



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
2 March 2023

Original: English

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Seventy-third session

Summary record of the 17th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 23 February 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Abdel-Moneim

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

Consideration of reports *(continued)*

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

Third periodic report of Yemen (continued) (E/C.12/YEM/3; E/C.12/YEM/Q/3; E/C.12/YEM/RQ/3)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Yemen joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair**, welcoming the Deputy Permanent Representative of Yemen to the meeting, explained that the other members of the delegation would be participating via video link. He invited the delegation to continue replying to the questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting.
3. **A representative of Yemen** said that the Government had taken action to address the issue of the recruitment of children into the armed forces and armed groups. The Joint Technical Committee on the Prevention of Child Recruitment, which had been brought into being under Council of Ministers Decree No. 91 of 2018, had appointed 80 focal points to monitor, inter alia, the Security Belt Forces and the Amaliqah Brigades across all military zones. Special training had been prepared for the focal points and was due to be delivered the following month. In addition, the Minister of Defence had recently issued an order which not only explicitly prohibited the recruitment of children but also envisaged the establishment of child protection units in all combat zones.
4. Government policies intended to combat the recruitment of children and to hold perpetrators to account were being implemented by key stakeholders: the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice and the Army Chief of Staff. It was thanks to such efforts that, in the most recent report of the United Nations Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/76/871–S/2022/493), the name of the pro-Government forces in Yemen, including the Yemeni armed forces, no longer appeared on the “B” list concerning the recruitment of children and their use in armed conflict.
5. Support in combating child recruitment had also been forthcoming from Saudi Arabia and other Arab States of the Gulf, and the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre had recently opened an office for the rehabilitation of child victims of recruitment in the governorate of Ma’rib.
6. **Mr. Ibrahim** (Yemen) said that the authorities were seeking to address the issue of birth registration in coordination with hospitals and health centres. Currently, in urban areas, between 70 and 75 per cent of births were duly registered, but the percentage in rural areas was only half that figure. In the course of 2020, registration documents had been issued to 150,000 persons in the capital, Aden. The problem arose chiefly in areas controlled by the Houthi terrorist militias, where no more than 40 per cent of births were being registered.
7. **A representative of Yemen** said that the question of food security was one of the Government’s foremost concerns. Action had been taken to identify the most important commodities, reduce customs tariffs and limit prices. In addition, high-level meetings had been held to manage food security in the light of the problems caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the war in Ukraine.
8. The northern part of Yemen, which was under the control of the Houthi terrorist militias, had once been the food basket for the entire country, and the Houthis were using food as a weapon of war. The legitimate Government was seeking to meet food deficits by providing subsidies for certain basic commodities, and it was working with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf with a view to creating food reserves. A project was being rolled out to facilitate the entry of vessels into Yemeni ports and a series of meetings had been held with the World Food Programme with a view to expediting the delivery of food aid. The Government was seeking to identify groups that were appropriating aid and selling it for profit.

9. **A representative of Yemen** said that the Government had met with representatives of United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations and had taken action to facilitate their operations inside Yemen. Memorandums of understanding had been signed and staff had been provided with entry visas and with work and residency permits. The authorities had not sought to interfere with humanitarian activities in any way or to impose local partners. Action had been taken to provide safe transit corridors. Only two cases of obstruction had been reported in areas under the control of the legitimate Government, and they had been found to be attributable to a lack of coordination among the parties involved.

10. Most international assistance came from States that were part of the Arab Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait. The Houthi terrorist militias sought to obstruct and interfere with the work of international aid organizations, and required them to work with certain local partners. Moreover, they sought to divert aid to their own supporters or to sell it in on the black market order to finance their military operations.

11. **A representative of Yemen** said that he had been surprised by the figure mentioned of 150 cases of obstruction of the movement of staff of international organizations. Each case of which the Government was aware had been dealt with by the competent authorities. It was important that international organizations should coordinate their activities with the legitimate government authorities and the failure of some of them to do so had sometimes led to problems. The Government actively sought to facilitate the work of such organizations and to help them to overcome any obstacles they might face. However, most of the difficulties arose in areas under the control of the Houthi terrorist militias, where six or seven humanitarian aid workers had been abducted and were still being held captive.

12. **A representative of Yemen**, noting that the question of khat cultivation had not been raised in the list of issues in relation to the periodic report (E/C.12/YEM/Q/3), said that it was, in any case, a localized problem that did not affect the entire country, and the statistics quoted on its extent and production rates were inaccurate. Since before the beginning of the war, the authorities had been expending considerable efforts to reduce the cultivation of khat and to replace it with cash crops. Moreover, as part of its efforts to promote food security, the Government had rolled out a new agricultural strategy and had established an agriculture and fisheries support fund.

13. **A representative of Yemen** said that the National Commission of Inquiry, which had been established in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolution 2140 (2014) to investigate alleged human rights violations, was consistent with international principles concerning the independence of such investigative bodies. Following extensive consultation with civil society, the members of the Commission had been chosen on the basis of their integrity and their expertise in the law and human rights. They travelled to areas of the country where human rights violations had occurred, visited places of detention, met with victims and sought to hold perpetrators to account. Thus far, 1,500 cases had been referred to prosecutors and the Commission had produced 10 annual reports, which had all been made public and had been discussed with international and regional human rights organizations. The Human Rights Council had recently issued its resolution 51/39 expressing its appreciation for the Commission's work and calling on the international community to provide it with the technical assistance and logistical support it required.

14. **A representative of Yemen** said that the exceptional circumstances Yemen was suffering from, as a result of the war and the COVID-19 pandemic, had had a devastating effect on the delivery of health services. In partnership with international stakeholders, mobile clinics had been set up in remote areas, action had been taken to detect contagious diseases and contain them before they could spread and campaigns on sexual and reproductive health had been run. To the extent possible in the light of the country's difficult economic circumstances, medicines and medical equipment had been supplied to hospitals and clinics.

15. The Government had taken a series of preventive and precautionary measures to combat COVID-19, including the temporary closure of land, sea and air borders. The Ministry of Health had set up monitoring and response teams, opened 23 centres in various governorates to treat victims of the epidemic and provided coronavirus-related training to 2,200 medical personnel, in line with World Health Organization protocols.

16. Health centres had been instructed to provide vaccines to everyone, including asylum-seekers and migrants, free of charge. Individuals had been given either two or three doses of the vaccine, depending on their circumstances. Around 1.2 million citizens had been vaccinated; most lived in areas under the Government's control.

17. Corruption was a pervasive problem, and the Ministry of Health was participating in the Government's efforts to combat it. It was also taking steps to encourage health-care professionals in the governorates of Ta'izz, Hadramawt and Aden to remain in the country rather than seek work abroad.

18. The wounded received care in either the military or the civilian health-care system. The number of persons wounded continued to rise, and a national commission would soon be established to address their needs, regardless of where they came from or how they had been wounded. New orthopaedic and prosthetic centres had been opened to meet the needs of the growing number of mine victims, increased psychological support was available to them and 10 training centres that had been set up for health workers would also be equipped to provide care for victims.

19. Some 5,500 medical facilities were in place in the various governorates under the Government's control, including some facilities specialized in the treatment of cardiovascular disease and cancer, physiotherapy and dialysis. The Government was working to build the capacity of the health system to provide organ transplant services domestically. The country's health facilities had around 21,500 hospital beds, some 2,900 of which were in maternity wards, and around 450 ambulances were in operation in the cities. The health workforce comprised regular and contractual employees. The country had only one doctor for every 100,000 Yemenis.

20. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** (Country Task Force) said that he would welcome additional information on the 150 incidents involving acts of violence against the staff of humanitarian aid agencies, which had been mentioned by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator in a statement to the Security Council on 16 January 2023. He wished to know whether the State party had launched any demining programmes and had sought international support for them where necessary; what types of health-care services were available to pregnant women; and what the rates of neonatal, child and maternal mortality were in the country. It would also be helpful to know whether the State party had encountered any obstacles in carrying out its COVID-19 vaccination campaign and whether it had received enough vaccines from the international community.

21. **Mr. Hennebel** (Country Rapporteur) said that he wished to learn whether the State party planned to have the National Commission of Inquiry's level of compliance with the Paris Principles assessed by an independent body. He would be interested to find out whether the public would be consulted on the terms under which the \$1 billion deposit planned to be made by the Government of Saudi Arabia in the Yemen Central Bank would be accepted, given that the parliament was currently not holding sessions; to what purposes the funds would be put; whether the public would be able to monitor how the funds were spent; and what steps would be taken to prevent misappropriation of the funds. He would be grateful for information on measures to combat food insecurity and to end corporal punishment in schools and would welcome clarification as to whether the State party planned to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

22. **Mr. Ibrahim** (Yemen) said that any additional information available on the 150 incidents referred to by Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente would be provided in writing. A genuine assessment of the independence of the National Commission of Inquiry had been conducted through the reports that it had made to the Human Rights Council. They had generated no observations and the information provided in them had been commended. There was no government interference in the work of the Commission.

23. Although the parliament was not meeting regularly, it had convened twice to discuss the budget and was expected to hold another session to discuss economic matters, including the planned deposit by the Government of Saudi Arabia. Laws were in place and decisions had been issued by the Ministry of Education to prevent violence against students. Regarding the possible accession of Yemen to the Optional Protocol, under the Constitution and laws

of Yemen, individuals were already entitled to approach domestic courts to seek enforcement of their rights. There was therefore no need to turn to international mechanisms.

24. **A representative of Yemen** said that the maternal mortality rate was 158 per 100,000 births. There had been positive international cooperation in the provision of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines.

25. **Mr. Ibrahim** (Yemen) said that the Houthi militias rejected vaccinations as heresy, and used that rejection as a way of exercising pressure on the international community.

26. **A representative of Yemen** said that the Government was strongly committed to providing education for all, a right guaranteed in its legislation. The Ministry of Education provided support for basic education, and the Supreme Council of Universities dealt with higher education. Centres for compensatory education and literacy had also been opened. However, the ongoing conflict in the country had affected the Government's capacity with regard to education.

27. According to the most recent survey, there were 5 million students enrolled in schools, including over 3 million female students. There were 18,000 operational schools, and educational partners had contributed to the building and maintenance of 1,700 schools, including the addition of over 100 classrooms. However, more schools and classrooms were needed and 140,000 teachers were not receiving their full salary. Bags with school supplies had been provided to 700,000 students, including more than 300,000 female students. The Ministry of Education had provided textbooks; however, some students still had to go without them.

28. A specialized unit for internally displaced persons had coordinated with the Ministry of Education to enrol more than 400,000 internally displaced students in schools and exempt them from paying school fees. Identity documents had been provided to students in need of them and teaching facilities had been set up in rural areas with no schools.

29. Support had also been provided to children with learning difficulties, and 22,000 students had been authorized to sit exams to finish secondary education, despite not fulfilling the official requirements. Courses had been developed for various types of education, with priority on community and compensatory education outside schools.

30. The Ministry of Education had a special unit working on education for girls and, through collaboration with partners, had opened girls' schools and launched livelihood programmes. However, several initiatives within girls' education had ceased and Yemen hoped for generous international support for their resumption.

31. **A representative of Yemen** said that the war waged by the Houthi militias had destroyed a large number of heritage sites through bombing, pillaging and attacks on public and private property. The trafficking of cultural heritage was then used to finance the militias' activities. A series of preventive measures had therefore been taken, including the creation of a central governmental body to produce lists of cultural sites and museum artefacts and to facilitate the monitoring of cultural wealth. The Government was also working with partners, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and academic institutions abroad, on projects for the monitoring and protection of world heritage sites.

32. A framework was in place for the collection of resources and their distribution to museums. A number of artefacts would be repatriated to Yemen following their illegal removal from the territory, and a partnership with Egyptian authorities had provided training for Yemen museum personnel. Border control had been increased in provinces under government control and a national body was cooperating with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) to combat the illegal removal of artefacts from museums.

33. Nevertheless, in spite of the measures taken, the Houthi militias had refused to support the Government's cultural initiatives or to respect the country's commitment to preserving cultural sites from military action. Cultural preservation would therefore currently only be possible if peace was restored.

34. **Mr. Ibrahim** (Yemen) said that the ethnic fanaticism and racist extremism of the Houthi militias were the primary challenges facing Yemen. The Government hoped that the

militias would find reason, contribute to the respect of universal values and align themselves once more with the legitimate Government.

35. **Mr. Shen** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to know if the Government intended to increase the budget for education. He would also welcome information on whether there had been any investigation into the use of educational institutions and cultural sites for military purposes by government forces and their allies. Lastly, he wondered what steps the Government had taken or planned to take in order to offer human rights education in schools and to the general population.

36. **Mr. Hennebel** said that he would be interested to know what measures had been taken by the State party to ensure that all teachers' salaries were paid, that no school or educational facility was used for military purposes, and that all schools and educational facilities were equipped with water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

37. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he wished to know what steps the State party had taken recently towards finally ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which contained provisions that were relevant to the rights under the Covenant, and whether the delegation might indicate a tentative time frame for that ratification.

38. **A representative of Yemen** said that the percentage of the national budget allocated to education stood at 17 per cent in 2022, a figure that represented an increase compared to previous years: in 2017, it had been only 14 per cent. The deposit at the Central Bank was a concessional loan, the purpose of which, in accordance with the terms agreed between the Central Bank and the Saudi side, was to stabilize the national currency and ensure food security by covering the cost of basic foodstuffs.

39. **A representative of Yemen** said that, according to reports from both local and international organizations, mines were being laid exclusively by the Houthi militias, including in populated areas. The Government was pushing forward demining efforts in cooperation with the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre. Regarding the ratification of international instruments, in 2022, the Cabinet had approved a number of Conventions, including the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the texts of which were now before the parliament.

40. **Mr. Ibrahim** said that, since 2004, the Government had been discussing reforms to the school curriculum with a view to ensuring the inclusion of a human rights component. Lectures and symposia on human rights were delivered at universities, and specialist training in international humanitarian law was available for magistrates. While the Government's commitment to education was unwavering, its efforts had been curtailed by the situation in Yemen in recent years.

41. **A representative of Yemen** said that, as an outcome of various workshops, including one held in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund, the Ministry of Education had decided to mainstream human rights principles into secondary-level education. However, owing to the lack of available resources, the Ministry had been unable to put that decision into effect.

42. **Mr. Hennebel** said that the State party should be commended for participating in an interactive dialogue with the Committee and for its efforts to protect human rights during a time of war in Yemen.

43. **Mr. Al-Foqumi** (Yemen) said that his delegation was grateful for the Committee's understanding of the factors and difficulties affecting the degree of fulfilment of his Government's obligations under the Covenant and was hopeful that the next interactive dialogue would take place against a backdrop of peace, not war, in Yemen.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.