



International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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Summary record of the 3112th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 27 November 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Balcerzak

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

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

Combined tenth and eleventh periodic reports of Saudi Arabia
([CERD/C/SAU/10-11](#); [CERD/C/SAU/Q/10-11](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Saudi Arabia joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Saudi Arabia**, introducing her country's combined tenth and eleventh periodic reports ([CERD/C/SAU/10-11](#)), said that racial discrimination and claims of racial superiority were incompatible with Islam, as it considered all human beings to be equal. The same principle was enshrined in the Constitution of Saudi Arabia. The Government was committed to cooperating with the Committee, as evidenced by its implementation of most of the recommendations made in the Committee's previous concluding observations.
3. Saudi Arabia was home to a diverse community of over 13 million foreign nationals from more than 60 countries, who made up more than 40 per cent of the population. They enjoyed equal rights and were protected from racial discrimination under various laws and policies. Since the adoption of Saudi Vision 2030 and the attendant reforms related to labour, tourism, investment and residency, there had been an unprecedented level of openness to people of different races, cultures and religions.
4. Under the Labour Code, which had been updated most recently in August 2024, employers had an obligation to treat all workers with respect. They must ensure equal opportunities and refrain from differentiating between applicants or employees on the basis of race, colour, sex, age, disability, marital status or any other discriminatory grounds. To ensure compliance with that obligation, the relevant authorities took the necessary measures in terms of support, oversight and redress. To ensure the effectiveness of the legislative framework, labour courts had been established in 2018. The National Council for Occupational Health and Safety had been established in 2022 to promote a healthy and safe work environment for all workers – citizens and foreign residents alike.
5. The national policy to promote equal opportunities and equal treatment in employment, launched in 2023, was one of the most important strategic initiatives aimed at eliminating discrimination in the labour market, including racial and gender discrimination. The national policy and action plan for the prevention of child labour, introduced in 2021, involved a package of strategic interventions aimed at protecting all children, without discrimination.
6. The State provided comprehensive and integrated healthcare to the entire population in a fair and accessible manner, in accordance with the Health Act. The Health Transformation Programme, launched under Saudi Vision 2030, was intended to facilitate access to healthcare services for all, without discrimination, and to improve the quality and efficiency of services. The principles of equality and non-discrimination had been demonstrated during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, when free healthcare had been provided to all persons living in the country who were infected or suspected of being infected with COVID-19, even those in an irregular situation. The families of persons working in the public and private health sectors who had died due to the coronavirus, both Saudi citizens and foreign nationals, had received a payment of 500,000 Saudi Arabian riyals (SRIs) (about \$133,000).
7. The right to education for all, without discrimination, was established in the Basic Law of Governance. Public education was compulsory and free for Saudi and foreign nationals alike. The Minister of Education had issued a decree permitting the school enrolment of children whose documentation was problematic in order to ensure that their education would not be interrupted. School curricula had been reviewed to ensure that they did not contain any potentially discriminatory content and that they promoted the values of tolerance and anti-racism.
8. **Ms. Stavrinaki** (Country Rapporteur) said that, as the State party had stated in its previous dialogue with the Committee that no specific inconsistencies had been identified

between the provisions of the Convention and Islamic sharia, it would be interesting to know whether any consideration had been given to withdrawing the general reservation to the Convention. It would also be interesting to hear the State party's position with regard to the reservation to article 22. According to the reservation, Saudi Arabia considered that any dispute should be referred to the International Court of Justice only with the approval of the States parties to the dispute. However, upon ratification of the Convention, all States parties automatically accepted the Convention's mandatory dispute resolution mechanism. If an additional expression of consent were required, that would have been explicitly stated in article 22.

9. The Committee would welcome an update on any plans to introduce a comprehensive anti-discrimination law. It would also be interested to hear of any specific instances in which direct or indirect racial discrimination had been identified and addressed as such. The delegation might comment on the fact that many provisions of the Basic Law of Governance appeared to apply only to citizens. For example, article 27 provided that the State guaranteed the rights of citizens and their families in the event of emergency, sickness, disability or old age, and article 31 provided that the State was to provide healthcare to all citizens. She invited the delegation to clarify whether the royal decree on promoting women's rights applied to all women, including migrant women and those belonging to ethnic minorities.

10. During the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review, Saudi Arabia had accepted recommendations that it should ensure the compliance of the Saudi Human Rights Commission with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). It would be useful to hear an update on the related steps that had since been taken.

11. In view of reports that artificial intelligence technologies, such as sound, facial and voice recognition, had been introduced in multiple sectors, the Committee would be interested to know whether the Government was considering the adoption of specific legislation to prohibit racial profiling by law enforcement services and private actors, in line with its general recommendation No. 36 on preventing and combating racial profiling by law enforcement officials. It would also be useful to know of any measures taken to regulate the use of artificial intelligence in order to prevent discriminatory algorithmic profiling and establish effective oversight and transparency mechanisms.

12. The Committee would be grateful for an update on the status and content of the draft Criminal Code. It would be of interest to hear the delegation's response to reports that criminal provisions were applied to suppress the enjoyment of human rights by minorities. It would be useful to know whether the Audiovisual Media Act, article 5 of which prohibited abuse, insult and any actions apt to provoke enmity, division and hatred among citizens, incite violence or threaten societal harmony, protected everyone in Saudi Arabia against hate speech, or only Saudi citizens. Given that the draft Criminal Code did not appear to include provisions on tackling hate crimes or ensuring protection against racial discrimination, the Committee would like to hear about any plans to adopt specific hate crime legislation, in accordance with articles 2 and 4 of the Convention.

13. The Committee would appreciate details with regard to the 118 cases initiated between 2016 and October 2020 by the Public Prosecution Service involving racism, hate speech and the incitement of enmity, including information on the specific offences, the number of convictions, the penalties imposed and the compensation granted to victims, as well as data on the victims, disaggregated by age, gender and ethnic origin. Noting that the Basic Law of Governance stipulated that all citizens and residents had an equal right to take legal action, she said that it would be of interest to the Committee to hear the definition of a resident. The Committee would also appreciate data on the number of convictions for abuse of power by public servants.

14. The Committee would be interested to learn more about the specific role and independence of the various governmental and non-governmental institutions that worked to ensure that victims of human rights violations, including racial discrimination, obtained redress. It would also welcome examples of court cases in which explicit reference had been made to the Convention.

15. Migrant workers, particularly domestic workers, faced numerous obstacles in lodging complaints, including language barriers, limited access to digital services and the difficulty of leaving their employers' home to file complaints in person. The Committee would appreciate details on the number and types of complaints filed by migrant workers, disaggregated by sex and ethnic origin, and the number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions, the penalties imposed and the remedies provided to victims. It would also be interested to receive data similarly disaggregated on the complaints filed by prisoners and detainees that had been received by the National Society for Human Rights.

16. In view of reports that the death penalty was disproportionately imposed on persons belonging to minority groups and on migrant women, the Committee would be grateful for disaggregated information on the imposition of the death penalty during the reporting period. It would be interested to hear whether judges were permitted to take into account gender-specific defences and mitigating factors in capital cases, including women's experiences with trauma, poverty and gender-based violence, and, if so, whether such defences and mitigating factors were explicitly codified in law. The delegation might explain what training was provided to judges, prosecutors and defence lawyers on issues such as gender-based discrimination and violence and coercive control tactics that might lead women to commit offences punishable by death.

17. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the State party's reservations to certain provisions of the Convention were in line with international law, and specifically with the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. That notwithstanding, the relevant authorities regularly reviewed the country's obligations under the human rights instruments to which it was a party, including the Convention. Previous reviews had shown that the reservations filed by Saudi Arabia had no impact on the purposes and objectives of the Convention in practice.

18. Regarding the possibility of enacting a comprehensive anti-racism law, in accordance with article 8 of the Basic Law of Governance, the country's laws already prohibited any discrimination, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin when such discrimination impeded the recognition or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal footing in various fields of public life. Those laws included the Labour Code, the Health Act and the Press and Publications Act. Article 3 of the Child Protection Act, for example, criminalized discrimination against a child on ethnic, social or economic grounds. Saudi Arabia adhered to the definition of racial discrimination contained in article 1 of the Convention, which had become part of the domestic legal order upon ratification. Under the royal decree pursuant to which Saudi Arabia had ratified the Convention, the competent authorities were required to take the necessary measures to ensure the fulfilment of the country's obligations arising from the Convention.

19. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the Basic Law of Governance specified that the Law was without prejudice to any treaties or agreements that Saudi Arabia had concluded with States, international organizations or other bodies. A circular issued by the Chief Prosecutor stated that human rights treaties, including the Convention, were to be referenced in all relevant bills of indictment. Some 236 judges and specialists had been trained in the provisions of international conventions during the reporting period.

20. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that legislation had been adopted to prohibit and punish hate speech and that enforcement measures had been taken. Under article 39 of the Basic Law of Governance, for example, media professionals were required to use polite and respectful language that did not undermine human dignity. A series of legislative amendments had been adopted in February 2021 to further enhance the protection of human rights.

21. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that victims of racial discrimination could seek redress and compensation through the courts and other public and private bodies. The Saudi Human Rights Commission received and investigated complaints of human rights violations, including racial discrimination. Between 2020 and 2024, it had received 24 complaints of racial discrimination. The oversight bodies responsible for monitoring violations of legislation on audiovisual and other media, including cybercrime, had issued over 130 decisions relating to racial discrimination between 2020 and 2024. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development had also received numerous complaints of racial

discrimination, many of which had been referred to the courts and had led to the prosecution and punishment of the perpetrators.

22. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the Saudi Human Rights Commission, which was under the responsibility of the King, was an independent body with a broad mandate that included conducting unannounced visits to places of detention and ensuring the implementation of treaty body recommendations. Steps were being taken to bring the institution into line with the Paris Principles. The fact that it was not yet fully compliant with the Paris Principles did not mean that her country did not abide by human rights principles.

23. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the Audiovisual Media Act obliged media professionals to avoid language that sowed discord and division.

24. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that her country sought to strike a balance between protecting the freedoms of expression, opinion and belief and combating hate speech, in accordance with international human rights law. While freedom of expression was sacred, it was subject to limitations.

25. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that Saudi Arabia was firmly committed to meeting international standards relating to the application of the death penalty.

26. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that regulations were in place to protect the rights and welfare of domestic workers. Domestic workers must be at least 21 years old, could not be required to perform tasks that fell outside their job description and were entitled to keep their passports on them. They must be allowed to take regular breaks and must be paid monthly. Violations of their physical integrity were prohibited. All domestic workers must be treated equally, regardless of their nationality, religion and ethnic origin.

27. **Ms. Stavrinaki** said that the Committee did not dispute the State party's right to enter reservations to the Convention. However, it considered that its general reservation sent the wrong message to society at large, as it implied that the Convention was not compatible with sharia. In her view, it would be a good idea to clarify the distinction between citizens and residents in a legal text, not only to facilitate the work of judges and prosecutors, but also because laws played an instructive role in society and their wording was therefore very important.

28. She would be interested to know whether the Saudi Human Rights Commission had withdrawn the recommendation it had issued in 2019 for the adoption of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law and if not, what measures had been taken in response to that recommendation. She would welcome qualitative data on cases of racial discrimination, such as the types of cases that had been reported and the patterns observed. It would also be useful to know who had access to the various complaint mechanisms that had been mentioned.

29. She would appreciate clarification as to whether all acts addressed by article 4 of the Convention were punishable under the State party's legislation on hate speech. Was the wording of that legislation sufficiently precise to ensure compliance with international human rights law and to avoid a disproportionate conflict between the prevention of hate speech and the protection of freedom of expression?

30. **A representative of Saudi Arabia**, noting that sharia was entirely consistent with the principle of non-discrimination, said that the general reservation to the Convention was based on a constitutional principle. She could assure the Committee that, technically and legally speaking, there was real, concrete implementation of all the provisions of the Convention. Lawmakers were careful to ensure that the correct terminology was used in laws and regulations, including those relating to discrimination. Many laws were currently being reviewed, with due regard for the State's obligations under international law.

31. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that measures were taken to prevent and punish not only direct and indirect racial discrimination, but also intersectional discrimination. Racial discrimination was considered an aggravating circumstance, especially when it occurred in combination with gender-based discrimination. Changes had been made to the legal framework in order to empower women and protect them from discrimination. For example, the legislation on travel documents had been amended to enable women to travel on an equal footing with men, the Labour Code had been amended to ensure

gender equality in all areas relating to employment and a law prohibiting and punishing harassment in various settings, including the workplace, had been adopted.

32. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that various measures were in place to protect domestic workers, including foreigners, from abuse and exploitation. Employers and workers were required to comply with the Labour Code and could not limit the freedoms of others while engaging in profitable pursuits. Seven labour courts and nine courts of appeal had been established in various cities and provinces. Complaints filed by domestic workers with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development were referred to the Public Prosecution Service and handled in accordance with the relevant regulations. Since the beginning of 2023, a total of 296 such complaints had been received and processed by the Ministry. Between 2020 and 2023, 2,014 complaints involving domestic workers had been received and dealt with by the Public Prosecution Service.

33. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that domestic workers could submit complaints of trafficking and related violations to the Committee on Trafficking in Persons, which was responsible for ensuring that the relevant procedures were followed and that victims received assistance. The Government worked with the embassies of labour-exporting countries to ensure that all migrant workers were aware of their rights and the remedies available to them. Information was also disseminated to migrant workers in the form of booklets and flyers in languages understood by them.

34. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that trafficking in persons was punishable by 15 years' imprisonment or a fine of up to SR1 1 million. In 2023, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development had received and dealt with 1,046 complaints of suspected trafficking in persons. Inspectors from the Ministry had conducted preliminary examinations of 1,058 cases in 2023. Convictions had been handed down in 141 cases between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

35. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that all citizens had equal access to social security under the Social Security Act, and that foreign nationals' access to social protection was dependent on their status as workers. For foreign workers, Saudi Arabia was their place of work, but they returned to their countries at the end of their contracts.

36. **A representative of Saudi Arabia**, drawing attention to the social security programmes mentioned in paragraphs 141 and 142 of the periodic report, said that the aim of the Social Security Act was to promote individuals' financial independence and productivity. The Government had signed 13 agreements with non-profit organizations in the area of social protection. It had also assisted nationals and foreigners in need of support, through the Ehsan charitable initiative.

37. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the country's laws applied equally to all residents, irrespective of their origin, nationality or legal status. All victims of discrimination had access to justice and remedies. Article 8 of the Basic Law of Governance provided that governance was based on equality and justice, while article 47 provided that all citizens and residents had the right to bring proceedings before a court. The denial of a person's access to justice was a violation of human rights. Cases of human rights violations were examined by the Saudi Human Rights Commission, civil society organizations and the various courts. The Judicial Council supervised the conduct of judges.

38. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that national laws had been reformed in line with the objectives set for Saudi Vision 2030. A decision adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2020 had established a platform that allowed stakeholders to obtain feedback on development projects. A national consultation was undertaken to ensure that public and private sector employees were consulted about bills before they were adopted. The Shura (Consultative) Council, which included representatives of all sectors of society, reviewed all draft laws relating to human rights and issued recommendations through specialized committees.

The meeting was suspended at 11.25 a.m. and resumed at 11.40 a.m.

39. **Mr. Guissé** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would welcome up-to-date information on the outcome of the census conducted in 2022, including statistics on the ethnic and

ethno-religious composition of the population. He wondered whether, and in what way, the principle of self-identification had been incorporated into the census process.

40. He wished to know what measures were taken to combat discrimination against ethnic and ethno-religious minority groups, including people of African descent, in order to ensure their rights under the Convention, including their right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The Committee would be grateful for information on any targeted measures taken to combat the racial segregation and marginalization experienced by the Bidoon people and any measures taken to ensure the full and equal enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by all groups. Did the Government intend to adopt a comprehensive strategy and a national plan to combat racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, in consultation with stakeholders, including civil society organizations?

41. He would appreciate the delegation's comments on reports indicating that members of the Shiite community faced barriers to education and that no members of that community were currently serving as judges or prosecutors. The Committee would be grateful to learn about any measures taken to put an end to the structural discrimination faced by the Shiite community and to ensure their rights to education, health and housing. It would be useful to learn about any measures taken to investigate and punish hate speech directed at that community. The Committee would appreciate further information on the ethnic and religious make-up of the judiciary and the executive branch.

42. The acquisition of land for the Neom project, which involved the development of a 170 kilometre-long linear city in the Tabuk region, threatened to displace around 20,000 members of the Howeitat tribe, which had inhabited the region for centuries. A large proportion of the tribe had refused to leave the region and had faced various forms of persecution, including the destruction of their property. In view of that situation, he would appreciate information on the implementation of the project, including any consultations conducted with the Howeitat tribe and any forced evictions that had taken place. What measures were taken to mitigate the project's adverse effects on the tribe and to ensure its members' right to housing?

43. The Committee would be grateful for statistics on persons sentenced to death over the previous five years, broken down by ethnicity, status and religion. It would also welcome information on any due process guarantees in the legal system and any mechanisms established to ensure that persons suspected of an offence were not subjected to discrimination by the Public Prosecution Service or the judiciary. Were any plans in place to abolish the death penalty?

44. He wished to know whether any civil society organizations dealt specifically with the rights of minorities and whether the State party intended to ratify the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. The Committee would welcome information on any specialized training in the prevention of racial discrimination given to judges, lawyers and State officials and any steps taken to promote human rights education, including by addressing the fight against racial discrimination in all educational curricula and teacher training programmes.

45. The Committee would welcome the delegation's comments on reports that some Bidoon students were prevented from studying at public universities and were denied access to scholarships and certain programmes because they were classified as foreign students. What measures were taken to ensure that Bidoon students had access to education on an equal footing with the rest of the population?

46. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the statistics on the population were broken down by sex, nationality, economic status and region and that steps were taken to measure the extent to which the population was able to exercise its human rights. According to the census conducted in 2022, the population of Saudi Arabia was a little over 32 million. Some 58 per cent of the population were Saudi nationals. Around 77 per cent of non-nationals were men and nearly 9 million migrant workers resided in the country.

47. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the Committee's reporting guidelines indicated that statistics gathered by States parties could be broken down by characteristics other than gender or race, such as mother tongue. The Government's approach to data

collection was based on economic, social and cultural factors. The data were broken down by gender, nationality, age and socioeconomic status and were used to measure the progress made in the fight against racial discrimination.

48. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that persons residing unlawfully in Saudi Arabia were provided with social assistance, medical insurance and disability insurance and their children were guaranteed access to education, including school transport services. Illegal residents were entitled to apply for travel documents, birth certificates, marriage certificates and any other type of identity documents that they might require.

49. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the right to decent housing was guaranteed for all persons living in the country, without any distinction between citizens and non-citizens, and that housing was provided to the most vulnerable persons. Around 79,000 housing units had been provided across the country and more would be provided over the next few years. Following the launch of a housing programme in 2017, the proportion of Saudi families who owned their own home had risen to almost 63 per cent. A total of 96,000 families had benefited from the programme between 2020 and 2023.

50. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that, under national law, all residents of Saudi Arabia were guaranteed the right to education, without discrimination. Article 30 of the Basic Law of Governance provided that the State must provide public education and combat illiteracy. In 2004, a royal decree had been adopted to make education compulsory for children from the age of 6 to 15. The Child Protection Act prohibited the interruption of children's education, irrespective of their nationality.

51. Over 6.7 million pupils were enrolled in the education system and almost 1.5 million students were pursuing higher education. Many studied abroad, choosing subjects in accordance with the requirements of the Saudi labour market. All non-Saudi students had access to education. Nearly 1.9 million students were enrolled in public schools, and a scholarship programme benefited over 20,000 students of all nationalities. There were 3,750 international universities and schools, catering to more than 290,000 students. A department responsible for managing university admissions had been set up within the Ministry of Education. The department provided assistance to non-Saudi students, of whom there were now more than 1.1 million, as well as to Saudi nationals.

52. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that large-scale development projects were implemented in accordance with the Declaration on the Right to Development adopted by the United Nations in 1986. When the implementation of a project made it necessary to resettle a community, the Government took all necessary measures to ensure that the resettlement was carried out safely. Transfers of ownership were carried out in accordance with the appropriate regulations, and the right to ownership was guaranteed. The Basic Law of Governance included a provision that guaranteed fair compensation for persons subjected to such transfers. The Government had set up an agency responsible for resettling communities in line with local and national laws and international criteria and standards. Resettlement processes involved consultations with stakeholders and the communities concerned.

53. The Tamhir Programme supported persons affected by large-scale projects by providing them with financial support, creating jobs for them and ensuring their access to education and healthcare. All persons were entitled to receive assistance, irrespective of whether they held ownership deeds. A law on expropriation had been adopted to ensure that the process ran smoothly. Communities were not evicted until all the procedures were complete, they had received their compensation and they knew what their destination would be. Communities benefited from a grace period before eviction.

54. Amounts of compensation were determined by an independent and impartial committee composed of two independent members and representatives of various government agencies. The committee followed the guidelines and regulations adopted by the Saudi Authority for Accredited Valuers, which determined the amount of compensation to be allocated and assessed the value of non-transferable assets. The Saudi Human Rights Commission followed up on expropriation procedures, in line with the relevant national and international standards. If any person's rights were violated, the Commission held the perpetrators accountable and ensured that the victim received redress.

55. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that Shiites were part of Saudi society. They were protected against discrimination under national law, exercised all their rights and freedoms and had equal access to government services. Under the Civil Service Act, recruitment to the civil service was based purely on merit. The Labour Code established that all citizens must be treated equally, and the Health Act ensured equal access to comprehensive healthcare for all members of the population.

56. Entitlement to citizenship was the same for everyone, , irrespective of their denomination. Specialized Shiite courts, presided over by Shiite judges, dealt with cases relating to inheritance, personal status and other matters. Shiite citizens conducted their own rites and celebrated their festivals in public. Any discrimination based on denomination was considered to be a violation of human rights and was dealt with by the competent bodies, which included the Saudi Human Rights Commission, relevant civil society organizations, the courts and the public prosecutors. The Basic Law of Governance established that all members of society had equal access to justice.

57. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that Saudi identity documents did not contain any distinguishing information relating to denomination. Hate speech was prohibited under the Basic Law of Governance. Any person who directed any form of hate speech against any person or group was subject to prosecution. Efforts were made to raise awareness of the importance of tolerance within the country.

58. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the Government made efforts to combat racial discrimination and conducted awareness-raising campaigns to promote tolerance and coexistence. The Global Centre for Combating Extremist Ideology (Etidal) had been launched in May 2017 to combat extremism and promote tolerance and coexistence. The Centre analysed and monitored extremist activities and tried to build partnerships and mutual understanding in order to promote moderate Islamic thinking in the media, including in the digital sphere.

59. The Government had launched a national indicator for tolerance that was assessed on an annual basis and an initiative to promote communication among residents, with a view to improving relations between nationals and non-nationals. As part of the efforts to promote moderation and tolerance, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance had dedicated more than 279,000 Friday sermons to the subjects of coexistence and tolerance from an Islamic perspective. The training provided to judges and public prosecutors addressed the subject of racial discrimination. Police forces received training in human rights and the promotion of tolerance and coexistence.

60. **Mr. Guissé** said that he would welcome more precise information on, inter alia, how many members of the Shiite and other communities held positions as political representatives. He would appreciate clarification as to whether the principle of self-identification was applied in the census-taking process. The delegation might comment on reports that members of the Howeitat tribe had been subjected to arbitrary detention.

61. **Ms. Stavrinaki** said that she would be grateful to receive examples of positive steps that the State party had taken in line with the Convention to facilitate the exercise of freedom of religion by ethno-religious minorities. It would be helpful to receive statistics that demonstrated that the Penal Law for Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing was not disproportionately applied to such minorities.

62. **Mr. Yeung Sik Yuen** said that he would be interested to hear more about why Shiite courts operated in Saudi Arabia and which courts heard cases that involved persons from two or more different communities.

63. **Ms. Tlakula** (Follow-up Coordinator) said that in its follow-up report ([CERD/C/SAU/CO/4-9/Add.1](#)), the State party had provided some information on the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee in paragraph 24 of its concluding observations ([CERD/C/SAU/CO/4-9](#)) with respect to the enjoyment of freedom of thought, conscience and religion by ethno-religious minorities. However, it had regretfully not indicated what specific measures had been taken to protect the enjoyment in practice of those rights, including the right to construct religious places of worship or conduct public worship without discrimination on the grounds stipulated in the Convention. The Committee

had received little information on any concrete measures taken to eliminate barriers faced by such minorities in education – including by removing from textbooks derogatory comments about certain religions – and in employment and the legal system. The delegation was requested to provide more information on that subject.

64. She wished to know whether Saudi Vision 2030 included any specific steps to safeguard the enjoyment of freedom of thought, conscience and religion by such minorities.

65. **Mr. Diaby** said that he would be interested to know whether Saudi women were able to transfer their nationality to their children and to their spouses on an equal footing with Saudi men. He wished to know whether the plans to reform the *kafalah* system had been carried out in full and, if so, whether their implementation had undergone analysis to identify any obstacles encountered.

66. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the steps taken by the Government to ensure access to remedies and to safeguard the right to litigation were specific measures that were intended to benefit all persons, without discrimination. The specialized Shiite courts handled matters such as marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance. As the rules governing those subjects varied between communities, it would be discriminatory to compel members of other communities to follow the rulings of the Sunni courts.

67. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that all school curricula in Saudi Arabia were based on the principles of combating inequality and discrimination – including all forms of racial discrimination – and promoting tolerance and the coexistence of all citizens on an equal footing. The curricula were reviewed regularly to ensure that they were in line with international human rights standards and did not promote discrimination in any form. An independent educational centre had made more than 400 amendments to align the curricula with such standards at all stages of education, and a national vocational development centre provided teachers with training on those standards. Teaching about human rights and civil freedoms had been integrated into all stages of public education and relevant teaching guides had been provided to teachers. The Ministry of Education also conducted targeted activities to promote values such as democracy and respect for others among schoolchildren.

68. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that Saudi Vision 2030 included measures to promote the values of peaceful coexistence and tolerance by making it easier for tourists to visit Saudi Arabia and providing persons who wished to settle in the country with a number of privileges. Non-Muslims who resided in Saudi Arabia were freely able to practice their religions and public service employees were prohibited from interfering with such practices. It was against Saudi law to disparage or blaspheme against any religion. A number of people had been arrested for propagating religious hatred.

69. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the Penal Law for Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing applied only to terrorist crimes – such as incitement to terrorism – and did not provide for the criminalization of practices such as the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression. All Saudi laws were in alignment with the country's human rights obligations.

70. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that, pursuant to article 36 the Basic Law of Governance, which protected the safety of all citizens and residents of the country, Saudi law prohibited any restrictions on freedom of expression or movement. No one could be arrested or detained if the person had not committed an offence and no one could have his or her liberty restricted without a valid reason. All citizens and residents exercised their freedoms fully and on an equal footing, in accordance with the law. Any person whose rights had been violated could have recourse to justice, which the authorities were obliged by law to administer without discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, religion or nationality. A number of bodies were responsible for upholding human rights. The intention was to ensure that justice was done effectively.

71. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the Government was fully committed to respecting international standards concerning the application of the death penalty, which was imposed only for capital crimes, in accordance with the law, and was applied only once conclusive evidence had been gathered and a final decision had been issued by a specialized court. Appropriate legal assistance also had to be provided in such cases. Such decisions by a court of first instance were always referred to a court of appeal and subsequently to a court

of cassation or a supreme court. Six women had been executed in 2023, and four thus far in 2024; in many cases, women had received that sentence for murdering or being an accomplice to the murder of their husbands.

72. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that a number of decisions, policies and procedures had been adopted that prohibited discrimination in the workplace in both the public and private sectors and that persons who engaged in any such discrimination were held to account. Between 2020 and 2023, the Government had implemented a policy that was intended to promote the enjoyment of equal opportunities and equal treatment at work and to combat discrimination in all its forms in the workplace. A harmonization programme – which was one of many programmes to assist persons with disabilities – was being carried out with the aim of guaranteeing equal opportunities and treatment in the workplace and of ensuring that persons with disabilities were provided with sufficient means to lead successful careers.

73. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the *kafalah* system had been abolished in 2000 and had been replaced with a labour system for migrant workers and members of their families that provided an improved contractual relationship between employers and employees. Under a national transformation programme led by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, migrant workers had the right to change jobs during the period of validity of an employment contract and to leave jobs after registering their intention to do so on the Absher online platform. More than 1.3 million workers had used the platform, and more than 70 per cent of workers had used it in 2024 alone. More than 80 per cent of migrant workers had benefited from the reforms, which had also improved workers' performance. The Expat Insider survey had awarded Saudi Arabia a satisfactory ranking among countries that hosted a large number of foreign workers.

74. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that the *kafalah* system no longer existed either in legal instruments or in reality and that a number of mechanisms were employed to ensure that neither the system nor the term "*kafalah*" were used anymore. Saudi Vision 2030 included a policy aimed at promoting the enjoyment of equal opportunities and eliminating racial discrimination in the workplace.

75. **A representative of Saudi Arabia** said that, under the Basic Law of Governance, children of Saudi mothers received Saudi nationality if their father was a stateless person or if his nationality was unknown, or if the father was a foreign national, the nationality of their father. They enjoyed all the same rights as did Saudi children. A Saudi mother married to a foreign national could obtain Saudi nationality for her children in certain cases, for example by demonstrating that they had sufficient familial links with the country.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.