tribes living in other parts of the world in that they had never been subjected to colonial domination and had always been an integral part of Indian society, even during the colonial period. It was true that some of them, because of their particular culture and their geographic isolation, had been left behind by the country's

educational and economic development, for which reason the Indian Constitution provided for the establishment of lists of tribes for whom there were to be special provisions to ensure their social economic development and their participation in political life. These provisions were similar to those described previously for the scheduled castes. The country had more than 700 scheduled tribes, and the total number of tribal community members stood at 84.3 million in 2001. The Indian Government was striving to ensure that these tribes could preserve their identity, their culture and their way of life, while guaranteeing them access to education and health care and allowing them to earn a livelihood. The importance attached to issues relating to these communities was evident in the creation of a separate ministry in 1999 to pay closer attention to the social, economic and cultural development of scheduled tribes.

8. In addition to constitutional provisions guaranteeing equitable social, economic and political treatment for scheduled tribes, the Union government and the state governments had adopted various special legislative provisions affording them protection. These include the 1996 Panchayats Act, which allowed tribal communities to take their destiny into their own hands and to preserve and protect their traditional right to dispose of their resources. The most recent legal provisions adopted for the protection of scheduled tribes were the 2006 law on scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers (the Recognition of Forest Rights Act) and the 2008 regulations to that Act. These texts sought to protect forest rights and land occupancy rights of scheduled tribes and other peoples who had been living in the forests for generations but whose rights had never been registered. Among the rights guaranteed by these texts were the right to enjoy the resources of the forests they inhabited and to protect and manage them, and the right to recover the lands from which they had been unlawfully evicted, or to be awarded other lands. A national commission for scheduled tribes had also been created to protect their interests.

9. The Indian Government was actively engaged in planning the development of areas inhabited by scheduled tribes. Since 1974 a great number of plans and programmes covering nearly all aspects of tribal life had been implemented by public and other agencies. The annual budget of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs had risen steadily, and in 2008 it stood at 21.21 billion rupees. In addition to the funds allocated by the ministry to the states for implementing programmes under article 275 (1) of the Constitution, the states were assigning funds to the development of scheduled tribes, in amounts proportionate to the percentage of tribal members living on their territory.

10. The Ministry was paying particular attention to education programmes. In this matter, it sought to ensure that the members of scheduled tribes had schools available in the zones they inhabited, and to establish boarding schools when no such schools were available: 79 boarding schools had recently been opened in various states. Scholarships were also granted to members of scheduled tribes who wished to pursue further studies.

11. The Ministry was giving close attention to especially vulnerable tribal groups, of which there were 75. Highly flexible programmes had been implemented to promote their socioeconomic development, with a particular focus on housing, land distribution, infrastructure, and social security through social insurance or other innovative activities that would ensure the development of the tribes concerned, particularly nomadic tribes. As well, the Ministry was striving to promote and protect the cultural heritage of scheduled tribes. To this end, it had created 18 tribal culture research institutes and was organizing seminars and workshops in collaboration with NGOs and research institutes on various questions relating to tribes.

12. The Indian Government, in order to help tribes market their output and promote their handicrafts, had instituted in 1987 a federation of tribal marketing cooperatives.

In 2001 it created a public corporation, the National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation, to support the economic development of scheduled tribes, through the offer of financial assistance to aspiring entrepreneurs. The Government considered it extremely important to base development activities on the principle of participation, for which reason NGOs with demonstrated expertise in this area were associated in running tribal development programmes and in administering such institutions as schools, mobile dispensaries, hospitals, and training centres.

13. Mr. PURI (India) said that, immediately following the tsunami of 26 December 2004, the Rajiv Gandhi Emergency Fund had mobilized no less than US\$ 2.5 billion to assist Indian victims. Subsequently, the Government had launched rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes that were to be completed in March 2009. Already, of the 86,000 dwellings destroyed, 75,000 had been rebuilt. Priority had also been given to agriculture and fisheries and to reconstructing jetties and port facilities.

Articles 6 to 9 of the Covenant

14. Mr. KOLOSOV asked how the State party could ensure that displaced persons who found themselves within its borders for various reasons, especially conflicts in neighbouring countries, would have access to social security, given the absence of any instrument for identifying and registering these population groups.

15. Mr. MARTYNOV noted, in paragraph 10 of the report under consideration, that the overall growth of employment had slowed between 1994 and 2000, and wondered whether that tendency had continued after 2000. He also asked about the change in the unemployment rate over the period 2000-2005. He understood that there were education and employment quotas for handicapped persons, and wondered whether they applied to both the public and private sectors. On this point, he cited information to the effect that few handicapped persons had access to vocational training, and he wondered what were the mechanisms for enforcing respect of quotas.

16. Mrs. WILSON was pleased that India had decided to cancel the debt of small farmers so as to reverse the vicious circle of indebtedness and impoverishment. She referred however to reports that the suicide rate was particularly high among small farmers, who were often in thrall to large multinational enterprises and were obliged to practice monoculture. She asked for complete information on this subject, and in particular on the extremely difficult working conditions of small farmers.

17. Mrs. BRAS GOMES cited information sources to the effect that India's anti-poverty strategy was not working very well, that inequalities continued to deepen and that employment creation remained weak. Those sources also reported that the poorest people had no access to training that would allow them to acquire the basic skills to hold a paying job. The delegation was asked to give its views on this question. Noting that only 7 per cent of the workforce was engaged in the informal sector, Mrs. Bras Gomes asked whether India intended to take advantage of its strong economic growth to increase the rate of activity in the formal sector.. She also wondered why the Union had not established a minimum wage. She pointed to the great wage inequalities between men and women in rural areas, and was surprised at the explanation offered by the State party, to the effect that the states did not follow through on Union recommendations. She recalled that it was the primary responsibility of the central Government to fight discrimination in all fields. When it came to the situation of women, she was astonished that the authorities did not recognize the status of female heads of households, and she asked what India was doing to combat unpaid labour by female seasonal workers and domestic employees.

18. With respect to the Dalits, Mrs. Bras Gomes cited NGO claims that the quota policy allocating jobs for these people and reserving them places in the schools was not being applied. She asked if India had implemented positive action programmes for combating the exclusion facing Dalits in public and private sector employment. She referred to the situation of Dalits working without pay in agriculture, and asked what steps the State party had taken to combat forced labour and degrading forms of employment. Finally, she wondered why India had not ratified ILO Convention No. 102.

19. Mr. ABDEL-MONEIM congratulated India for its vigorous economic growth, but was concerned about the persistence of very great inequalities between rich and poor, which threatened the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. He asked whether India was planning further resort to taxation in order to redistribute the national income more fairly. Noting from paragraph 10 of the report under consideration that the slowing of overall employment growth was largely attributed to a near stagnation of employment in agriculture, he wanted to know what other factors might explain this slowdown, and also the reasons for the near stagnation in agricultural employment.

20. Mr. ZHAN Daode regretted that the statistics shown in the report under examination were for the most part a decade old, and thus did not give a clear picture of the current situation in many fields. In paragraph 347 of the report, he noted that the number of poor had dropped from around 323 million in 1983 to 260 million in 1990-2000, which meant however that one Indian in four was still living in poverty. He asked how the situation had evolved since 2000, recognizing that if living standards had increased then poverty must have retreated.

21. Mrs. BONOAN-DANDAN wanted the delegation to respond in detail to questions 5, 16, 17 and 21 in the list of issues. She also wanted to raise the situation of prostitutes, of whom there were apparently at least 10 million in India, and to whom the authorities seemed to be paying little attention.

22. Mrs. BARAHONA RIERA was surprised that India had not dealt in its periodic report with article 3 of the Covenant, on gender equality, and asked what institutional framework was in place to guarantee this equality at the Union and local levels. She wondered in particular if there was a Union law or programme to combat poverty among women, and whether positive action was being taken in their favour. She noted the situation of communities and groups where women and men did not enjoy the same legal status, and she asked how the Union government could guarantee gender equality in all communities and regions. She noted with satisfaction that microcredit had expanded considerably in India, and wondered what the sources of financing were. She also asked if access to microcredit had allowed greater numbers of women to pursue a vocational activity. She understood that social security provisions covered only the formal sector, and wondered what was being done for workers in the informal sector.

23. The CHAIRPERSON, speaking as a member of the Committee, asked whether labour rights were being respected in the special economic zones or whether, on the contrary, they were weakened by the advantages granted to investors.

24. Mr. PILLAY asked whether article 19 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to form trade unions, also applied to the unstructured sector, which accounted for 93 per cent of employment. As workers in that sector were often denied the right to form a union, he wanted to know if the problem lay in certain laws, and whether the State party would be prepared in this case to amend those laws.

25. Mr. SEN (India) indicated that the answers to questions 16, 17 and 21 in the list of issues had been distributed in writing. Concerning the application of social security

regimes, he said this was a problem not only for displaced persons but also for migrant workers, because of shortcomings in the civil registry system. That problem, which for the time being was preventing uniform application of social security regimes across the country, was a priority for the Government, and it was currently considering ways of remedying the problem.

26. Mr. Sen reported that the weak employment performance found in the 1999-2000 survey, which had surprised observers, could be explained in large part by a problem of data interpretation, but he noted that employment growth had returned to a level closer to expectations in the 2004-2005 survey. It was nevertheless true that the elasticity of employment vis-à-vis GDP growth had declined. Growth was now less employment-intensive. At the same time, the workforce was expected to increase by around 2.3 per cent per year over the coming decade. The Government was aware that growth might have to be accelerated if the economy were to create sufficient jobs to absorb the increase in the workforce.

27. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was a matter of sharp debate, and was variously regarded as an employment programme, an instrument for combating poverty, or a social protection device. Yet the most important dimension of that Act was to improve the negotiating power of rural workers by opening other employment opportunities for them when their working conditions were unsatisfactory.

28. As to the fact that only 10 to 15 per cent of displaced persons received any vocational training, Mr. Sen said that this figure was in fact high in comparison to the total active population, in which beneficiaries of such training amounted to no more than 3 per cent. Vocational training was an integral part of the reintegration measures offered displaced persons.

29. Mr. Sen said there was no single explanation for suicides among farmers, and the situations differed greatly from one region to another. The problem had begun when many farmers shifted to growing Bt cotton seed, which they purchased from multinational companies at four times the price of seeds supplied by Government agencies and which had not produced the expected results. But more fundamentally they were also suffering from the excessive fragmentation of agricultural lands, with the result that farms were too small to yield a satisfactory income.

30. There were recourses available to enforce the principle of equal pay for equal work. This principle was rigorously applied in the public sector. In the private sector, there were problems in measuring salaries and wages, for example in the case of unskilled workers in the non-structured sector, who were paid on a piecework basis.

31. As to the prospect for increasing the number of working days guaranteed by the NREGA, Mr. Sen stressed that the law was not primarily intended as an anti-poverty mechanism, but rather as a way to help people pursue a productive activity by offering them work when they had none or when their current working conditions were not acceptable. Moreover, according to the still-limited lessons that one might draw from the three years of the law's application in beneficiary districts, the number of working days requested never exceeded 70. The rights of workers affiliated with the system were scrupulously protected, and the competent district administrations were required to respect the provisions of the law fully. The programme had been successful, especially in regions with strong planning capacities and administrations capable of proposing employment solutions. Not all regions had such capacities, a fact that could create some real problems if the programme were to be extended to other districts.

32. Allegations of corruption in the administration of programmes were taken seriously, and while he was not in a position to give a detailed response, Mr. Sen

understood that the Auditor General of India had made some unflattering observations on this matter in a recent report. He did not believe there was any systematic discrimination in these programmes, which were prepared at the district level, but he could not exclude the possibility of discrimination at the application stage.

33. The issue of employment integration in the structured sector was a matter of keen debate in India. Overall, structured employment was growing only slowly. In the public sector, it had declined in absolute terms as a result of reforms and privatizations, while in the private sector it was rising modestly, at 3 per cent a year. One of the issues under debate related to the behaviour of Indian entrepreneurs, who were often reluctant to incorporate their businesses or to exceed a certain staffing level that would expose them to various taxes and obligations under labour laws. Thus, the growth in structured employment was probably stronger than one would suppose from a strict reading of the statistics.

34. India had no well-organized system for helping job seekers. According to available data, a student leaving school could expect to take from one to three years to find a job. Most often, people found employment through their social networks. Moreover, job searching via the Internet was fast and easy, and many firms followed that recruitment route. The establishment of a nationwide minimum wage was a hotly debated subject in India, but given the inter-regional gaps in price levels, which could be as great as 40 per cent, it would seem more logical to have the states set a minimum wage.

35. Mr. PURI (India) said that the Indian authorities were giving careful consideration to ratifying ILO Convention No. 102 on Social Security (Minimum Standards); they recognized the need to conform to that instrument, and they were taking steps to adapt laws and regulations promptly so that ratification would be possible as soon as the conditions were met.

36. Mr. SEN (India), did not have the necessary information to answer the question about recognition of women as heads of family. However, the Indian Government was cooperating closely with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and with NGOs to define and evaluate domestic work, which was the most common form of women's work after farm work. The results of that study would be published shortly and should lead to a more precise characterization of domestic work, on the basis of which measures could be examined to provide protection for workers in this category.

37. On the question of integrating the plan into the market economy, Mr. Sen said that the initial results had been encouraging, showing that Government resources could be used as an incentive for market players to achieve certain objectives. The Union Government still accounted for one quarter of investment, a significant amount. With respect to income disparities at a time of high growth, he said that, contrary to the first period of strong growth in the mid-1990s, the current period did not seem to have done much for the lowest-income categories. The poorest 5 per cent of the population had seen a slight decline in their living standards, and this appeared to be the case particularly for landless farm workers in certain regions.

38. On the redistribution of tax receipts, Mr. Sen said that, after a downward trend in tax collection rates, the figures were rising again and had moved from 8.2 per cent of GDP in early 2000 to 10.6 per cent in 2007. On the employment front, the agriculture sector, which had long generated the greatest number of jobs, was now saturated; over the next 10 years, 50 to 60 million people could be expected to leave farming and would have to be absorbed elsewhere. Concerned at this prospect, the Government was orienting its planning accordingly.

39. The general practice in India was to collect statistics every five years, which explained why the most recent figures in the report under consideration dated back to 1999-2000; data for the following period (2004-2005) became available only in 2006, and would be communicated to the Committee. The percentage of the population living below the poverty line was 21 per cent in 2004-2005, but the Government considered, in fact, that a quarter of the population was poor by this definition, or around 230 million people.

40. Mrs. PANT (India), addressing the question of discrimination concerning scheduled tribes, gave assurance that these people were not the victims of any form of prejudice. The Constitution made special provisions for them, in recognition of the fact that these people lived in remote and inaccessible regions and were lagging behind the rest of the population to some extent. Special measures were thus required to bring them up to the same development level as the rest of the country's population. Nor was there any specific recognizable trend in crimes against scheduled tribes or Dalits. The 1989 Act on prevention of atrocities against scheduled castes and tribes was a supplementary guarantee for these categories of people, recognizing their greater vulnerability. As to recourse, there was a national commission on issues concerning the scheduled tribes, and it intervened as well in cases of atrocities; there was also a multidisciplinary committee of the Ministry of Social Affairs established to combat such crimes. Full and up-to-date information on this matter would be communicated to the Committee when available.

Articles 10 to 15 of the Covenant

41. Mr. RIEDEL asked about the results of the plans, policies and strategies announced in the health area. Referring to the figures in the report under consideration on the matter of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, he asked for details on the relationship between the different figures announced. He also wanted information on measures taken to remedy the alarming situation in mental health, and the results obtained.

42. Recalling the Bhopal disaster of 1984, and the fact that ground waters were still polluted 20 years later, and in light of the authorities' commitment in March 2006 to clean up the site and guarantee safe drinking water, Mr. Riedel wanted to know what the Government had done since. He also asked about the outcome of research by the National Commission on Human Rights into health risks in prisons, and what had been done with the conclusions of that research. As well, he wanted written information on what was being done to combat corruption in the health area (citing extreme privatization of health personnel, health tourism, and the associated trade in organs), and he wondered whether reprehensible activities were being punished. He asked about the current situation with respect to sanitation, bearing in mind the people, in particular the Dalits, who scavenged for their livelihood.

43. Mr. Riedel then asked if the 1986 Child Labour Act was in fact being applied. He raised the question of discrimination in education, and wondered what the country was doing to give effect to the 1976 Act abolishing the bonded labour system, with a view to improving the situation of the Dalits in particular.

44. Mr. ATANGANA asked whether, given the scale of domestic violence, the Government was planning to step up investigation measures in order to enforce the law in this area. He also wondered if the "Swadhar" project had been implemented and if the shelters for victims of violence were now in place. He observed that the Indian Government had not provided a written response to questions 24 to 27 in the list of issues, which related essentially to updated figures. He then raised the problem of the marriage age, which should be harmonized: there were now three ages, 18 years

for women, 21 years for men, and 15 years under Islamic law. Finally, he noted that while the law allowed children to begin work at 14 years, the report under consideration revealed that children were employed from the age of five, which appeared excessively low.

45. Mr. KOLOSOV noted that there was in India a strong political current favourable to child labour as an activity that provided an appreciable supplement to family incomes. He wondered why the private sector was so eager to hire very young children when there were so many unemployed adults in the country, and he suggested that the real reason might be that hiring children was more profitable because their wages were lower. He also wanted detailed statistics on the age at which children began to work and on the industrial sectors that employed them, and asked whether employers of very young children were punished.

46. Mr. MARTYNOV asked whether the National Plan of Action for Children mentioned in paragraph 280 of the report had been finalized, whether it had been implemented and, if so, whether it had produced any results. Referring next to paragraph 322 of the report, Mr. Martin asked the delegation for more detailed figures on the integrated programme for street children.

47. Mrs. WILSON, citing article 24 of the Indian Constitution banning work for children under 14 years in “hazardous employment,” asked if this meant that children from 14 to 18 years could work in hazardous employment, and she wondered whether penalties were stipulated for employers who flouted this article 24.

48. Returning to the question of small farmers, and recalling that 14.74 million acres of land had been distributed to landless peasants, Mrs. Wilson asked if measures had been taken to ensure that these farmers had sufficient land to exercise their right to food. Finally, with respect to the right to health, she wanted to know what use had been made of funds received from the World Health Organization and the World Bank to treat and prevent blindness, and to what extent the situation had improved.

49. Mr. PILLAY was surprised at the lack of response from the Indian Government to question 35 on the list of issues, dealing with the phenomenon of homelessness, and he doubted that the problem could be addressed without reliable data (by sex, age, caste and religion). The figures provided for the city of Delhi alone (100,000 homeless, 10,000 of them women) denoted an alarming situation. He asked if there were a strategy to attenuate this phenomenon, one that would provide emergency shelter and care but would also include measures to prevent the homeless from returning to the street.

50. On the right to food, Mr. Pillay recalled that the policies implemented in this area were not working, for various reasons – in particular, corruption, discrimination in distribution, liberalization of the economy and its adverse repercussions on food security. The agrarian reform programme had also failed. The public distribution system in place was targeted at the most disadvantaged, yet estimates of the population living below the poverty line differed: 25 per cent according to the Government, and 80 per cent according to the special rapporteur on the right to food. It seemed that the first figure was based solely on daily calorie intake and incomes, but there were many other criteria that should also be taken into account, such as housing or access to health-care, education, drinking water and sanitation. Mr. Pillay wanted in this connection to know whether India’s poverty reduction strategy took full account of economic, social and cultural rights.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.