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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Thirty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD (PARTIAL)* OF THE 37th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Thursday, 11 November 2004, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BONOAN-DANDAN

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* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS (agenda item 6)

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT

Fourth periodic report of Denmark (E/C.12/4/Add.12; E/C.12/Q/DEN/2; HR/CESCR/NONE/2004/6; HRI/CORE/1/Add.58) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Denmark resumed their places at the Committee table.
2. Mr. VINTHEN (Denmark) said that since the submission of the fourth periodic report (E/C.12/4/Add.12) his Government had taken action to improve conditions for research and development, in order to increase the wealth of the nation and to ensure the distribution of new information and results to the general public, government research institutions and universities. Measures had been taken to improve the transfer of knowledge and technology between research institutions and trade and industry. Research institutions and universities were permitted to form and own independent public enterprises for the purpose of technology transfer. The rights of individual researchers to enjoy the financial rewards of their work were safeguarded. Danish legislation recognized individuals, groups of individuals and juridical persons as holders of property rights. Written information would be forwarded to the Committee on the links between intellectual property rights, the export of medicines and Denmark's position as a leading producer of pharmaceuticals.
3. Ms. BARNHOLT (Denmark), turning to the issue of bilingual children and language teaching, said that the principal goals of language teaching were: to ensure that children derived maximum benefit from the education system; to facilitate entry into the labour market and integration into Danish society for adults; and to ensure protection of the right to linguistic, religious and cultural freedom. The number of bilingual teachers in Denmark was increasing, since schools had recognized the advantages of employing teachers who spoke Danish as a second language. The number of first and second-generation immigrants who had obtained qualifications in the Danish language had increased considerably over the past three years.
4. Education, rather than school attendance, was compulsory under the Danish Constitution. The vast majority of children attended State schools, approximately 10 per cent attended private schools, and less than 1 per cent were educated at home. In cases of home education, municipal bodies were responsible for ensuring that Ministry of Education targets were met and that curricula used in the home were monitored. In schools, teaching methods and curricula were monitored by the school board, which comprised parents, school staff, the head teacher and local government representatives.
5. Although methods of monitoring home teaching varied between municipalities, the authorities took their responsibilities very seriously and visited parents on a regular basis. Children who were educated at home were invited to sit national exams in State-run schools. The number of specialized private schools in Denmark had increased considerably over recent years. All private schools took the Ministry of Education's goals as their main objective.

Curricula were defined by the school board, and such schools were only visited by a Ministry of Education representative in the event that a complaint was lodged against them. Folk schools focused on familiarizing children with Danish and other cultures, and on increasing their understanding of man's interaction with nature. They prepared the children for active participation in society, increasing their awareness of their rights and duties, and building on the broad values of intellectual freedom, equality and democracy.

6. Many programmes were being organized to encourage the integration of immigrant children into Danish society through participation in leisure and other extra-curricular activities with Danish children. Funding for such activities was raised through local events with the participation of ethnic minority organizations.

7. Mr. VINTHEN (Denmark) said that Denmark provided assistance to developing countries within the context of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Denmark had been active in the development of the Doha Declaration on the trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS) and public health, and would continue to ensure that the Declaration and the decision of the WTO General Council of 30 August 2003 were implemented as effectively as possible. The final provision on a waiver contained in that WTO decision would be integrated swiftly into Danish national legislation. Every effort would be made to ensure that developing countries were in a position to take full advantage of the Doha Declaration.

8. Further information on the Urban Renewal Act would be forwarded to the Committee in due course, with specific details on the provisions pertaining to housing allowances and the protection of tenants' rights during renewal activities.

9. Turning to the report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, which had mentioned cases of obstacles to access to places of worship and funeral sites, he said that the Government was aware of problems of that nature, and was making efforts to find solutions. One particular municipality had recently reached an agreement with the local Muslim community on the building of a new Muslim funeral site.

10. Mr. KOLOSOV asked how the progress of children in home education was monitored, and how their education was certified.

11. Mr. SADI enquired whether the Committee's General Comments No. 11 and No. 13 on the right to education were taken into consideration when monitoring informal education.

12. Ms. BRAS GOMES wondered whether people who opted to educate their children at home tended to be from the poorest families or from migrant backgrounds. If that was the case, what measures were being taken to encourage such families to send their children to school.

13. Mr. VINTHEN (Denmark) assured the Committee that all its General Comments were held in high regard by the Government and were taken into account in all its related activities.

14. Ms. BARNHOLT (Denmark) said that the monitoring of home teaching was usually carried out annually. The home teaching environment would be visited by the local authorities, and children being educated at home would be invited to sit tests at their local State school.

Since the Danish school-leaving certificate could only be obtained through schools, all children who were educated at home were obliged to sit their school-leaving exams at the local school. Children living abroad could be granted authorization to take those exams under the supervision of an official from the Danish education authority.

15. Children's education was free of charge in Denmark for all families. There would therefore be no advantage for poor families in educating their children at home. Home education tended to be preferred by diplomats and other professionals who travelled, and in the majority of cases, qualified Danish teachers were employed by families to educate their children. The Ministry of Education placed considerable emphasis on the concept of lifelong learning, and had developed an education system that was closely linked to the labour market. All employees were able to take courses or return to university to further their education when necessary. Although adult education was not free of charge, it was co-financed by the labour market, local government authorities, the participant's employer and the participant. Denmark had worked together with other European Union countries and the Nordic countries to encourage recognition of the importance of informal education, providing training in life skills and the areas of competence required during working life.

16. Mr. CEAUSU enquired under what circumstances families could be authorized to educate their children at home. He wished to know whether that option was available only to people living on small islands in the Baltic, or whether home education could be pursued in the large cities of mainland Denmark.

17. Ms. BARNHOLT (Denmark) said that all parents were free to educate their children at home. All those living on small islands were offered free school transport and education for their children, in order to guarantee all children equal access to schools irrespective of where they lived.

18. Mr. KOLOSOV asked how reliable the delegation considered the supplementary material submitted by NGOs to have been, since it had contained substantial criticism of the Danish Government.

19. Mr. VINTHEN (Denmark) said that the right to criticize was an important element of life in a democratic society, which could be used to enhance open debate on issues of public interest. Governments in democratic countries faced criticism of their methods of handling many issues.

20. He thanked the members of the Committee for their questions and the interest they had shown in his country's fourth periodic report. His delegation would endeavour to send written replies to questions that had not been answered fully during the current session.

21. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the Danish delegation for its comprehensive replies to the Committee's questions. The Committee regarded Denmark as a true partner in the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights, and commended it for the progress it had made in the field of human rights protection.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 3.45 p.m.