



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Fiftieth session

Summary record of the 999th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 4 October 2011, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Pimentel

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

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

Initial report of Oman (continued) (CEDAW/C/OMN/1; CEDAW/C/OMN/Q/1 and CEDAW/C/OMN/Q/1/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Oman took places at the Committee table.*

Article 9

2. **Ms. Schulz**, addressing the issue of the transfer of nationality from parents to children, said that it was clear that the very limited conditions under which Omani mothers were able to pass on their nationality to their children constituted discrimination because, unlike Omani men, they were deemed to be incapable of transmitting the indivisible “bond of allegiance between the State and the individual” to which reference was made in paragraph 92 of the replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/OMN/Q/1/Add.1). Since it appeared that the purpose of the Omani Nationality Act was to guarantee that no children were stateless, she wished to know what would happen if the legislation of a foreign father’s country of origin made no provision for the acquisition of his nationality by his child.

3. Even if there were no stateless children in Oman and even if there was no discrimination against the foreign children of Omani women, under the Convention Omani women had the right to equal treatment in all matters regarding nationality. Morocco and Egypt had recently amended their legislation to grant women the right to transfer their nationality in accordance with article 9 of the Convention. The theory of the bond of allegiance hampered the evolution of Omani society in a world where increasing migration led to more mixed marriages. Since foreigners made up some 30 per cent of the population in Oman, a growing number of children were presumably deprived of Omani nationality. In the light of the foregoing, she asked whether the Omani Government would consider withdrawing or narrowing its reservation to article 9, paragraph 2.

4. She further requested clarification of the requirements which had to be met in order for children born and raised in Oman to be naturalized. Was the process easier for the children of Omani mothers? She asked for information concerning the conditions under which an Omani man could pass on his nationality to his foreign wife and vice versa. Lastly, she wished to know when statistics would be available on the number of mixed marriages and naturalizations. Such data were needed to identify any instances where marriage authorizations or naturalizations were subject to discrimination on the grounds of sex and national origin.

5. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** said that the fact that Omani women married to foreigners were prohibited from transferring their nationality to their children constituted discrimination. She pointed out that children who could not acquire the nationality of either their father or their mother would be rendered stateless. Many Arab States which had previously entered reservations to article 9 of the Convention had since withdrawn them or had announced their intention to do so. She hoped that Oman would take the same step in the near future.

6. **Mr. Al-Nabhani** (Oman) said that nationality was a complex, sensitive, political issue with legal and social implications. States with a similar cultural environment could have a different political and legal system. In Oman the objective of the law on nationality was to ensure that no child was stateless. For that reason, Oman had withdrawn its previous reservations to certain provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a result,

the current law of the Sultanate enabled it to honour its obligation to guarantee the right of every child to a nationality. There were no stateless children in Oman. If children born in Oman to an Omani mother were unable to acquire their father's nationality, because the father was stateless or unknown, they would automatically be granted Omani nationality under article 1 of the Omani Nationality Act. The children of Omani women married to non-Omanis not possessing Omani nationality but resident in Oman received the same treatment as citizens in respect of health care and education. They also had the right to study abroad on a government grant.

7. **Mr. Al-Hinai** (Oman) said that dual nationality was not permitted in Oman. If a child was unable to acquire the nationality of his or her foreign father, he or she would be granted Omani nationality. The same applied to foundlings.

8. **Mr. Al-Kalbani** (Oman) said that foundlings were cared for in an SOS Children's Village and were entitled to receive all necessary health care and education.

9. It was a father's right to insist that his children had his nationality. If a child was always granted the nationality of his or her mother, that could constitute discrimination against the father and would cause problems if the father was separated from the child. It was important for families to be united and for mothers and fathers to be able to care for their children jointly. Amending Omani law to give a child his or her mother's nationality would be detrimental to family unity.

10. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** said that her question had concerned the nationality of a child born in Oman to a mother who was Omani, but whose father was not. In other countries, mothers could pass on their nationality in those circumstances. She would raise that issue again when the next report was presented.

11. **Ms. Jahan** said that she assumed that Omani women could transfer their nationality to their foreign husbands. She wished to know if Omani men and women were allowed to marry non-Muslims without their prospective spouse having to convert to Islam.

12. **Mr. Al-Nabhani** (Oman) said that an Omani woman's husband who was non-Omani but who had been resident in the Sultanate for at least 10 consecutive years would be naturalized on application, provided that he met certain requirements regarding income and good morals. Foreign women married to an Omani citizen could acquire Omani nationality on certain conditions, but they would have to relinquish their original nationality, as dual nationality was prohibited.

13. **Mr. Al-Mukhaini** (Oman) said that Omani legislation on marriage did not lay down any requirements regarding religion.

14. **Ms. Acar** said that it was still unclear whether the conditions for conferring nationality on the foreign spouses of Omanis were the same for men and women.

15. **Mr. Al-Nabhani** (Oman) said that under the Omani Nationality Act the foreign wife of an Omani could acquire Omani nationality after five years' residence. The other conditions governing naturalization were identical. The disparity in the number of requisite years of residence was designed as a safeguard to protect — not discriminate against — Omani women, by ensuring that marriage to them could not be used solely as a means of acquiring Omani nationality and that the purpose of the marriage was to found a family.

Articles 15 and 16

16. **Ms. Hayashi** asked what part of the Omani Personal Status Act formed the grounds for the State party's reservation to article 16 (c). She welcomed the information provided in the introductory statement that considerable progress had been made after the submission of the initial report (CEDAW/C/OMN/1) and had taken note of the establishment of a

National Human Rights Commission. She wondered if any initiatives had been taken by that institution or any other entity to reform family law.

17. Turning to divorce issues, she noted that, according to article 82 of the Personal Status Act, a wife could initiate divorce proceedings if her husband authorized her to do so. She wondered how that article was to be interpreted in the light of the explanation in the initial report that a wife could rely on eight grounds for divorce. Alternative sources indicated that in Oman the right to divorce was essentially vested in the husband and that many women suffered from prolonged divorce proceedings. She wished to know if the wife was entitled to the division of marital property, or to any other form of compensation in the event of a divorce.

18. Although paragraph 246 of the report explained the rules regarding the custody of children, it was silent about child support; she therefore enquired about the existence of legal provisions which would entitle a woman to claim maintenance for herself and her children from her former husband. Was there any mechanism for enforcing that claim if the man failed to honour his obligations? Lastly, she asked if there were any circumstances in which a mother could lose the custody of her children.

19. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that there were some gaps in the information provided in the report. Much had been said about the State party's reservations and the place of sharia law in the Omani legal system. As someone from a country which also faced the challenge of accommodating religious law in its legal system, she suggested that more use should be made of the possibility of interpreting Islamic jurisprudence governing property ownership. Paragraph 257 of the report indicated that basically there was no division of jointly held property upon divorce unless provision had been made for such a division in a marriage contract. One solution might be to posit the existence of an implied contract under which matrimonial property would be shared equally between spouses. She wished to know whether the Government intended to ask women to participate in any forthcoming reform of the Personal Status Act.

20. She would be interested to know if there was any mechanism for recognizing and registering *talaq* divorces. As far as the custody of children was concerned, she asked if there was an age limit beyond which a mother would forfeit her right of custody and if there were any grounds on which the custody of children could be lost.

21. She would likewise be interested to learn what share of a deceased man's estate would be inherited by his wife or daughter. Was it any different to the share falling to a husband or son of a dead spouse or parent? In other countries which applied sharia law, there were huge discrepancies in the size of bequests which could be made to women. Could a woman be bequeathed more than one third of a dead person's estate?

22. She asked what the consequences would be if a wife left the marital home because of domestic violence. She noted that, under article 38 of the Personal Status Act, it was the wife's duty to obey her husband. She wished to know if that duty gave a husband the right to use violence to "educate" or chastise a woman. If the wife then left the home did she forfeit any of her rights?

23. **Ms. Rasekh** said that, as a national of a Muslim country whose laws were based on the sharia code, she understood some of the challenges faced by Oman in the implementation of the Convention. At the same time it had to be acknowledged that many women suffered greatly from injustice due to discriminatory laws based on sharia. The fact that several Muslim countries had amended their family law showed that sharia was not immutable. In that context, she asked whether the Government of Oman had any intention of prohibiting polygamy.

24. **Mr. Al-Nabhani** (Oman) said that, under sharia law, marriage was a contract between two consenting parties. The Personal Status Code of Oman was based on sharia law and Islamic jurisprudence, adapted to modern life, and could be amended if necessary. Women had the right to marry a husband of their choice and were not forced into marriage.

25. The pronouncement of *talaq* (divorce) was a right accorded to men. However, under sharia law women could also request the right to divorce when drawing up the marriage contract and could apply to the courts to seek annulment of the contract. Divorce cases were resolved on an expedited basis.

26. Divorced women were entitled to maintenance under the Personal Status Code and were awarded custody of children resulting from the marriage until the children reached 18 years of age, during which period the father was required to pay child support. Men were awarded custody in cases where the courts determined that that was in the best interests of the child, such as in cases where the mother was deemed incompetent, in accordance with international conventions and instruments.

27. Polygamy was a sensitive issue but was a relatively rare occurrence. Under the Constitution, women whose interests had been jeopardized by a polygamous husband's marriage to another woman could turn to the courts and judges competent to rule in such cases.

28. **Mr. Al-Ibri** (Oman) said that he wished to clarify that there were at times divergences between the principles of sharia law and the practical application of the law. However, sharia law always favoured the interests of the wife in cases of divorce and polygamy. With regard to inheritance, inheritance shares were calculated on the basis of specific rules and women received different shares under different circumstances. However, there was no discrimination against women in that regard. Lastly, polygamy was not widespread; a mere 3 per cent of marriages in Oman were polygamous.

29. **Mr. Al-Kalbani** (Oman) said that modern communications and transport had made the world a village. Consequently, even if polygamy were prohibited in Oman an individual could contract a polygamous marriage in another country where the practice was not prohibited. It should be recalled that not all European countries had withdrawn all of their various reservations to the different provisions of the Convention and that the different practices of countries reflected their different positions.

30. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** asked whether divorced mothers were awarded both physical and legal custody of their children, or whether fathers were awarded legal custody. Furthermore, she sought clarification as to whether Omani women could marry non-Muslim men. Lastly, she asked what action the Government was taking to prevent parents from putting undue pressure on their daughters to marry suitors offering high dowries.

31. **Ms. Rasekh** said she wished to know why, if women were free to choose their future husband, they were required to obtain the approval of a guardian or of the court in order to marry. Moreover, as early marriage remained an issue, she would appreciate further information on steps taken by the Government to encourage the registration of such marriages.

32. **Mr. Al-Nabhani** said in connection with marriage to non-Muslims that article 16 of the Personal Status Code did not mention the religious affiliations of spouses. Forced marriage was only heard of in Oman through international reports. Marriage in Oman could not take place without the consent of both spouses.

33. Women could resort to the courts if their guardians forced them to marry against their will or if they wished to marry a person not approved by their guardians. A royal decree had been issued empowering the Supreme Court to consider such cases and judges in such cases to assume the role of guardian.

34. The approval of guardians was required in Oman because Omani law was based on sharia law. It was possible to amend the law if an alternative and more tolerant doctrine emerged that was better suited to the needs of modern society, although there was no decisive opinion on that issue to date.

35. The minimum marriage age in Oman was 18 years and women under that age required the consent of a judge in order to marry. Under the Personal Status Code it was a requirement that all marriages should be registered, which enabled the courts to monitor early and forced marriages.

Articles 7 and 8

36. **Ms. Jahan** said that she wished to know why women were not winning a greater number of seats on the Consultative Council and whether it was anticipated that that situation would change after the forthcoming elections. In addition, the delegation had indicated that women were against the imposition of quotas; it would be helpful to understand the mechanism whereby their views on that issue had been sought. She asked whether the Government financed measures to empower women candidates. Furthermore, she wished to know whether women occupied decision-making positions in local government.

37. She expressed regret that there had been no shadow report from any Omani non-governmental organization. The alternative sources on which the Committee had relied had indicated that it was difficult to obtain access to organizations that could give a non-governmental perspective on the status of women.

38. Lastly, she wished to know whether the hereditary absolute monarchy of Oman was a male preserve.

39. **Ms. Neubauer** said that, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Oman was one of a small number of States that had no women representatives in the lower chamber of the national parliament. That situation did not reflect well on Oman, particularly in view of the considerable progress and development that it had achieved. She asked for further information about the support offered to women candidates. In addition, she asked the delegation to elaborate on the legal and organizational factors cited in paragraph 84 of Oman's replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/OMN/Q/1/Add.1) as having an impact on women's participation in the electoral process, as that response appeared to indicate that there were legal impediments to the election of women to the Consultative Council.

40. **Mr. Al-Kalbani** (Oman) said that, although the Consultative Council had no women members, a number of women had been appointed to the State Council and parliamentary elections were to be held during the coming week. It was to be hoped that women would win as many seats as possible, but the decision lay with the voters. There were no political parties in Oman, but independent candidates stood for election and required a budget in order to do so. Women were represented and played an active role in all Omani committees and commissions.

41. Although a lack of communication between the various associations and the monitoring committee on implementation of the Convention had been signalled, a number of channels of communication did exist through various social media. Although no shadow report was available in English, the relevant information was available on the Internet.

42. **Mr. Al-Mukhaini** (Oman) said that the Committee for Civil Society, which he represented, had not been able to prepare a shadow report in view of the numerous protests and demonstrations that had taken place during the current year. The Committee for Civil Society had raised the issue of quotas at a number of seminars attended by numerous women participants from various sectors, since 2007. However, aspiring women candidates

had categorically rejected the quota system. His committee would raise the issue at future gatherings. Although there were no local or municipal councils in Oman, women held responsible positions in many government departments throughout Oman and had broad executive powers.

43. **Mr. Al-Hinai** (Oman) said that reference had been made earlier to a study reviewed at the Omani Women's Symposium that had highlighted various factors that had an impact on the election of women to the Consultative Council. The study had found that the prime factor was the media, followed by legal, social and other factors. On that basis, Oman had sought to ensure that men and women candidates had access to various forms of media coverage on an equal footing, in order to raise awareness of women candidates and their capabilities.

Article 10

44. **Ms. Bailey** said that, in view of the absence of a law on compulsory education, the Committee was concerned about the extent to which Oman could meet its obligations under article 12 of the Basic Law of Oman to provide education to all citizens. She asked the delegation to provide information on enrolment rates, rather than ratios, so that the Committee could identify the percentage of females enrolled at each level of the education system in the respective age cohorts in the population.

45. She requested information on the school dropout rate, in particular at the primary level. She also asked whether factors other than economic conditions affected the female dropout rate, such as pregnancy or early marriage. She requested more detailed information on the national project on dropouts and asked whether it met the needs of rightful beneficiaries. In addition, she asked the delegation to indicate the extent of the success of the workshop on the inclusion of gender-disaggregated statistics in the relevant databases, in particular with regard to education indicators.

46. Further information on vocational training and the options pursued by girls would be helpful, particularly as it had been admitted that girls tended to choose stereotyped roles, in addition to details of the action plan to modify attitudes. Although curricula and textbooks had been revised to remove stereotypes, Oman had indicated that male and female teachers tended to replicate those stereotypes and that a programme had been introduced to provide guidance in that area. The Committee wished to know whether the programme was mandatory for all teachers, and how its effectiveness was assessed.

47. Women's decisions about the educational and career options that they wished to pursue must certainly be respected, but it must also be recognized that their decisions were often conditioned by social norms, traditions and stereotypes. In view of the underrepresentation of women in tertiary education, she wished to know what measures the State party was contemplating to accelerate the movement of women into those areas where they were underrepresented. Lastly, paragraph 123 of Oman's report (CEDAW/C/OMN/1) indicated that the underrepresentation of women in engineering and the applied sciences had been addressed by the annulment of a previous decree limiting female enrolment in those areas of study. The same paragraph referred to a decree equalizing the number of males and females in the intake of the country's one Government university, accompanied by temporary discrimination in favour of males. Were qualified women being blocked from entering universities? What was the main criterion for admission?

48. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert and referring to the policy on gender mainstreaming in careers counselling, noted that paragraph 112 of the report spoke of girls' mental conditioning by their immediate community and of limits deriving from their family's social and economic level. Since the Public Status Act established a man's role as head of the family and stipulated that a wife must obey her husband, girls

probably had an uphill struggle to obtain equal educational and training opportunities. Many countries had reformed their family law to do away with such ideas, which were rooted in the Napoleonic Code, and to secure equality between men and women. She hoped that she would soon hear that Oman had done the same.

49. Referring to paragraph 117 of the report, she wished to know what were the cultural, social and age-related considerations which led to the separation of the sexes in the middle stage of education in government schools and why they did not apply in private schools.

50. **Mr. Al-Yaa'qubi** (Oman) said that the current rate of school enrolment in grades 1 to 6 had risen by 6 per cent since 2005 to stand at 98 per cent of all children. In grades 7 to 10 that figure was 95 per cent and in grades 11 and 12 it amounted to 82 per cent. Those high rates could be attributed to the fact that education was free, since it was seen as the pillar of development. Draft legislation currently under consideration would make education compulsory. The school curricula, which were revised every two years in order to improve the content of textbooks, were free from sexual stereotyping. Textbooks were designed for use by all pupils and teaching material was distributed to all schools on an equal basis. National sports competitions were open to all young people who had the ability and wish to participate and all young people had access to musical education and national and international music competitions.

51. **Ms. Al-Hamdani** (Oman) said that, according to the most recent statistics, the gender gap in education was narrowing and in fact there were more girls enrolled in higher education than boys.

52. **Ms. Al-Sabhiya** (Oman) said that education grants were awarded on merit. Girl students tended to shun engineering and opt for medical studies as they were more suited to women's nature. Statistics showed that the number of girl students was increasing; they currently received 54 per cent of all government grants for foreign study.

Article 11

53. **Ms. Patten** said that domestic workers, who mainly comprised women and girls, were extremely vulnerable. Some reports indicated that they were often subjected to multiple forms of abuse and had to work excessively long hours for low wages without adequate health insurance coverage. They were not covered by industrial safety laws and there was no system to monitor respect for their employment contracts. It was also reported that abuse occurred behind closed doors and that the authorities were reluctant to intervene in contractual relations between domestic workers and their employers, because they regarded that relationship as a private matter. She therefore wished to know what measures were being adopted to address the problems of female migrant and domestic workers. What steps were being taken to ensure that migrant domestic workers had an employment contract before they entered the country and that they were given social security protection, including maternity benefit? In that connection, she wished to know whether Oman planned to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). She would also like to know whether Oman was addressing abuses under the *kafalah* sponsorship system for migrant workers, which did not allow migrant workers to change employers without the consent of their sponsors who often confiscated workers' passports. She wondered if the Government was in favour of abolishing the sponsorship system and of introducing more up-to-date labour legislation to spell out the rights and duties of foreign workers and their employers.

54. **Mr. Bruun** requested clarification regarding the provision of paid maternity leave for civil servants. He also asked for statistics showing the number of reported cases of sexual harassment in the workplace and information on procedures for dealing with that issue. He wondered whether Oman was contemplating ratification of the ILO Equal

Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), since that move would further the implementation of article 11 of the Convention. As Oman had not ratified the ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the ILO Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), he enquired whether trade unions were able to operate in the country and if female employees had the right to organize. Trade union membership would promote the protection of their interests in the workplace. In view of persistently wide disparities in the remuneration of men and women in Oman, he asked what was being done to monitor wage gaps.

55. **Mr. Al-Wahaibi** (Oman) said that the Omani Labour Code did not discriminate against migrant workers. All workers had equal rights and duties. The rights of all migrant workers temporarily resident in the country were respected. The Labour Code did not permit the employment of undocumented workers. The authorities of his country were combating illegal immigration. To that end, the Government had undertaken to ratify a number of ILO Conventions and the Ministry of Manpower had signed memorandums of understanding with several migrant workers' countries of origin, which were designed to prohibit illegal migration. Oman was receiving technical assistance from international organizations in the implementation of its national programmes.

56. A memorandum of understanding had been signed with the International Labour Organization and the three social partners on the implementation of the ILO Decent Work Agenda. A consultative committee and the labour inspectorate likewise safeguarded workers' rights in Oman. Leaflets were distributed in 11 languages to enhance awareness of migrant workers' rights. The Ministry of Manpower had also set up a hotline to receive complaints from workers regarding violations of their rights, in order that the requisite measures could be taken to redress any wrongs.

57. **Mr. Al-Nabhani** (Oman) said that the rights and working conditions of domestic workers were regulated by the Ministry of Manpower which sought to establish a balanced relationship between employees and employers. It made the employer responsible for providing adequate care and housing for domestic workers. If wages were not paid, penalties could be imposed under the Labour Code.

58. Oman had undertaken to find a substitute for the sponsorship system in coordination and consultation with other Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Sponsorship did not in any way restrict workers' rights. The Minister of Manpower had issued a decision which prohibited the confiscation by employers of workers' passports. The Labour Code explicitly provided for equal pay for equal work regardless of sex or nationality. Workers had been able to join trade unions since 2006. A general federation of workers had been established.

59. Women civil servants could take 50 days paid maternity leave before and after the birth of their child and could apply for a further one year of unpaid leave.

60. **Ms. Al-Roqishiy** (Oman) said that in the event of sexual harassment or violence against domestic workers, the latter had access to the courts under the Code of Criminal Procedure and Criminal Code. Plaintiffs had to submit sufficient evidence and had the right to be assisted by a lawyer. There were female lawyers in Oman.

61. **Mr. Al-Mukhaini** (Oman), referring to the situation of migrant workers and domestic workers, said that contacts had been established between civil society organizations in Oman and the International Organization for Migration. It was hoped that by the end of 2011 a seminar on the enforcement of the law protecting migrants' rights would be held with the cooperation of the Ministry of Justice and the university law school. Civil society bodies had called on the Government to grant paid delivery leave and maternity leave to all women who gave birth.

Article 12

62. **Ms. Arocha Dominguez** said that she was concerned by the fact that, according to paragraph 168 of the report, infectious and parasitic diseases were the second main cause of death among Omani women. Given the relatively high standard of living in Oman, she was surprised by such a high level of mortality from what were essentially preventable diseases. She therefore wished to know why so many women died from those causes and what were the rates of breast, cervical and uterine cancer among Omani women. She also asked what early screening and other programmes were available to prevent and treat those forms of cancer.

63. It would seem from the report that the policy on using contraceptives was focused more on reproductive issues and was not designed, as it ought to be, to prevent sexually transmissible diseases among women.

64. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert and referring to paragraph 183 of the report, said that she wished to know if female sterilization was completely optional. Were any restrictions imposed on the basis of age or number of children? She further sought information on whether there were any guarantees to ensure that women could not be subjected to moral or physical coercion to undergo sterilization. The next report from Oman should contain statistics on the number of sterilizations.

65. She requested data on the number of clandestine abortions and wondered if there was any relationship between possible clandestine abortion practices and maternal mortality rates. Were there any statistics on that subject? She asked whether women who resorted to illegal abortions were prosecuted. If so, did the Government intend to decriminalize that practice?

66. **Ms. Rasekh** said that female genital mutilation (FGM) had serious physical and psychological consequences throughout a woman's life. She wished to know if the high rate of mortality and morbidity from infections was connected with female circumcision. Had any study been conducted on that subject? In that connection, she drew attention to the fact that FGM left women vulnerable to infertility, depression and other serious health problems. She wished to know if there had been any drop in the percentage of women circumcised since the report had been written. She hoped that the Minister of Health was concerned by such an "epidemic". It would seem from paragraph 187 of the report that there was widespread acceptance of that barbaric practice which had no basis in Islam. She asked why it was not prohibited by law. Since it was not permitted in government hospitals, what steps were taken to monitor private clinics in order to end FGM?

67. She requested information on women's mental health problems, which was lacking in the report, and enquired whether health-care facilities were equipped to cater for the special needs of women and girls with disabilities.

68. **Ms. Al-Ibriya** (Oman) said that mental health care was provided to men and women on an equal basis at all primary, secondary and tertiary health-care institutions, and had been made available to all who needed it through primary health-care centres. Ministry of Health statistics for 2009 indicated that females represented 47 per cent of all new patients registered for a range of different mental health problems. Although a minority of cases required sedation, most could be treated on an outpatient basis. There were some discrepancies between the types of mental health issues affecting men and women.

69. A range of services and equipment were offered to all persons with disabilities, on an equal basis, from childhood. Efforts were made to ensure that disabilities in boys and girls were detected early and treated. Rehabilitation, equipment and a range of therapies were provided at a number of hospitals throughout Oman.

70. Abortion was permitted only in cases where the mother or foetus was at risk from the pregnancy. Abortions could be performed up to the seventeenth week of pregnancy, in a health-care institution. The abortion rate had declined significantly over the past decade. The Ministry of Health did not have statistics on illegal or unsafe abortions. With regard to the link between unsafe abortions and maternal mortality, the data for the period 2002–2006 indicated that abortion was not a leading cause of maternal mortality. It should be noted that the maternal mortality rate had declined considerably over the past two decades.

71. Reproductive health services were offered free of charge to all Omani women at primary health-care centres and they were encouraged to use contraception as a means to prevent pregnancy and protect themselves against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The health survey of 2005 indicated that 65 per cent of schoolgirls consulted were aware of AIDS and STD prevention.

72. Women did not need authorization from men in order to obtain health care of any kind, including reproductive health care, at any health-care facility. The consent of both spouses was required for women undergoing tubal ligation or hysterectomy and for men undergoing sterilization, as such operations had an impact on both spouses. In cases of medical necessity, such operations would be performed without the spouse's consent.

73. With regard to cancer screening, various programmes included in the 2006–2010 and 2010–2012 plans targeted women over childbearing age. Those programmes included screening for various diseases, in addition to preventive programmes and awareness campaigns on reproductive health. Although cervical cancer rates were low, Oman was considering the possibility of establishing a cervical cancer screening programme in consultation with the World Health Organization should that prove necessary in the coming years. In the meantime, any woman who wished to be screened for cervical cancer could obtain the required services at women's health clinics and primary health-care centres.

74. Female genital mutilation had not been included as a theme in the 2008 Gulf Facility Health Survey for a number of reasons, including the fact that such mutilation was not practised openly. No reliable statistical data were as yet available on the issue. Nevertheless, it was anticipated that higher levels of education would reduce the incidence of female genital mutilation. A bill on children currently under preparation would contain a section on harmful practices, including female genital mutilation.

Article 13 and 14

75. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega** said that she wished to know whether, under Omani law, the husband was recognized as the head of household and whether married women needed to ask permission to open a bank account, whether they could hold a joint bank account with their husbands and whether husband and wife could hold separate accounts. Although women had access to loans and credit under Omani law, it appeared that the conditions imposed were stringent. She asked what steps the Government was taking to ensure that women enjoyed the same rights to ownership as men, within marriage. She sought clarification as to whether men and women enjoyed the same guarantees with regard to the separation of assets in divorce cases.

76. Although the State party had indicated in paragraph 35 of its replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/OMN/Q/1/Add.1) that it supported civil society associations, she asked why the only association that dealt exclusively with women's issues was the Omani Women's Association.

77. **Ms. Zou** Xiaoqiao said that she hoped that the State party's following report would contain more sex-disaggregated data than its initial report. In view of the importance of access to land ownership for the economic empowerment and status of rural women, she

would like to know why new agricultural land was not granted to women on a preferential basis and requested further information on the access of rural women to land.

78. The report appeared not to mention any comprehensive strategies and programmes to address the needs of rural women in Oman, which were substantially different from those of urban women. She wished to know what measures were in place to ensure that a gender perspective was integrated into national policy and whether there was in fact a comprehensive programme in that regard.

79. **Mr. Al-Nabhani** (Oman) said that in Oman, women had access to mortgage loans and credit when they reached the age of majority, at 18 years. They enjoyed all the same rights and benefits as men, without discrimination. Women were not required to obtain their husband's consent to open a bank account or obtain a loan. The financial status of women was separate from that of their husbands and their income, goods and assets were not shared with their husbands.

80. Property brought into a marriage by a wife was her own, and was not shared in case of divorce. Property purchased in common during a marriage was shared in case of divorce, on the basis of the percentage contribution to the property of each spouse. Women had independent legal personality and enjoyed all their rights on an equal basis with men. Women were fully entitled to enjoy independent financial status.

81. **Ms. Al-Hamdani** (Oman) said that women had been involved in economic and commercial activities since the start of Oman's renaissance. They had access to the same educational and vocational opportunities as men and, from the age of 18 years, could engage in the same commercial activities. Women were offered special business skills development training to support their enterprises; private sector training courses for young people were also available, and 64 per cent of participants in those courses were female. With regard to financing, women received some 51 per cent of public financing for enterprises and the Oman Development Bank financed a number of large-scale commercial projects undertaken by women.

82. **Ms. Al-Shukairia** (Oman) said that, in view of the dearth of statistical information on rural women in the report, she would make available to the Committee a study on rural women in Oman, in English translation, which contained more comprehensive statistical data. Women's right to own and dispose of land and property on an equal basis with men was fully guaranteed under article 11 of the Basic Law and pursuant to Royal Decree No. 125 of 2008.

83. Rural women were not given preferential treatment with regard to the allocation of land. The Department of Rural Women, in cooperation with the Ministry of Housing, was currently implementing programmes under which women were allotted plots of agricultural land in exchange for modest annual payments. Conditions were imposed but all land allocations required the women considered to be committed to the long-term implementation of the programmes.

84. Women could inherit and own land in Oman. Indeed, some 38.5 per cent of agricultural land owners in Oman were women, and a number of comprehensive plans had been formulated to respond to the needs of rural women. Under the 2005–2010 and 2006–2011 plans, a number of in-depth studies had been conducted on the situation of rural women, in conjunction with the Food and Agriculture Organization, among others. The plans also focused on providing support to small businesses.

85. **Mr. Al-Kalbani** (Oman) said that the delegation had been honoured to discuss Oman's initial report with the Committee and that the Committee's concluding observations would have a positive impact on implementation of the Convention in his country. The delegation had given transparent replies to the Committee's questions and

would ensure that the points raised were followed up with the relevant bodies. He expressed the hope that the dialogue would serve women.

86. **The Chairperson** thanked the members of the Omani delegation for their constructive dialogue with the Committee and encouraged them to take the necessary measures to address the Committee's concerns, which would be communicated in writing.

The meeting rose at 3.40 p.m.