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Summary record of the 14th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 20 February 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

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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)

Fifth periodic report of Iraq (continued) (E/C.12/IRQ/5; E/C.12/IRQ/Q/5;
E/C.12/IRQ/RQ/5)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Iraq joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Saran** (Country Task Force) said that it would be helpful to receive the disaggregated data requested in paragraphs 11, 15, and 17 of the list of issues in relation to the State party's report (E/C.12/IRQ/Q/5), namely in respect of the realization of the right to work, complaints about working conditions, and social security coverage. She would also be grateful for details of any measures to address corruption that affected citizens' right to work, and for concrete positive examples of the Government's efforts to tackle the worst forms of child labour and, in particular, to prevent the recruitment of children by militias and armed groups. Lastly, she wondered whether public sector employees were allowed to form trade unions and, if not, how they were able to exercise their trade union rights under the Covenant.
3. **Ms. Lee** said that she would like to hear about any measures taken to address the high rates of unemployment in the district of Basra, with a particular focus on facilitating access to decent jobs and training. It would be helpful to know how the Government intended to ensure that the population of Basra had adequate access to water, electricity and basic services. She would also like to know what percentage of the federal budget was allocated to the district of Basra and what measures were in place to ensure the equitable distribution of oil revenues.
4. She would appreciate more information about employment discrimination against people of African descent, Roma communities, ethnic minorities and women and about the application of the Labour Code. It would be useful to receive details of any complaints of discrimination or sexual harassment filed with the Labour Court, as well as any other available complaint mechanisms and any sanctions that had been imposed. She would be grateful for an update on progress made in the adoption of the bills pending since 2017 on diversity protection, non-discrimination and the protection of the rights of religious and ethnic minority groups.
5. **A representative of Iraq** said that the wars that had been fought since the 1980s had led to the disappearance of many people, as well as to mass killings, mass graves, the Kurdish genocide, forced displacement and the concealment of remains by terrorist groups, most recently Da'esh. The figures relating to enforced disappearances varied from one report to another and had not been legally proven before the Iraqi courts. The Government had set up a missing persons unit within the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Justice to investigate cases and a national commission on missing persons led by the Minister of Justice, as well as security, judicial and executive authorities. It had also worked to prepare a national register of missing persons and a bill on enforced disappearances, which had been approved by the Council of Ministers and submitted to the Council of Representatives.
6. **A representative of Iraq** said that of the 900,000 families recorded as displaced between 2014 and 2023, approximately 600,000 had returned to their place of origin. While official figures showed that 309,000 families remained displaced, the reality was different: only 31,000 people, mostly Yazidis, resided in the 24 displacement camps in Kurdistan Region, with others having settled in the Region or returned to Mosul.
7. In 2023, the Government's efforts to support returnees and persons in displacement camps had included some 600 income-generating projects; initiatives to support blacksmithing, carpentry, barber shops and food industries; the distribution of approximately 2 million food and relief rations, as well as of durable goods such as refrigerators, dishes and televisions to more than 4,000 families and of household supplies to some 35,000 families; the allocation of housing and plots of land; support for more than 1,000 persons with disabilities to hire a full-time assistant; the inclusion of more than 3 million individuals in

activities to support their return to their areas of origin; the provision of replacement tents for persons living in camps; the issuance of more than 15,000 identity documents to displaced persons; and the establishment of a service to support communication between Iraqis living abroad and those who were internally displaced. A decision had also been made by the Higher Committee for Relief and Shelter of Displaced Families to provide such families with 200 litres of oil free of charge in winter.

8. The Government had also set up various psychosocial support and rehabilitation services for returnee families from the Hawl and Jad'a camps, which covered aspects such as legal support, human rights, women's empowerment, livelihoods and skills development, and peacebuilding. In Jad'a camp, more than 1,000 students were continuing their education, and the Ministry of Migration and Displacement was overseeing the launch of income-generating projects for women. Elsewhere, the Government's initiatives for displaced women included courses on agriculture, livestock and economic development; the distribution of sewing machines; training to promote community recovery; and the reintegration of survivors of Da'esh.

9. **A representative of Iraq** said that Iraq attached great importance to the protection of women from all forms of violence, especially given that, in recent years, women had been subjected to violence and displacement by members of Da'esh. The Government was implementing the provisions of the Yazidi Female Survivors Act No. 8 of 2021 by establishing a special directorate for survivors within the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. In 2023, it had allocated 25 billion Iraqi dinars (ID) to provide more than 1,000 women with stipends, real estate grants and health and psychosocial support. The Government was working to address the lack of legislation on domestic violence and had submitted a bill on family protection to the Council of Representatives. Amendments were being considered to provisions of the Criminal Code, including articles 41 and 398, that were discriminatory to women.

10. The national strategy to combat violence against women and girls for 2018–2030 had been implemented, and follow-up plans were being developed. Iraq had been the first Middle Eastern country to develop a national plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, and a team had been formed to prepare the country's third such plan.

11. A specialized investigative body had been created to investigate terrorism offences against minorities, including women, and courses were being delivered to develop the skills of judges and members of the Public Prosecution Service in dealing with cases in the liberated areas. Some 25,000 members of the police force and 10,000 members of the rapid intervention squad had been trained in dealing with violent crimes against women. More than 400 women had been trained to implement a strategy on combating violent extremism. The Supreme Judicial Council had developed gender-sensitive guidelines that included a recommendation that women should not be arrested for unintentionally committing an offence. The code of conduct of the internal security forces included elements intended to ensure that women were properly treated during searches, arrests and investigations. A code of conduct was also being considered for prisons and detention centres, especially women's prisons. Hotlines and field teams had been established in each governorate to support interventions to protect women suffering from abuse, and community protection centres, centres specifically for victims of abuse and mental health centres were being opened in various governorates. Family courts had been established across the country.

12. The first executive plan to support women's political participation had been implemented during the 2021 parliamentary elections, when protection had been afforded to 750 female candidates throughout their campaigns by a range of authorities including the Ministry of the Interior, the National Security Advisory, the Supreme Judicial Council and the National Communication and Media Commission. The women had been provided with training and hotlines, and measures had been put in place to ensure prompt processing of complaints. A code of conduct had also been introduced for media outlets to protect women from defamation. Following the implementation of the plan, 96 women had been elected to the Council of Representatives, increasing their representation therein to 29 per cent. The second executive plan to support women's political participation had been implemented in the recent municipal council elections, in which female candidates had been protected from

violence, abuse and online blackmail, including through the deletion of offensive posts. Some 76 women had been elected, and no complaints had been received from female candidates.

13. There were approximately 10,000 women employed in the security services and more than 700 women employed in military roles. A national peace mediation team had been formed, in which more than 75 women participated.

14. In 2023, the Government had paid out over ID 16 billion in compensation to victims of terrorism and military errors.

15. **A representative of Iraq** said that the Government had a national policy aimed at protecting children from violence and exploitation and providing them with care and support and had taken steps to strengthen institutional capacity to address child begging. Article 392 of the Criminal Code set out penalties for those who enticed children under the age of 18 years into begging. The exploitation and sexual abuse of children was covered in article 393 of the Criminal Code, and begging and sexual exploitation were also covered by the legislation on trafficking in persons. A national strategy to combat trafficking in persons had also been prepared for 2023–2026 and included a range of programmes, awareness-raising activities and training in protection and prevention. The Ministry of Labour had allocated monthly stipends to beggars on the condition that they pledged not to continue begging.

16. **A representative of Iraq** said that the Government planned to address the problem of rising house prices through, inter alia, the construction of residential cities in the outskirts of governorates, away from crowded areas. It had also established a housing fund to provide citizens with interest-free loans. The authorities had distributed plots of land to government and military personnel and victims of terrorism.

17. A national housing project had been announced as part of the Government's economic development plan, and the first housing units under that plan had been completed in 2016. Loans of ID 100 million were available from the housing fund for the purchase of those units. The goal was to create between 250,000 and 300,000 housing units for the poor and middle classes. Initially, 5 new residential cities had been announced under the plan, and a further 10 new cities that would be accessible for low-income families would be announced shortly.

18. Efforts were under way to establish road links with the planned city of Ali El Wardy. The project to construct the city of Al-Jawahiri over an area of 7,121 dunums, 25 per cent of which would be allocated to residents, included plans for a large number of housing units, in addition to shopping centres and schools. The project, the implementation of which was being overseen by a team led by the Ministry of Construction and Housing, would adhere to smart city standards and was targeted at low-income groups.

19. **Mr. Emuze** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to know how the State party intended to determine the poverty status of households potentially eligible for support under the Social Protection Act No. 11 of 2014 and the Social Protection Strategic Road Map for 2015–2019, bearing in mind the high cost of applying for that support. He would be interested to receive information on the acute shortage of doctors and nurses, on the reasons for it, on the impact of the 2019 reforms to enable the importation of medicines and on plans to address the inadequate distribution of health facilities, underfunding in the health-care sector and geographical health disparities. He invited the delegation to indicate whether the Government, in particular the Ministry of Health and the Environment, had prioritized the implementation of the Health Insurance Act No. 22 of 2020 and to describe any steps taken to remove barriers to access to health services for women and girls in rural areas and slums, address the issue of sexual violence against men and boys in the national legal framework, strengthen data collection and safe, anonymous information-sharing on sexual violence against men and boys as part of broader efforts to monitor and report on conflict-related sexual violence, ensure that activities to raise awareness of sexual violence were gender-inclusive, hold perpetrators to account for crimes of sexual violence and give effect to survivors' right to a remedy and reparation, ensure that gender-inclusive mental health and psychosocial services were available to all survivors of sexual violence and guarantee legal and safe access to abortion.

20. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would appreciate details of any measures taken to review legislation or practices that made access to public services such as health care dependent on

marital status and to ensure the civil recognition of religious marriages to facilitate access to social security payments, including bereavement benefits.

21. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** (Country Rapporteur), noting that, according to paragraph 66 of the State party's replies to the list of issues (E/C.12/IRQ/RQ/5), the right of women to own property was enshrined in article 23 of the 2005 Constitution, asked whether daughters enjoyed equal inheritance rights.

22. **Ms. Saran** said that she wished to know whether plans were in place to provide internally displaced returnees with adequate housing. She would welcome information on the extent to which illegal drugs and psychotropic substances were used in the State party, particularly in schools, hospitals and prisons, and what steps had been taken to address the issue.

23. **A representative of Iraq** said that, in 2023, the Ministry of Health had spent in excess of ID 8 trillion, up from ID 7.6 trillion in 2022. Total expenditure on the country's response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in 2022 had amounted to ID 407 billion. In 2023, some ID 1.9 trillion had been spent on medicines. There were 71 public university hospitals, 161 public general hospitals, 131 private hospitals, 9 obstetrics and gynaecology clinics, 121 health centres with maternity wards and 131 family health-care centres. As part of the fight against poverty, hospital equipment had been purchased and health centres had been built in the governorates of Salah al-Din and Nineveh, and oncology centres had been constructed in the governorates of Anbar and Maysan. Under the Workers' Retirement and Social Security Act No. 18 of 2023, which represented a significant step forward, certain categories of the population were exempt from paying social security contributions, including cancer patients, persons with disabilities, patients undergoing dialysis and members of the security forces.

24. Adequately equipped health centres for internally displaced persons had been opened in all camps and in the city of Erbil. In Kurdistan Region, the Ministry of Health supplied cancer drugs and medication for chronic illnesses. The public health-care system was free nationwide. There were mental health units in 1,200 primary health-care centres, and steps had been taken to build the capacity of staff in the units. Centres had been established in the governorates of Kirkuk and Nineveh to provide comprehensive medical, psychological and legal services to survivors of violence. Furthermore, mental health services had been integrated across primary care, including for mothers and children, and campaigns had been launched to raise awareness of violence, bullying and drug use. Treatment for drug addiction was provided in hospitals in the governorates of Diwaniyah and Sulaymaniyah and at the Al-Canal Centre for Social Rehabilitation in Baghdad, among other facilities. There were eight treatment units for female addicts, which had cared for more than 34,000 patients over the previous year.

25. **A representative of Iraq** said that the Government was prioritizing measures to reduce unemployment, particularly among young people and vulnerable groups. The Workers' Retirement and Social Security Act No. 18 of 2023 provided for five branches of coverage: retirement and death benefits; insurance for occupational illnesses and diseases; unemployment benefits; benefits for persons taking voluntary retirement and those employed in the informal sector; and health insurance and benefits for working women. Under the Act, the Government paid into a fund for self-employed workers who made voluntary social security contributions. There were currently 20,170 individuals receiving pension payments from the fund. A law on support for small income-generating projects had been amended to increase the size of the interest-free loans that could be extended to businesses. The Council of Ministers had issued a decision granting ID 100,000 to retirees whose salaries upon retirement had not reached the threshold of ID 1 million. In 2023, a total of 900,000 people had received assistance under the Social Protection Act No. 11 of 2014, which currently covered 2,159,963 families. Individuals covered, including displaced persons, were given food baskets and education grants. The Prime Minister's Office had launched an initiative to grant soft loans to young jobseekers to facilitate their labour market integration. A range of measures had been taken to support persons with disabilities under Act No. 38 of 2013, and the Iraq Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Fund had been established to assist the most impoverished governorates.

26. Public sector workers had the right to form and join trade unions. Iraq had ratified the International Labour Organization Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87). According to data from the Ministry of Planning for 2023, the governorate of Basra had the fourth-highest unemployment rate in Iraq, in part because of the large number of jobseekers who moved there from other parts of the country. The Al-Faw port project, once completed, would create many jobs in Basra and the surrounding areas.

27. Domestic labour laws prohibited discrimination. Some 190 complaints of employment discrimination had been settled in court or by other competent authorities. Male and female workers enjoyed the same right to employment.

28. **A representative of Iraq** said that, in the 2023 State budget, \$950 million had been allocated to the city of Basra.

29. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Country Task Force, said that she would be grateful for specific information on the progress made and challenges faced in the implementation of laws and policies. It would be interesting to know what the Government's three main concerns and three key priorities were in the field of education; what measures it had taken to improve access to education for all school-age children and what results it had achieved in that regard; whether there were plans to increase public spending on education; what was being done to address high dropout rates in primary and secondary schools, which left children more vulnerable to practices such as child labour and child marriage; whether there was truth to reports of a need for around 8,000 new schools and the rehabilitation of existing facilities; what measures were being taken to address the lack of school infrastructure in the country, enhance the quality of learning and teaching materials, reduce classroom overcrowding and improve teacher numbers; and why enrolment and completion rates for vocational training courses were consistently lower among women and girls and what was being done to tackle the issue.

30. She would welcome details of any measures put in place in follow-up to the sessions that had been hosted by the European Union to discuss methods for protecting archaeological and heritage sites; information on the functioning of the unified database of protected and unprotected archaeological and heritage sites; details of any steps taken to promote and raise awareness of the country's cultural diversity, with a particular focus on the cultures of ethnic and religious minorities, together with an indication of the main difficulties faced in doing so; an explanation of how the use of online education was reconciled with the limited Internet access in some parts of the country; and an account of efforts to expand access to the Internet and digital technologies in rural and deprived urban areas.

31. **A representative of Iraq** said that individuals from ethnic and religious minorities and other groups affected by Da'esh received the necessary support to obtain access to education. Several universities had been built, including in Nineveh, Sinjar, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din, and new departments were being added to existing universities to meet the demands of students and the labour market. In the areas affected by Da'esh – Nineveh, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Anbar and Diyala – approximately 30 per cent of university students were women. Female survivors from the Yazidi community had been given educational support, including at the university level. Iraq had become a party to the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled.

32. Medical examinations were provided to students in primary school and preschool, with a focus on the areas affected by Da'esh, and were required for those registering for university. A national strategy for occupational health and safety had been established, which covered students and educational staff. Awareness and educational courses were offered to students who required care, especially in regions affected by Da'esh.

33. Efforts were being made to build new schools and universities as part of the national strategy for higher education, subject to the relevant budget allocations, and every effort was being made to increase the number of university places. The national committee for school enrolment and dropout rates paid particular attention to children living in areas affected by Da'esh, in low-income families or below the poverty line, using measures including surveys and awareness-raising activities. Educational and social workers received training and

administrative support. Measures had been taken to reintegrate children affected by Da'esh into the education system, including through psychological care.

34. The Government attached importance to the quality of staff in the education sector and to bringing curricula into line with the requirements of the labour market. The dropout rate had stood at approximately 3 per cent in primary schools in the 2021/22 and 2022/23 academic years and at approximately 5 per cent in secondary and vocational schools in 2022/23. The Government was working to decrease those rates. University dropout rates, including in governmental, technical and vocational colleges, had also fallen, despite having been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and Da'esh.

35. The Ministry of Higher Education had engaged in the national strategies to combat hate speech, radicalization and extremism. In cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), awards were handed out for graduate research addressing the topic of combating violence and extremism. Measures to facilitate access to education for displaced and migrant students included a focus on access to university and a project focusing on children aged 10 to 15 years and female students. In addition, human rights principles had been integrated into the curriculum, addressing topics such as peaceful coexistence, tolerance and respect for minorities and opinions, respect for the law and preservation of the environment. Iraqi and other civilizations were also covered.

36. **A representative of Iraq** said that, in Kurdistan Region, a law on education that was aimed at improving institutional capabilities had been adopted in 2021, in line with international recommendations. Between 2018 and 2023, more than 200 educational projects had been implemented, including the Back to Learning campaign which had resulted in 20,000 students – of the target of 30,000 – re-entering the education system. More than 1,000 schools had been renovated between 2019 and 2023, with ID 6 billion allocated to the building of classrooms. Anyone who established a private school would be exempt from the relevant taxes for five years. In 2023, there had been more than 300 students in the Region's reform schools, and during the 2023/24 academic year, more than 1 million students with disabilities had been enrolled at all levels of education, some of whom had been offered free university places. More than 50 per cent of refugees and more than 90 percent of displaced persons had benefited from extra classes delivered in the Arabic language. More than 80 university graduates and more than 1,000 school students belonged to the Roma community.

37. Free health-care services were available to mothers, newborn babies, children and adolescents through more than 1,000 health centres. There were more than 80 government hospitals and 60 community hospitals in the Region. More than 80 health-care projects had been implemented, and more than ID 20 billion per month was spent on such services by the Kurdistan Regional Government. Individuals living in poverty, the families of martyrs and political prisoners and persons with disabilities were offered a reduced price for any health-care services that were not free. In 2023, there had been more than 4 million visits to medical institutions, more than 7,000 children had been born and more than 4,000 caesareans had been performed. Committees of experts throughout the country made decisions on whether abortions could be carried out in exceptional circumstances.

38. **A representative of Iraq** said that the Government had used a model from the International Institute for Educational Planning to determine the national education budget, which was expected to increase until 2031. The most recent budget had been released early to facilitate preparations for the academic year, including the printing of schoolbooks and the renovation of schools. Iraq had joined the Bologna Process, and measures had been taken to achieve global educational standards. Several Iraqi universities appeared in the global rankings.

39. The Government was planning to build more than 150 hospitals and establish medical colleges in areas where there was a shortage of doctors.

40. **A representative of Iraq** said that poverty was one reason why students dropped out of school. More than ID 200,000 had therefore been allocated to scholarships for poor students at all levels of education.

41. **A representative of Iraq** said that several measures had been taken to combat drug use, including the issuance of a 2023 decree by the Council of Ministers on the establishment of rehabilitation centres and the adoption of a 2017 law on the provision of treatment for drug users in 11 governorates. Proposed amendments to the latter had been referred to the Council of State. In February 2024, rehabilitation centres had opened in Maysan and Baghdad. The Ministry of the Interior was carrying out work under the national strategy on combating drug use for 2023–2025 to tackle the root causes, such as youth unemployment, and provide drug detection kits. Local and national conferences had been held to raise awareness of the dangers of drugs and strengthen cooperation between the relevant bodies.

42. **A representative of Iraq** said that significant funds were allocated to controlling the country's borders to contain the movement of drugs. In 2023, there had been a decrease in the drugs trade. In February 2024, Iraq had signed an agreement with Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria that was designed to stem cross-border drug flows.

43. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** said that he wondered why fewer girls than boys were attending secondary education and what measures had been taken to address the imbalance. He would welcome data, disaggregated by sex, on access to higher education. He would like to know about the legal status of the national human rights plan for 2021–2025 and about any progress that had been made in the implementation of the plan, particularly with regard to the inclusion of human rights education in, and the elimination of gender stereotypes from, the school curriculum, the removal of such stereotypes from school textbooks, the prevention of school dropout among girls and the provision of education in minority languages.

44. He would welcome the delegation's comments on the death of Iraqi blogger Ayser Al-Khafaji and the safety of activists in general. Drawing the delegation's attention to paragraph 52 of the Committee's general comment No. 25 (2020) on science and economic, social and cultural rights, he said that he would be interested to hear about any measures designed to increase women's and girls' participation in scientific and technological fields.

45. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** said that in order to achieve prosperity in the State party, human rights education must cover economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights. While human rights were in a precarious position due to ongoing global events, it was important that international human rights mechanisms and standards continued to develop, including with the participation of the Arab world. Iraq had the capability to make a contribution in that regard, despite the challenges facing the country.

46. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he wished to know whether Iraq was a party to the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the Protocol thereto and, if so, whether those instruments had been fully incorporated into national law. He wondered whether any legislative steps had been taken to include in domestic law the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, particularly the provisions pertaining to the protection of cultural rights.

47. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would be interested to learn what obstacles or restrictions prevented the Government from allocating more resources to guarantee the right to education and whether those obstacles included the servicing of the public debt or other loan conditions. She wondered whether there was an internal mechanism to identify and address any conflicts between the provisions of sharia and international human rights law, particularly in terms of equal access to education.

48. **Ms. Saran** asked whether there was any truth to reports that there were elements of sectarianism in recruiting educators and developing curricula in schools and other education institutions.

49. **A representative of Iraq** said that the enrolment rates of male and female students at primary and secondary school levels were approximately equal. Female students outnumbered male students in preschool and higher education, while more males were enrolled in vocational training courses. Women accounted for more than 40 per cent of staff in universities and the Ministry of Education, though their representation among high-level administrative staff was lower. The Government's priorities were to increase education capacity to enrol more students and employ more staff, provide capacity-building to

educators and improve school curricula and teaching materials. However, insufficient financial and human resources posed a challenge.

50. Human rights education was mandatory at primary school level and was taught as a key part of a variety of subjects in secondary schools. The Government had recently implemented a project to improve education methodologies in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme, and plans were being developed to recruit teachers and educators from among top-performing students.

51. **A representative of Iraq** said that teachers were not appointed along sectarian lines. Iraq was a diverse country, and teachers' religious affiliations reflected those of the general population in each governorate. Some education was provided in the Kurdish and Assyrian languages. Iraq had acceded to the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, and legislation had been passed in 2020 to incorporate the provisions of the Protocol into national law.

52. **A representative of Iraq** said that under the Constitution, no legislation could be enacted that conflicted with sharia law, the principles of democracy or the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in the second chapter of the Constitution. Different sources of law prevailed in different areas. For example, in matters pertaining to inheritance and personal status, the tenets of sharia law were followed.

53. Marriage was allowed only under certain legal conditions, most of which were derived from sharia law and included legal competency and the consent of the spouses. The minimum age for marriage was 18 years. However, minors could marry from the age of 15 years at the discretion of a judge and subject to the decision of a committee that determined whether the intended spouses had the capacity to marry. Pursuant to the Personal Status Act, husbands who had forced their spouse into marriage were liable to punishment; the wife was not held responsible. An illegal marriage constituted grounds for separation and could be invoked by the wife.

54. **A representative of Iraq** said that the parliament was in the final stages of debating a bill on the protection of diversity and the rights of religious and ethnic minority groups. Meanwhile, the Government had adopted a range of measures in that area. Four consultants, who included specialists in the rights of minorities, ethnic diversity and matters related to the Yazidi and Sabaean Mandaean communities, had been appointed by the Prime Minister's Office. The Constitution described Iraq as a multi-ethnic country with great religious diversity and established that all citizens were equal before the law, irrespective of ethnicity or religion. Under the Yazidi Female Survivors Act No. 8 of 2021, temporary special measures had been established for the Yazidi community and more than 1,600 survivors had received reparations. A committee had been formed to search for such survivors and a ministerial decree had been issued to distribute plots of land to minority groups living in Nineveh. In Sinjar and Mosul, 50 dunums of land had been allocated for development, and more than 23,000 displaced families had returned to Sinjar.

55. Iraq had acceded to the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and a department had been established under the Ministry of Communications to protect cultural diversity. Archaeological and heritage sites were protected under Act No. 55 of 2002. The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities worked in cooperation with UNESCO to preserve archaeological sites using the most advanced techniques.

56. **A representative of Iraq** said that the Council of Ministers had approved a project to restore the city of Ur in line with UNESCO standards, and measures had been taken to protect the population of the Mesopotamian marshlands from the effects of climate change.

57. The Government had formed a committee to investigate the death of the activist blogger Ayser Al-Khafaji. According to preliminary evidence, his death had been unrelated to his political views, but the Government was unable to provide any further details until the committee released its findings.

58. **A representative of Iraq** said that by law, Peshmerga troops must be aged over 18 years. The authorities had published a list of more than 100 children who had gone missing or had disappeared in Iran following the chemical weapons attack in Halabjah in 1988. There

had been 6 children among the 20,000 individuals who had been convicted in 2020 for joining Da'esh.

59. The parliament was debating a bill to address early marriage between persons aged under 18 years, and steps were being taken to increase the number of marriages that took place in court. Textbooks were being distributed among students to raise awareness of reproductive health.

60. Between 2017 and 2023, the number of suicides had more than halved. In 2023, 81 cases of forced marriage and 15 cases of female genital mutilation had been registered. More than 1,000 victims of crimes committed by Da'esh had received psychological support in Germany, and a centre had been opened to provide services, including psychological support, to women. The Kurdistan Regional Government continued to provide assistance to Yazidi victims of enforced disappearance. Lastly, more than 1,000 individuals had been imprisoned for drug addiction.

61. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** said that he wished to thank the members of the delegation for their thorough and frank replies.

62. **A representative of Iraq**, thanking the Committee members for their constructive questions, said that additional information would be supplied in writing on a number of issues, including food security, the rights of persons with disabilities and the national ranking system for universities. The Government would continue to engage with stakeholders, including international organizations, to implement the Committee's recommendations.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.