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## Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Seventy-fifth session

### Summary record of the 4th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 13 February 2024, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Lemus de Vásquez (Vice-Chair)

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### Consideration of reports (*continued*)

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*Second periodic report of Mauritania*

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*Ms. Lemus de Vásquez (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.*

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

**Consideration of reports** (*continued*)

**(a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant**  
(*continued*)

*Second periodic report of Mauritania* (E/C.12/MRT/2; E/C.12/MRT/Q/2;  
E/C.12/MRT/RQ/2)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Mauritania joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Mauritania**, introducing his country's second periodic report (E/C.12/MRT/2), said that the report had been prepared in close consultation with the public authorities and various stakeholders, including civil society organizations. In order to give full effect to the provisions of the Covenant, it had been published in a special edition of the Official Gazette. The Government had introduced several plans and strategies, including the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity, the National Social Protection Strategy and the National Action Plan on Health Safety. A national strategy for the promotion and protection of human rights had also been approved as part of measures to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
3. The Government had adopted a national strategy to combat corruption and had undertaken a digital reform of public procurement processes. In 2022, Mauritania had published its national report for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. In 2023, the country had won the Initiative's prize for leadership and had been elected chair of its regional group.
4. The country's preschool education policy had proved highly successful and the number of pupils enrolled had increased fivefold since 2019. The Government had paid the school fees of more than 12,000 children from low-income families and had passed a law on education system reform. A national institute had been established to promote the use of national languages in the school system, and the republican school project had been launched. The proportion of children who completed education at primary, secondary and upper secondary levels had increased since 2019. More than 210,000 pupils in 1,200 schools had benefited from the scholarship programme since its launch in 2020, and school meals were offered to encourage attendance.
5. In the health system, there were 23 medical practitioners per 10,000 people, following the recruitment of over 2,800 professionals. One third of the population had health-care coverage, at a cost of 2.1 billion ouguiyas (UM), and 43,000 people benefited from the National Social Security Fund.
6. Finance programmes had been established for projects that aimed to create over 12,000 employment opportunities. The Government had undertaken a wholesale reform of the legislative and institutional framework for the promotion and protection of employees' rights, the minimum wage had been raised, and inspections to ensure workplace health and safety had been improved. The mining sector employed 50,000 workers and had created 200,000 indirect jobs. The working conditions of miners and prospectors had been improved through better access to services.
7. Efforts to combat desertification, preserve biological diversity and protect pastures had been stepped up. The number of green jobs had risen and vegetation coverage had been increased substantially. In recent years, an environmental police force had been set up to support industrial activity at the community level and ensure that it complied with the appropriate environmental standards. National observatories for the environment and coastal areas and two nature reserves had been established, as part of the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
8. A national plan had been launched to promote the values of national unity and justice, and measures were taken to preserve the country's heritage, such as the festival of ancient towns and the Soninke language. The first cultural festival had taken place in Djowol, and

events had been held to celebrate Nouakchott as the cultural capital of the Islamic world. Around UM 900 million had been earmarked to host the events.

9. Social protection programmes had been introduced to protect the rights of the most vulnerable people, and steps had been taken to cover their medical expenses. Some 1,200 patients had benefited. Cash transfers had been made to 238,000 low-income and crisis-affected households, almost half of whom received regular transfers. Food subsidies to the value of UM 450,000 were also distributed. In 2023, the Government had spent UM 4.7 billion on socioeconomic programmes to improve services for the most impoverished and vulnerable persons. They included projects to provide drinking water to 117 villages and electricity to 21 villages. Funding in the amount of UM 810 million had been provided to support income-generating activities for unemployed women and young persons, in particular. The political programme established by the Mauritanian President focused on social justice and improving the standard of living of the most vulnerable people.

10. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu** (Country Rapporteur) said that she wished to know whether it was possible for individuals to invoke the Covenant in cases before the domestic courts in Mauritania; what other remedies were available to address violations of economic, social and cultural rights; whether the mandate of the National Human Rights Commission covered economic, social and cultural rights; and whether judges and other legal professionals were trained in the protection of such rights. It would be helpful to have examples of court decisions in that area. She wondered what steps had been taken to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Covenant, which would enable States and individuals to raise issues through inter-State and individual communications.

11. Given reports that human rights defenders faced a hostile environment in Mauritania, she would appreciate an explanation of the regulatory framework governing the activities of human rights defenders and the main challenges that the State party had identified in that regard. She would be interested to learn what steps the State party would take to protect human rights defenders, including anti-slavery activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), from harassment and abuse.

12. She wished to know what measures were in place to combat corruption, how the State party assessed the outcome of those measures, and whether NGOs were involved in the fight against corruption and, if so, how. She would welcome statistics on court cases, including the sentences handed down, for corruption-related offences, especially those involving high-ranking officials.

13. She would be interested to hear what measures had been adopted to implement and enforce anti-slavery legislation; what measures the Government would take to ensure that all specialized anti-slavery courts were properly resourced and that victims received the legal aid to which they were entitled under Act No. 2015-031; and what steps the State party would take to ensure that all Haratine people and Afro-Mauritanians, including those who had escaped slavery, had civil status. She wondered whether there were sufficient mechanisms in place to accurately determine the number of Mauritanian citizens who were subject to descent-based slavery. If not, what mechanisms would the Government introduce? She wished to know how the State party would ensure that the whole population had civil status documents, and how it would address problems related to the lack of birth registration and the issuing of documents to internally displaced persons and migrants from Senegal.

14. It would be good to know what was the status of the bill on women's rights, how property issues would be regulated under it, and what measures had been put in place to protect women's rights defenders, who were at greater risk as a result of their activism. She would welcome statistical data to support the information provided in the State party's replies to the list of issues (E/C.12/MRT/RQ/2). It would be helpful to know how the State party collected enough reliable disaggregated data to inform evidence-based policies on the protection of economic, social and cultural rights, and when the most recent population census had been conducted.

15. She wondered how the State party addressed issues related to climate change and what legal framework was in place to that end. She would be interested to hear about the regulatory framework introduced by the State party to alleviate the negative impact of business activities on human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights, in accordance with the

Committee's general comment No. 24 (2017) on State obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the context of business activities.

*The meeting was suspended at 3.35 p.m. and resumed at 3.45 p.m.*

16. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the preamble to the Constitution guaranteed economic, social and cultural rights and personal freedoms, which could be restricted only by law. Family rights were also protected. The State devoted the most resources it could to implement its economic and social programmes. Since civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights were interdependent, they had equal recognition under the law. The Covenant had not been invoked before the domestic courts, although it was possible to do so. Article 11 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights had been used to overturn a prison sentence that had been imposed in a debt-related case, even before prison sentences in civil matters had been abolished under national law. Judges, prosecutors and many law enforcement officers received training and capacity-building on the nine United Nations human rights treaties to which Mauritania was a party.

17. The national anti-corruption strategy had been updated in December 2022 and approved for the period up to 2030. A steering committee for the strategy, comprising all departments concerned and chaired by the Prime Minister, had been established by decree to monitor its implementation and evaluate governance. The committee's operations were overseen by the Inspectorate General of State. An independent anti-corruption agency would be set up as part of the committee's action plan. Between 2017 and 2023, the specialized anti-corruption court had heard 40 corruption cases involving a hundred defendants. The sentences handed down varied from 6 months' to 10 years' imprisonment and the confiscation of the defendants' assets had been ordered. The trial of a former President of Mauritania had recently concluded and he intended to lodge an appeal.

18. The jurisdiction of the three specialized anti-slavery courts covered the entire national territory. The Supreme Court examined appeals on points of law against decisions handed down by the lower courts. The institutional framework provided a solid foundation for combating slavery, as it allowed civil society organizations active in the field of human rights to assist victims at all stages of the proceedings. All victims of slavery and slavery-like practices received legal aid and protection against reprisals, and the proceedings were entirely free of charge. As none of the presiding judges of the anti-slavery courts had been reassigned since 2017, they had acquired extensive experience in their field. As of January 2024, the courts had received 164 cases concerning slavery and related practices, including hereditary slavery and all forms of trafficking in persons.

19. **A representative of Mauritania** said that fundamental rights, including the rights to freedom of expression and association, were enshrined in the preamble to the Constitution by reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. As such, human rights defenders had always been free to exercise their rights, including the right to protest. However, unauthorized protests that went out of control were met with the full force of the law.

20. Associations for the defence of human rights, like all associations, were governed by Act No. 004/2021 on Associations, Foundations and Networks, which established a declaratory system of registration, regulated the exercise of the right of association and protected members from intimidation, harassment and arbitrary interference. No human rights defenders were being held in arbitrary detention. In the climate of reconciliation, open policies and frank dialogue introduced in the country since the democratic handover of power in 2019, civil society organizations conducted their activities freely and played an important role in citizen participation, the consolidation of democracy through strong institutions that respected the rule of law, and the preparation, implementation and monitoring of public policies.

21. **A representative of Mauritania** said that a study conducted on the harmonization of national law with the country's international commitments had called for the introduction of a law on human rights defenders, and the Government was currently considering how best to frame such a law. The Government was also working with the interministerial committee responsible for preparing reports and following up on recommendations, which was attached

to the National Human Rights Commission, to examine the possibility of ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

22. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the fight against climate change lay at the heart of all the Government's development policies and strategies, including the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity for 2016–2030. Sustainable development had recently been incorporated into the title of the economy ministry, and its organization chart had been modified to take stock of sustainable development issues.

23. To combat environmental harm caused by practices such as gold washing, environmental certification was required for factories engaged in gold processing activities. The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development had issued 28 decisions regarding the environmental feasibility of such factories. All gold-washing activities were subject to inspection and five permits had been suspended. Three environmental police brigades had been deployed in gold-washing sites and measures had been taken to decontaminate the sites. The transport, storage and use of chemicals used in the mining industry were monitored; model terms of reference had been introduced that set out the best practices for companies engaged in the processing of waste from gold mining; and an environmental surveillance team had been formed to monitor environmental indicators and ensure compliance with the terms of reference. Two 4-month campaigns had been launched in seven regions to raise awareness among gold miners of the risks associated with chemical waste from the mining sector. Monitoring mechanisms had been established to ensure that gold mining operations complied with environmental regulations, and penalties were imposed for non-compliance. The authorities encouraged the adoption of sustainable and environmentally friendly mining techniques, such as the rehabilitation of abandoned mining sites. In accordance with the Common Regulation for the Registration of Pesticides in Member States of the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel, several pesticides had been banned in Mauritania.

24. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, on several occasions, the President of the Republic had drawn the attention of the people, government authorities and civil society to the importance of concerted action against corruption. The Government regularly called upon the private sector and civil society to assist in combating corruption, and whistle-blowers were protected by law. The separation of powers, the principle of transparency and a free press allowed people to share their opinions freely and play a role in holding the authorities to account. For instance, following reports in the press, the parliament had set up a commission of inquiry on governance, which had resulted in the prosecution of a former President. Under the national anti-corruption strategy, measures had been taken to enhance awareness-raising, training, capacity-building and transparency, and to establish stricter penalties for corruption offences. Plans were in place to introduce education on corruption in school and vocational training curricula.

25. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Government aimed to implement policies to ensure that citizens enjoyed a decent standard of living. Its priorities were to promote cultural heritage, implement preventive policies to curb inequality, empower women to participate in the country's development, and integrate persons with disabilities into the labour market. To attain those objectives, significant measures had been taken to address vulnerability, strengthen social cohesion and include vulnerable categories of people in income-generating activities, focusing on investment and the participation of women and young people in the national development process. The General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion (Taazour) had launched projects to enhance infrastructure in the tertiary sector in order to help vulnerable categories of people in all *wilayas* (governorates). As part of a solidarity action plan, investigations had been carried out into physical and verbal abuse, and charges had been brought; offices had been established in all municipalities to provide victims of abuse and human rights violations with information and accommodation; professionals had been appointed to strengthen national reconciliation and resolve national disputes; and complaints of assault had been investigated throughout the country.

26. There was no discrimination in terms of birth registration. The national campaign for registration of births using simplified procedures, launched on 11 July 2023, allowed birth

registration in communities that did not have access to registries. Thanks to mobile teams, 600,000 births had been registered.

27. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the country had a modern, robust, reliable and secure civil registration system. Compared to other countries in its subregion, Mauritania had a high registration rate and was technologically advanced. Currently, around 4.7 million people were registered with the system, and the initial results from the recently completed general population census showed that the population was less than 5 million. As the poorest households were least likely to register, a door-to-door campaign had been launched to identify individuals who had not yet registered with the system. In the previous six months, more people had been registered than in the entire period from 2007 to 2022. The civil registry also included approximately 320,000 foreign nationals, of whom some 125,000 were Malian refugees. A digital system allowed all citizens, including migrants, to apply for documents, such as passports and identity cards, remotely.

28. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Commission on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society had conducted a parallel campaign to help identify unregistered persons.

29. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu** said that she wished to know how the concept of social cohesion was interpreted when applying a 2021 law protecting national symbols and criminalizing acts against the State's authority and citizens' honour. She wondered what programmes and projects were in place to support persons who had regained their freedom after enslavement and, in particular, whether such persons received psychological support, identity documents and assistance with their reintegration into society.

30. **Ms. Rossi** (Country Task Force) said that she would appreciate information on the use of direct taxation as compared to indirect taxation. In particular, it would be helpful to know whether income tax rates were progressive and whether the State party used taxes to shift the energy matrix towards clean energy. She would be interested to hear how multinational corporations, especially those in the extractive industries, were taxed.

31. She wished to know what was the ratio of the State party's debt to its gross domestic product (GDP) and what had been the impact of servicing that debt on the fiscal space necessary to safeguard rights under the Covenant, particularly the rights to health and education. She wondered whether the State party was implementing measures to reduce and redistribute unpaid work carried out by women, for instance by increasing the availability of day-care services, promoting the participation of men in family and household tasks, and granting shared parental leave.

32. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he would be interested to hear whether the Government had circulated the State party's report among civil society organizations and other stakeholders, whether a leading human rights authority had coordinated the preparation of the report, and whether an ad hoc group or a permanent body had drafted the report. He wondered which government body was responsible for following up on the recommendations received by the State party from the Committee and other human rights mechanisms.

33. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he wished to know what impact climate change was expected to have on regional planning, how many people would be able to live in rural areas and whether more people would move to the cities. If so, what impact might that have on the provision of education and health services? He wondered what repercussions climate change might have on the Government's long-term development plans, and whether a law on climate adaptation was in place to deal with potential losses of access to housing or land and internal displacement.

34. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the resources made available to the anti-slavery courts had doubled each year for two consecutive fiscal years. In line with a recommendation by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, the Council of Ministers was considering a bill to reform the courts and allocate additional material and human resources, including prosecutors and investigating judges who specialized in combating slavery. A mechanism involving the National Human Rights Commission had been implemented to verify reports or suspicions of slavery.

35. Mauritania was a multi-ethnic and multicultural country. However, attacks and stigmatization through social media had adversely affected cohesion between its various peoples, to which the Government had responded by passing the 2021 law.

36. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, in October 2022, the Commission on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society had launched, in cooperation with civil society, the first nationwide campaign to raise awareness of slavery. Approximately 500,000 people were directly involved in the campaign, with more people participating via social networks. In the governorate of Trarza, a campaign had been carried out to raise awareness of legislation to counter slavery and trafficking in persons.

37. The State party's second periodic report had been prepared by an intersectoral technical committee that served as the country's national mechanism for reporting and follow-up. The committee had been established by order of the Prime Minister and comprised representatives of various government departments, including the ministries of justice, the civil service, the interior and foreign affairs, and the National Human Rights Commission. The report was drawn up through a participatory approach, whereby a task force within the committee collected data from the relevant government department and prepared a draft, which was submitted to the committee as a whole and shared with all stakeholders, including the National Human Rights Commission, the national mechanism for the prevention of torture, the women's rights observatory and civil society organizations. As the second report had been drafted during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the consultation process had taken place via email. A body had recently been established to follow up on recommendations made to Mauritania by other treaty bodies, special procedure mandate holders and participants in universal periodic reviews.

38. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the technical committee had a database of recommendations for follow-up. In 2022, a national body had been set up under the Commission on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society to combat trafficking in persons, including migrants. The body distributed funds and provided medical insurance to all victims of slavery, to ensure that they had a decent standard of living.

39. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the country's debt-to-GDP ratio remained stable at around 44.7 per cent. According to a joint assessment by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in January 2023, the risk of overall and external public debt distress was moderate, and had been reduced from high in the previous assessment.

40. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, in 2022, a unit had been set up, comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Commission on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society, and the prosecution service attached to the Supreme Court, to receive and monitor court cases and proceedings involving slavery-related offences. The unit cooperated with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United States Department of State, among other partners. The unit kept the interministerial committee responsible for preparing reports and following up on recommendations apprised of any developments in that area.

41. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the principle of gender equality was enshrined in the Constitution and national legislation and was reflected in tax equality, equal access to justice, equal pay access for equal work, and equality in public services. The Constitution recognized all the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Article 2 of the Constitution guaranteed all citizens equality before the law, without discrimination on the grounds of origin, race, sex or social circumstances. Furthermore, article 12 guaranteed all citizens the right to accede to public office or employment without any conditions other than those determined by law. The Government had for several years been pursuing a policy to promote and empower women and to incorporate a gender lens into development policies, including through its accession to a number of international treaties. Legal measures to that effect included Act No. 2022-023, the Framework Act on the National Education System, which recognized education as a fundamental right for all without discrimination on the grounds of age, origin, gender, culture, language or geographic location; laws addressing trafficking in persons, victim protection, the promotion of women's

access to elected office, and discrimination; and the bill on combating violence against women and girls, which was expected to be presented to parliament at its next session.

42. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, to guarantee decent incomes and livelihoods as well as adequate housing, the Government was building 2,508 social housing units at a cost of UM 22.6 billion, 32 per cent of which had been completed. The Government had also reviewed legislation on residential institutions; completed a project on tackling illegal structures in Toujouonine; built a university, schools, roads and supply warehouses; rehabilitated agricultural land, provided agricultural equipment and supported agricultural cooperatives; built a community shop; and distributed butane gas tanks to all displaced families, of which there were more than 9,000. Approximately 500,000 families had benefited from the current phase of resettlement efforts, including some 1,000 poor families who had been transferred from inadequate housing to new purpose-built developments and were also supported with cash transfers to help them settle into the new areas. The Government had also provided cash transfers to 1,000 of the poorest families and provided social insurance to households headed by widows, at a cost of UM 346 million. Areas had been connected to drinking water supplies and electricity networks.

43. **A representative of Mauritania** said that Act No. 2015-031 recognized the prerogative of civil society organizations to provide assistance and support to victims of slavery in the filing of charges and complaints, as well as during proceedings. It also allowed, in some circumstances, certain entities to exercise the rights of victims, such as the right to initiate civil proceedings. Consequently, the Commission on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society acted as a party to all cases concerning slavery and had intervened in two cases that year.

44. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** (Country Task Force) said that the Committee would appreciate more information on social security in the State party, particularly in the form of statistics on social insurance, as well as on working conditions. The delegation might clarify whether references in the report to agriculture primarily related to crop production and whether references to construction also covered infrastructure development. The delegation might comment further on articles 2 (1) and (3) of the Covenant, particularly the obligation of States parties to make use of international assistance and cooperation and take steps to implement the Covenant to the maximum of their available resources, noting that capital acquired through international assistance was an important resource. He also wished to highlight article 6 (2) of the Covenant regarding the obligation of States parties to achieve development and to realize the right to employment.

45. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the approach taken by the Government to set the minimum wage was the same as that adopted in all its policies: participatory and inclusive of all stakeholders. The minimum wage was based on the cost of living and had been reached through free negotiations, with the Government intervening only to enact the agreed outcome of those negotiations through legislation. Despite the difficult circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government had decided to increase the minimum wage by 50 per cent in order to improve living conditions. All workers, nationals and foreigners alike, were entitled to receive the minimum wage if they worked in Mauritania.

46. With regard to working conditions, the Labour Code guaranteed the economic, social and cultural rights of all workers, regardless of their race, culture, nationality or age. It also provided for the rights and freedoms set out in article 7 of the Covenant, through provisions on decent working conditions (arts. 153–169), reasonable working hours, rest periods and holidays (arts. 170–190), fair wages (arts. 191–237), health and safety at work (arts. 238–253), freedom of association and free functioning of trade unions (arts. 264–291), and housing, transport and meals for workers. The application of those provisions was ensured by the national inspectorate network, which comprised 15 inspectorates across the country's 15 governorates.

47. A range of disaggregated data were available on unemployment in Mauritania, which the delegation would send to the Committee. Notwithstanding the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of flagship measures had been implemented, including projects to strengthen women's entrepreneurship, finance cooperatives working with local products, support



apprentices and the self-employed, and offer vocational training to persons who had not had access to higher education in order to support their entry into the labour force.

48. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, in 2021, the State had decided to include poor households as a new category covered by the National Social Security Fund, in order to grant them access to social security free of charge. The households included had been identified through a transparent approach and had been included on the social register. Some 100,000 poor households had benefited from inclusion in the nationwide scheme. As Mauritanian households had an average of 6.2 members, the scheme was estimated to benefit more than 600,000 individuals. Since its introduction, the Government had covered all of the scheme's costs, which amounted to over UM 2 billion. While social security insurance was compulsory for all employees, some foreigners working in the informal sector did not have coverage, so the Government had set up a fund to provide them with coverage in 2023, through which more than 43,000 people had benefited to date, bringing the country closer to universal social security coverage.

49. The Al Baraka programme had been launched to accelerate the pace of economic development, particularly in agriculture and in rural areas populated by poor, vulnerable and marginalized households. The programme had enabled the construction of 27 large dams, as well as 500 sand dams to enable farmers to harvest rainwater; financed more than 1,600 income-generating activities for farmers; and supported desalination activities.

50. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the poor households that had benefited from inclusion in the National Social Security Fund represented 17 per cent of the total population, highlighting the significance of that measure. He also wished to clarify that the State party's second periodic report had been shared indirectly with civil society through the National Human Rights Commission.

51. **A representative of Mauritania** said that development was indeed seen as an obligation of the State in Mauritania, as demonstrated by the Government's Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity for 2016–2030, aimed at combating poverty; its recently approved strategy for the promotion and protection of human rights, which incorporated the Sustainable Development Goals; and the establishment of the General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion (Taazour), which strove to tackle poverty and to support and improve the prospects of poor and vulnerable people in Mauritania.

52. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Government had been working to improve the quality of health insurance services, particularly in poor areas, alongside its work to increase the number of policyholders. It had a programme to promote core services in poor areas that targeted access to education, with the Government having built 98 schools, as well as municipal childcare centres to support early access to education; school nutrition, with meals provided to 77,000 pupils; health care, with the establishment of 22 clinics; and malnutrition, with the Government having progressively taken on 100 per cent of the national caseload of support for malnourished children from the United Nations Children's Fund between 2021 and 2023. To foster development at the municipal level, the Government was identifying localities that had significant economic capacity, so that they could be equipped with solar or thermal energy plants. Twenty-two local authorities had been helped in that way. To improve access to water, 85 water networks had been established and 183 wells had been dug in poorer areas, while 75 boreholes had been drilled.

53. The cash transfer programme, under which payments were made to the 100,000 poorest households every three months, was applicable to both nationals and non-nationals. One-off payments were also made during the lean season. Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, cash transfers had been made to the 210,000 lowest-income households. In addition, the Government had introduced a system to provide basic foodstuffs at subsidized prices through 1,750 outlets across the country. That measure was aimed at helping the poorest members of society, particularly in the light of rising food and commodity prices since the start of the war in Ukraine. The social register ensured the data on household situations were up to date, so that policy could be adapted when necessary.

54. The Government was also engaged in what it called social promotion, with the aim of changing people's attitudes and teaching them about their rights and how to access them, so that they could improve their financial situation.

55. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the social register had initially included 200,000 families but had since been extended to almost the entire population.

56. **A representative of Mauritania** said that a programme targeting nomadic populations and pastoral farmers during the lean season was to be launched in the near future. The Government would provide that group with animal feed at subsidized prices from the end of February, when the lean season started. The social programme was being implemented by the General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion (Taazour), which had been established by the President, who believed that growth and development could not really be substantive unless their benefits were shared with the greatest number of people.

57. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he would appreciate more information from the State party regarding the extension of the cash transfer and food outlet programme to the whole population, particularly its time frame and financial impacts on the Government budget.

58. In the light of the World Bank Group's research indicating that the younger a population the higher the level of unemployment, he wished to know what measures the Government was taking to combat youth unemployment, in particular.

59. Noting that domestic and agricultural labour still frequently included forced labour, he asked how the Government was reaching out to women and young farmers, respectively. Sexual violence was particularly prevalent in the domestic part of the informal sector. What measures was the Government taking to tackle it?

60. Citing reports that unions experienced oppression or violence when they mobilized, he would appreciate receiving more information on the issue, and in particular a description of the type of relationship that the Government had with the trade unions and how it might be improved.

61. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu** said that the statistics presented had shown that a greater proportion of women experienced unemployment than men. Additionally, there were no legal provisions to implement the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value between men and women. Only 30 per cent of employees in the public sector were women, and a high proportion of women worked without pay. What measures was the State party taking to address those labour market segregation issues?

62. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** (Country Task Force) said that articles 306 and 308 of the Criminal Code appeared to criminalize sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex, with penalties extending up to the death penalty. That was incompatible with the principle of non-discrimination as determined by the United Nations human rights treaties. He wished to know how the State party reconciled its legislation with that principle, and how many people had been detained or prosecuted because of their sexual orientation in recent years. What measures were in place to eliminate discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and to ensure non-discriminatory access to economic, social and cultural rights?

63. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would like to know if the State party intended to protect the rights of older persons as well as of persons with disabilities, and when they would be covered by the social security programme.

64. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, as was the case for many other developing countries, the challenge regarding the informal economy was one of enforcement of legislation. The Government was keen to enforce labour law and had called on the International Labour Organization (ILO) for assistance in conducting a study into how it could help formalize the economy. The study had been completed and the findings would shortly be shared with the government departments that worked to protect the rights of workers.

65. Mauritania was a signatory to 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). Currently, there were 47 trade union federations and 200 non-affiliated trade unions, who conducted their activities unhindered.

66. Mauritania had ratified the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and had adopted the Labour Code to reflect that Convention. The Government did not believe that there was a gender wage gap.

67. **A representative of Mauritania** said that sharia was the cornerstone of domestic legislation, and individual rights and freedoms were safeguarded regardless of nationality. People were not stigmatized based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, provided their behaviour remained part of their private life.

68. **A representative of Mauritania** said that article 395 of the Labour Code guaranteed equal access to employment for all persons without distinction, while article 7 provided for contractual freedom in social matters, whereby both parties in a contract had to respect the principle of non-discrimination.

69. The Framework Act on the National Education System aimed to create an education system based on Sunni Islamic principles of tolerance and social cohesion. It provided for quality education for Mauritanian children, both boys and girls. It fostered multilingual development and for the first time incorporated nationwide teaching of national languages.

70. Article 309 of the Criminal Code criminalized rape and stipulated penalties for that offence pursuant to national law.

71. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Government organized annual national campaigns to promote the rights of women and girls, involving religious leaders, legal experts and women leaders. The Government had also created mechanisms to combat violence against women, including a national observatory for the rights of women and girls as well as other regional bodies. Multisectoral platforms had been established to combat violence against women.

72. A training system had been set up to meet the needs of women and girls working in cooperatives, especially in the food processing industry. A network of 14 regional entities had been established under the authority of the national centre for the promotion of women's rights and training in women's affairs.

73. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would be grateful if the delegation could provide updated and disaggregated data on the extent of the worst forms of child labour, particularly in the sectors of domestic employment, agriculture, fisheries and construction. While she commended the adoption by the State party of measures to prevent and punish the exploitation of child labour, she would appreciate receiving details of the impact of those measures and of any perpetrators who had been brought to justice.

74. She would welcome up-to-date information about the number of children living and working in the streets, and in particular about children sent to religious schools and forced to beg, and measures to tackle that situation. She would appreciate it if the delegation could provide information about the measures adopted to tackle corporal punishment inflicted on children, as well as the number of criminal cases involving such practices taken to court.

75. She would be grateful to receive specific information about the steps taken to tackle early marriage and to raise awareness about its harmful effects, especially on women. What had the State party done to eliminate exceptions to the minimum age of 18 years for marriage and to prosecute in such cases?

76. Whilst the practice of female genital mutilation was prohibited by law, the Committee had learned that there were several communities in which it persisted. She would be grateful if the delegation could provide information on the scale of that practice and on measures taken to enforce the law. What had been the results of such measures?

77. She would appreciate receiving disaggregated data for the previous five years on the proportion of the population living in poverty and extreme poverty, as well as information on multisectoral poverty, if available, and on the effects of the policies described in the State party's second periodic review. What measures had been taken to tackle the consequences of COVID-19, particularly in terms of increasing poverty and inequality?

78. She wondered what special measures had been taken for victims of slavery or labour exploitation, such as people of African descent, in addition to measures to promote their full integration into society and access to education, employment, housing, health care, land and natural resources.

79. With regard to the right to adequate food, she would appreciate receiving disaggregated data on the incidence of undernutrition and malnutrition in the previous 10 years, especially among children under 5 and pregnant and breastfeeding women; information on measures taken to control the increases in the cost of basic foodstuffs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; and statistics from the previous 10 years on access to drinking water and sanitation, especially in irregular settlements and rural areas. She asked whether there was a long-term plan or policy, with a budget and targets, for the progressive realization of the right to water, including measures planned to meet the increasing demand for water in urban areas. What steps had been taken to ensure that all health centres and schools had access to drinking water and sanitation?

80. She would appreciate receiving statistical data about the number of persons who were homeless or lived in inadequate housing, as well as about measures taken to tackle forced evictions. The State party should also provide information about the measures taken or planned to revise the legal framework for land ownership, based on consultations with the communities and affected persons, including matters pertaining to repatriated persons whose land had been redistributed or confiscated, as well as the lack of access to land for victims of slavery.

81. She would appreciate receiving updated information about the budget set aside for health, including trends in budgetary allocations of the previous five years. The Committee would welcome clearer statistics about the effects of measures taken to increase the accessibility, availability, affordability and quality of health-care services, especially in rural and isolated areas and for most disadvantaged groups. Did the State party have mechanisms in place to regularly assess the outcome of health policies?

82. Currently, only 30 per cent of the population was covered by the National Health Insurance Fund. She wondered whether a specific plan had been drawn up to cover the remaining 70 per cent, including time frames and targets. She wished to know which services were covered by the Fund; whether all services were free under the scheme; and what was the scope of the national programme for access to medicines. She would appreciate further information on the coverage of sexual and reproductive health services, including antenatal and postnatal care and the prevention and treatment of obstetric fistula; access to modern methods of contraception and family planning services; and comprehensive sex education. Noting the large number of hazardous abortions, she asked whether the Government intended to amend the restrictive legislation on access to abortion, and in particular to decriminalize abortion in all cases, or at least in cases of rape, incest or threat to the life or health of the pregnant woman or severe congenital malformations, pursuant to recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Lastly, she wished to know what steps had been taken to tackle the high rate of infant mortality.

*The meeting rose at 6 p.m.*