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Summary record of the 10th meeting*

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Friday, 17 February 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Abdel-Moneim

Contents

Consideration of reports (*continued*)

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

Fifth periodic report of Portugal (continued)

* No summary record was issued for the 9th meeting.

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

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

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

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Portugal joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair** invited the delegation of Portugal to continue replying to the questions put by Committee members at the previous day's meeting.
3. **A representative of Portugal** said that the Recovery and Resilience Plan included an innovative strategy, backed up by nearly €270,000 in funding, to increase the efficiency of the justice system, which should have a significant impact on both individuals and businesses. Progress had been made in the digitization and modernization of the justice system services, including automating the renewal of citizens' identity cards. Identity cards for newborns would be issued by post free of charge if the birth was registered online within 20 days. Other initiatives to streamline the justice system included systems for online consultation of legal cases and criminal records and projects to develop interoperable systems to ensure the availability of information that was clear, accessible and usable.
4. **A representative of Portugal** said that legal aid was available for persons of limited means who wished to submit communications to the human rights treaty bodies.
5. **A representative of Portugal** said that, according to Eurostat, the gender pay gap in Portugal was 11.4 per cent, which was less than the European Union average. The Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security website gave detailed statistics, disaggregated by age, seniority, education level, size of company and region. Act No. 60/2018, on measures to promote equal pay for women and men for equal work or work of equal value, used various means to encourage companies to narrow wage gaps. Around 28,000 firms had now joined the Pay Gap Barometer scheme enabling them to assess and correct their own wage gap, for example. An annual award had been created for those achieving a pay gap of between -1 and 1 per cent; since late 2022, the award been granted to some 17,500 companies.
6. The data compiled by the Ministry could be used by the Labour Inspectorate. In February 2023, for example, 1,500 employers had been notified of significant wage gaps and encouraged to draw up a plan to rectify them. Since 2019, the Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment had received six requests under Act No. 60/2018 for an opinion on wage discrimination. In two cases, gender-based wage discrimination had been found and a binding opinion issued, which had been communicated to the employers concerned, their employees and the Labour Inspectorate. An independent commission was studying the matter of pay equality and was due to release its findings shortly.
7. **A representative of Portugal** said that, as part of efforts to balance working life, personal life and family life, parental rights were enshrined in both the Constitution and labour law. The latter had been strengthened in 2015, when provisions reflecting the Decent Work Agenda had been incorporated. Among other measures, the parental leave system had been reinforced in order to promote equality between men and women. Leave specifically for the father had been increased from 20 to 28 days and the amount of shared leave had been increased. Parents of children who were chronically ill or had a disability had the right to work from home, a leave allowance had been introduced for adoptive and foster parents and compassionate leave in the event of death of a spouse had been increased from 5 to 20 days. Informal caregivers had been granted additional leave time and the right to more flexible or part-time work; they were also better protected in the event of dismissal or discrimination.
8. Further measures had been adopted in November 2022 to help workers in both the private and the public sectors to reconcile personal, professional and family life. They incorporated the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition, guidelines had been published to facilitate the implementation of the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination, with examples of best practice for promoting better work-life balance.

9. **A representative of Portugal** said that the national and local support centres for migrant integration provided one-stop-shop access to a range of services at no cost for asylum-seekers and other migrants. Consideration was being given to a proposal to digitize the files of asylum-seekers and thereby speed up the processing of asylum applications.

10. **A representative of Portugal** said that, in an effort to prevent hate crimes and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, steps had been taken as from 2022 to reinforce training for police officers who were in contact with the public. The aim was to enable them to identify situations of risk or potential discrimination in relation to that group.

11. **Mr. Bastos** (Portugal) said that a recent study had found that Portugal was one of the countries that differentiated least between its own nationals and migrants in terms of access to social protection. Its migrant integration policy had yielded good results in terms of the sustainability of social security, and levels of trust in the system were high. A newly established commission was looking into the sustainability of social security, in coordination with civil society and other partners and with technical support from the International Labour Organization. It was due to report by the end of the year.

12. The Government saw housing as a cross-cutting issue. The Prime Minister had recently unveiled a package of measures to ensure the right to housing. The aim was to increase the availability of housing and protect families by simplifying building permit procedures, improving the rental market and combating speculation.

13. Zero tolerance of violence of all kinds, but particularly violence against vulnerable groups, was a characteristic of Portuguese society as a whole. Not only the State but also civil society and the media were all extremely sensitive to the issue.

14. **A representative of Portugal** said that an independent stabilization fund had been set up in 1989 in order to guarantee the sustainability of social security. It was funded from workers' contributions, property sales and other financial earnings, and the growth in employment had ensured a consistent influx of new funding. The fund was essentially a reserve for the payment of pensions and benefits in the event that social security spending exceeded income. Although it had never yet been needed, the Government had made it a priority to strengthen the fund by diversifying the sources of financing, for example by drawing on various kinds of tax revenue.

15. **A representative of Portugal** said that her Government recognized that population ageing, and the resulting demographic imbalance, was becoming a challenge. It was attempting to address the issue by means of strategies to encourage active ageing and to combat vulnerability and isolation among older persons, particularly those living in poverty. The solidarity pension for older persons had been increased, and some 150,000 older persons were now receiving home support.

16. The Social Radar Programme had been launched in Lisbon as a means of supporting older persons, particularly those living in isolation. The Recovery and Resilience Plan had made it possible to extend the programme nationwide. Teams would be set up in municipalities to identify older persons living in isolation and provide them with support through community projects. In addition to the €60 million available under the Social Radar Programme, financing was also available to extend the national network for continuing care and home support and for innovative services such as shared housing, in order to enable older persons to live at home if they so wished. A programme had recently been introduced to offer residential places to older persons who were unable to go home on discharge from hospital. A significant percentage of situations of domestic violence concerned older persons. The National Social Emergency hotline was available round the clock to respond to all such incidents. In 2022, 13 per cent of the calls received on the hotline had concerned older persons.

17. **A representative of Portugal** said that the Government had been applying a comprehensive approach to gender-based violence in general and violence against women in particular. One innovation had been the creation of a multidisciplinary team to conduct retrospective analyses of cases of homicide resulting from domestic violence and make recommendations to improve the handling of such cases. Publicity campaigns were

conducted to combat domestic violence at the national level, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that worked with victims received financial support from the Government.

18. Between 2019 and 2022, the number of charges of domestic violence brought by the prosecution services had risen from just over 5,000 to around 5,300. The number of cases that had been provisionally suspended and not gone to trial had fallen dramatically, from 2,400 in 2019 to 1,300 in 2022. Currently, 955 individuals were serving prison sentences for domestic violence. The Justice Ministry, in partnership with the prosecution service and victims' NGOs, had created six centres for victim support since 2019, with two more planned for the current year. Compensation was often ordered by the court even if the victim did not request it. In 2021 the State had paid out €152,000 in compensation through the Justice Ministry to victims who found themselves in a situation of severe economic need because of the crimes committed against them.

19. **A representative of Portugal** said that there were 66 crisis centres and shelters in the country, offering 895 places overall. In the shelters, 631 of the places were for women and 10 for men.

20. **A representative of Portugal** said that, in terms of social protection for victims of domestic violence, financial assistance was available for a transitional period to enable them to restructure their family situation, and the State budget included provision for extended unemployment benefits for victims.

21. **A representative of Portugal** said that social transfers in the form of retirement and survivors' pensions had reduced the risk of poverty by 22 percentage points in 2021. Social transfers for illness or disability, for families and for unemployment had reduced the risk of poverty by around 5 percentage points, an improvement on the previous year. A national study had been launched with a view to combating poverty by improving the social transfer system and simplifying it by introducing a single social benefit that could be granted to those eligible for non-contributory pensions.

22. **A representative of Portugal** said that 9,400 individuals were registered under the National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People. Monitoring had shown that, since 2020, more than 1,000 places had been created in dwellings of different kinds and over 700 homeless persons had been given a place to live and were doing so independently. Under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, €3 million had been set aside for such reintegration communities. Assistance was also available under a temporary emergency housing scheme.

23. **A representative of Portugal**, replying to the question asked about the relocation and housing of families of African descent, said that local housing strategies were drawn up on the basis of two principles, namely social integration and participation. Priority was given to solutions that prevented social segregation and ensured the full integration of persons in need of housing into the local community. Participation was ensured by involving residents' associations in the preparation and implementation of housing plans. Vulnerable groups such as Roma and persons in a situation of homelessness were also included in the discussions. Solutions might involve demolishing rundown buildings and rehousing elsewhere, as in the Jamaica district of the city of Seixal, where housing solutions had been negotiated with all stakeholders.

24. Local housing strategies were required to be validated by the National Institute for Housing and Urban Renewal. Municipalities could be held accountable by the Institute in the event of failure to adhere to the principles of social integration and participation, which were applicable in all cases, including in relation to the relocation of families of African descent.

25. The Recovery and Resilience Plan included policies to address housing problems in high-density areas, especially for middle-income families who could not afford to pay market prices for rent. A total of €740 million had been set aside under the Plan to create some 6,800 properties, which would be rented at affordable rates in both Lisbon and environs. Other affordable housing programmes were also in place in Lisbon. Recently announced housing measures included the simplification of permit procedures for the conversion of commercial properties to affordable housing. State-owned property that was currently unoccupied would be made available for rent, and other unoccupied property would be rented by the State and

then sub-let. Mechanisms would also be put in place making it compulsory to rent out unoccupied apartments. Tax incentives currently in place for tourist accommodation would be shifted to encourage the rental of such accommodation as permanent housing, and a subsidy would be paid to families whose rental costs exceeded 35 per cent of their income. For 2023, in the current context of high inflation, landlords would only be able to increase rental costs on new and renewed contracts by a maximum of 2 per cent. The “Porta 65-Jovem” programme provided subsidized rental support to young people. In 2022, the threshold for eligibility had been raised and, in 2023, the programme’s funding would be increased in order to double the number of beneficiaries.

26. **A representative of Portugal** said that Portugal had been one of the first countries in the world to enshrine the right to a healthy environment in its Constitution. Climate change was one of the three pillars of the Recovery and Resilience Plan; a basic climate law had been adopted in 2021; and a road map for achieving carbon neutrality was in place. Portugal had been the first country in Europe without nuclear energy to stop the use of coal, the share of renewable energy had been increased to 60 per cent in 2021 and two new solar energy plants would be built by 2025. A further 10 gigawatts of energy would be produced from offshore wind farms by 2030.

27. Air quality in Portugal had improved thanks to a general reduction of pollutant emissions, but problems remained, such as the high concentration of nitrogen dioxide in urban areas. A national strategy to improve air quality had been introduced in 2016, and relevant measures taken in Lisbon included the introduction of a low emissions zone, the reduction of public transport costs, free public transport for those under 23 and over 65 years of age and incentives for the use of electric vehicles.

28. An Innovation Agenda for Agriculture 2020–2030 addressed issues of intensive farming and a National Strategy for Organic Farming was in place. The area of land farmed organically in the country had been increased. Studies were ongoing following claims that apples and pears from Portugal had contained high concentrations of pesticides, but data going back to 2020 had suggested that 94 per cent of samples from the country met legal standards.

29. Although there was room for improvement with regard to waste treatment, progress had been made. For example, several municipalities in the Greater Porto area had pooled waste treatment resources; as a result, just 2 per cent of waste in those areas ended up in landfills. The Government would continue to promote its Plan of Action for a Circular Economy and had reached an agreement with some 50 businesses to eliminate single-use plastics.

30. **A representative of Portugal** said that a range of structural measures had been introduced to address the shortage of doctors in health-care services during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as incentives for medical professionals to relocate outside major cities, pay increases and improvements to working conditions through investments in infrastructure. There had also been investment in telehealth, and €467 million had been allocated under the Recovery and Resilience Plan to finance the reform of and improve access to primary health care. Guidelines had been developed for the treatment and rehabilitation of persons suffering from sequelae of COVID-19, including long COVID.

31. The right to health was enshrined in the Portuguese constitution, and the National Health Service offered universal coverage free of charge. Care was therefore guaranteed for all residents of Portugal, regardless of their legal status. Migrants with irregular status had free access to public health care in cases involving urgent care or communicable diseases that could jeopardize public health; they also had guaranteed access to maternal and child health care, sexual and reproductive health care and vaccinations. Intersectoral groups had been created to support access to health care for asylum-seekers. To remove language barriers to health care, the High Commission for Migration had set up a language line that provided information in 69 languages.

32. Maternity facilities functioned on a rotational model, which had been developed following studies involving health professionals and patients. To date, no situations had arisen in which the health of women had been put at risk as a result of the model.

33. **A representative of Portugal** said that the Ministry of Health, the Ministry for the Environment and Climate Action and Statistics Portugal were defining a methodology to calculate the level of mortality attributable to environmental air pollution, in line with the relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators. The resulting data could be used to develop measures for monitoring population health in the areas at greatest risk.

34. The steady and significant decrease in the number of drug users in Portugal was not only the result of the decriminalization of drug possession and use, but also of a consistent national health-based approach to the issue, focusing on prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. A positive trend had been seen in indicators related to communicable diseases, including a drop in the number of cases of HIV infection. In 2021, only 2.3 per cent of new cases of HIV infection had been linked to drug use.

35. The autonomous regions of Madeira and the Azores had autonomy in the organization, financing and development of their regional health services and in the execution of health policies. The Basic Health Act ensured a link to continental Portugal with regard to access to necessary health care. Regional strategies for mental health were in place and would receive specific investment under the Recovery and Resilience Plan.

36. **Mr. Abashidze** (Country Task Force) said that he would welcome information on the measures taken by the Government to prevent school dropout and school failure, especially among Roma children and children with disabilities. He would also be interested to learn of any strategies or plans in place to improve digital literacy among older persons. He wondered whether there had been any recognition of the formal and informal barriers created by pushing students of African descent towards vocational education rather than higher education and, if so, what measures were envisaged to remove such barriers. Given that measures under the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities were targeting a relatively low number of persons, he wondered what further plans were in place to accelerate progress in that area. Data on the number of available social scholarships for higher education, including for disadvantaged groups, had been provided in absolute terms rather than as percentages. He would be grateful if the delegation would clarify the situation and provide more detailed information about education and training for adults.

37. He would welcome further information on the targets of the National Arts Plan 2019–2024 for involving marginalized groups in cultural activities and for the restitution of cultural property to countries of origin. He would also welcome further information on the level of spending allocated for cultural rights. Information on the development of multicultural classrooms and on the inclusion of cultural diversity in education and curricula would also be useful. A report of the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent had noted that the primacy of the European dialect of Portuguese was acting as a driver of persistent racial profiling, with serious impacts in the area of education. He would be grateful if the delegation would clarify the situation and provide information on the measures to be taken to address the issue. Lastly, he would like further information about cultural networks in the country, including the network of theatres, and about access to museums.

The meeting was suspended at 4.24 p.m. and resumed at 4.35 p.m.

38. **A representative of Portugal** said that a learning recovery plan introduced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic aimed to prevent school dropout through the allocation of resources to schools, preparation of personal development plans, psychosocial support and promotion of emotional well-being and community involvement. Schools were given flexibility to manage their curriculum as they considered appropriate for their pupils and to organize the academic year in order to accommodate students' needs. Such measures had helped to increase the number of students from the Roma community who were enrolled in school and had completed primary education and entered secondary school.

39. Schools had multidisciplinary teams to support inclusive education for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Such teams included a psychologist and were responsible for identifying existing barriers to learning and drawing up a programme to address them. In some cases, individual students could be offered support in the form of tutors and mentors, for which purpose investment had been increased.

40. Schools tended to be multicultural owing to the increasing number of children who came from a variety of cultural backgrounds and countries and who spoke a plethora of languages. Although Portuguese was the language of instruction, among themselves schoolchildren could express themselves freely in any language they wished. The national teacher training programme was designed to prepare teachers for an inclusive educational environment. Indicators that had been devised specifically for Portugal in the light of studies by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Commission and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education made it possible to monitor the application of inclusive education principles. The overarching idea was that diversity made for added value in schools and improved learning.

41. **A representative of Portugal** said that, in the field of adult education, the “Qualifica” Programme was aimed at upgrading qualifications and thereby improving employment prospects. The courses were flexible and of variable duration and enabled adults to complete their primary or secondary education and gain the requisite social, scientific and professional skills for joining the labour force. Some courses encompassed the acquisition of key technological skills. More than 800,000 adults had enrolled in the Programme since 2017.

42. **A representative of Portugal** said that, under the National Plan for the Arts, the number of schools with cultural projects had quadrupled since 2019. Resident artists served as mentors for artistic and cultural projects, which were then presented to the local community. An effort was made to reflect the multiplicity of pupils’ cultural backgrounds in those projects.

43. **A representative of Portugal** said that the number of grants given to university students had risen in the wake of new measures taken by the Government to widen eligibility criteria. The percentage of grants given to students with disabilities accounted for 1 to 2 per cent of the total, while social assistance scholarships made up 92 per cent. Ethnic and racial criteria were not taken into account in the awarding of those scholarships. However, a small number of grants were reserved for students from Portuguese-speaking countries. In addition, the Government paid the tuition fees of some students and subsidized their food and housing. The 2022/23 academic year had seen a 10 per cent rise in the amount of higher education grants, and the number of social assistance grants awarded would increase in 2023.

44. **A representative of Portugal** said that an external evaluation of the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities was to be conducted with a view to determining its impact. Two programmes had been set up to encourage the involvement of the Roma community in the implementation of the Strategy. One, the Support Fund for the Strategy, had provided financial assistance to several civil society organizations for projects that contributed to the achievement of the Strategy’s objectives, with 26 such projects having received support. The other programme supported Roma associations and encouraged Roma participation in local community measures to implement the priorities of the National Strategy. That programme had financed a total of 21 projects.

45. **A representative of Portugal** said that, as part of the measures to further the digital transition and improve the population’s digital skills, a set of training programmes had been introduced that would have the added benefit of enhancing employability and professional mobility. Since 2017, basic, refresher and advanced training had been offered under a digital skills promotion initiative known as INCoDe 2030, which had also sought to promote gender equality with regard to digital skills. Additional funding under the Recovery and Resilience Plan had made it possible to increase investment in programmes for youth and adults, enabling them to achieve a basic level of digital literacy, improve their qualifications and acquire specialized skills in digital technology.

46. **A representative of Portugal** said that, in 2023, there had been a 23 per cent increase in appropriations in the national budget for cultural rights, which currently stood at €260.3 million. Consideration was being given to the steps required for the restitution of cultural property. The National Plan for the Arts included measures designed to improve access to culture for marginalized and vulnerable groups. Each school and community identified the areas to be covered in cultural programmes in accordance with the characteristics of their populations. Specific programmes coordinated with the Directorate for Reintegration and Prison Services supplied prison libraries and carried out other cultural activities in prisons.

The Network of Theatres with Accessible Programming set up in 2019 comprised 80 theatres and cinemas, including some in the autonomous regions of Madeira and the Azores. The Portuguese Contemporary Art Network had been created in 2021. The Strategy for the Promotion of Accessibility and Inclusion in Museums, Monuments and Palaces sought to identify obstacles to physical and digital accessibility and define ways of overcoming them. Staff of cultural institutions were trained to be aware of the importance of ensuring accessibility. The Cultural Heritage Directorate had two ombudsmen who dealt with matters of accessibility.

47. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Country Task Force, said efforts to combat poverty should be understood and implemented in the light of article 11 of the Covenant, which referred to an “adequate standard of living” for everyone and required States parties to ensure the continuous improvement of living conditions. Of course, the nature of poverty varied from country to country and there might be pockets of poverty within a country, and it might take some time to address the causes of structural poverty. Almost all governments had to contend with public debt. A frequently heard argument in that context was that higher social expenditure inevitably led to greater public debt. However, moves to shrink the public debt should not impede the fulfilment of the rights embodied in the Covenant.

48. **Mr. Nonthasoot** (Country Task Force) said that the State party should incorporate the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in its national legal framework. Until such time as the State had party done so and also adopted its Action Plan on Responsible Business Conduct and Human Rights, he urged it to ensure that all businesses in its territory and under its control abroad were made aware of their responsibility to undertake mandatory human rights due diligence, in line 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. In addition, it would be advisable to use the same incentives as those deployed under the programme to combat the gender pay gap to reduce the use of temporary work contracts in order that workers might be employed for a long enough period to become eligible for social security benefits.

49. **Ms. Lee** said that she wished to know if the Government had conducted or commissioned a study of the causes of increasing manifestations of racism and hate speech in Portugal. She wondered whether ethnic and racial minorities were being made the scapegoats of deeply rooted social problems, such as unemployment, poverty, inequality and the shortage of affordable housing. She would also like to know whether the National Plan for Combating Racism and Discrimination 2021–2025 included policies to address unemployment and poverty among different ethnic groups. She was also curious to know whether the National Plan foresaw a role for political leaders and online platforms in combating racism, discrimination and hate speech.

50. **Ms. Rossi** said that she wished to know what emergency care was available for migrants in an irregular situation and whether consideration was being given to broadening the medical services available to those persons. Did asylum-seekers and refugees receive emergency medical care? She would also appreciate an assessment of whether the cash benefits granted to refugees, migrants, persons with disabilities and older persons who did not receive a pension were sufficient to ensure an adequate standard of living. Furthermore, she wished to know whether the State party reported to the International Monetary Fund on the steps it took to safeguard economic, social and cultural rights in view of the fact that the Fund’s conditions for making loans implied the furtherance of those and other human rights. Lastly, she wondered whether, in other forums, Portugal advocated the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Basic Principles on Sovereign Debt Restructuring Processes set out in General Assembly resolution 69/319 and the Guiding Principles for human rights impact assessments for economic reform policies.

51. **Mr. Windfuhr**, noting that adopting the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights would be a helpful step forward in terms of drawing up the international treaty that Portugal was keen to establish, said that he would like to know whether the significant delays affecting social benefit payments, which had been criticized by the Ombudsman in recent years, were still an issue. It would also be useful to learn whether a hotline or similar service had been set up to respond more effectively to complaints from social housing tenants, for example when utilities were cut off. In the light of the challenges posed by climate

change, the fact that the State party had closed all of its coal-fired power stations was to be commended.

52. **Mr. Caunhye** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would like to know what was being done to ensure independence and impartiality in the method used to appoint the Ombudsman and deputies in the Office of the Ombudsman and to protect them against dismissal and government interference.

53. **Mr. Bastos** (Portugal) said that the national strategy for combating poverty was designed to address regional differences, foster continuous improvement in living standards and allow all people to benefit from economic development. It was important to keep the public debt in check in order not to overburden future generations, but that should not mean cutting social expenditure, since the latter had to be seen as a productive factor. Indeed, providing all of society with the same opportunities would have a beneficial effect on the economy.

54. The response to discrimination and, in particular, hate speech, which had been on the increase on social media, needed to be multidimensional. The Government was endeavouring to address the problem through initiatives in the education system, but collective responsibility needed to be exercised on an ongoing basis by the media and the main actors in public life. Any tendency to stray away from a message of respect and tolerance for others needed a robust and unequivocal reaction.

55. **A representative of Portugal** said that the Government was committed to adopting the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights as soon as possible. The introduction of an international treaty was not an urgent necessity from the Government's point of view. Rather, it wished to help build greater consensus around the idea among United Nations Member States and was hopeful that a treaty that could give binding force to the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights could come into being in the not too distant future.

56. The Office of the Ombudsman, deputies included, acted with complete independence, in line with the Paris Principles and as stipulated by the country's Constitution. The Ombudsman was elected by the Assembly of the Republic without any political interference and was accredited by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions with A status.

57. **A representative of Portugal** said that any condition that put a patient's life at risk was deemed an emergency. However, health care for migrants was not limited to such care. Migrants also had access to sexual and reproductive health care, maternal and child health care, vaccinations and treatment of infectious diseases. Asylum-seekers and refugees enjoyed the same rights as citizens with regard to access to the national health service.

58. **A representative of Portugal** said that social benefits, in particular income support to help people maintain decent living standards, were a national priority. Owing to the complex and multifaceted nature of poverty, social indicators of the risk of poverty and exclusion took into account aspects such as people's ability to heat their homes and quality of diet as well as financial factors. Increases in old-age pensions and in the child allowance and other social benefits had enhanced social protection.

59. **A representative of Portugal** said that a digital transformation process was under way as part of a major overhaul of the relationship between the social security system, businesses and individuals, aimed at increasing efficiency, transparency and user-friendliness. In order to allow people easier access to their rights, computer systems had been upgraded and bureaucratic procedures had been simplified, and a greater number of benefits were now paid automatically. Staff were being trained in the new processes and support provided to users of the online system. Individuals could now obtain a social security number immediately, and access to pensions had been speeded up from an average of 101 days to 21 days. It was hoped that automating the process would eventually help reduce that time to seven days.

60. **A representative of Portugal** said that an agreement had been signed between the Government and social partners in 2022 to help increase the minimum wage in a sustained way, promote job creation and combat the gender wage gap. The national poverty reduction

strategy recognized that poverty was a complex phenomenon and went far beyond the reduction of financial poverty.

61. **The Chair** said that he was hopeful that the Government's efforts in relation to poverty and the public debt would help bring the State party ever closer to the realization of the rights enshrined in article 6 of the Covenant, namely full and productive employment.

62. **Mr. Caunhye** said that he was encouraged by both the delegation's commitment to engage in a wide-ranging, thorough and constructive dialogue and the State party's positive attitude to promoting human rights, in particular those enshrined by the Covenant.

63. **Mr. Bastos** (Portugal), recalling the progress his country had seen since the Carnation Revolution almost 50 years earlier and the democratic changes that had ensued, said that Portugal was fully committed to promoting and protecting all human rights. The Covenant was a cornerstone in pursuing that goal. Progress made since the previous dialogue with the Committee had been achieved in particularly trying circumstances marked by recovery from the financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts to receive and integrate migrants and refugees as well as a recent unexpected rise in inflation. The Government was proud of the advances made with regard to the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights in Portugal, but was well aware that much remained to be done.

The meeting rose at 18.05 p.m.