



News & Media [Unofficial Excerpts relevant to Israel's men's rights]

COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS CONSIDERS REPORT OF ISRAEL

17 November 2011

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has considered the third periodic report of Israel on that country's implementation of the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

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Introducing the report, Arthur Lenk, Director, Department of International Law, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that, literally, in the midst of all of the change surrounding the "Arab Spring", the Israeli-Palestinian issue remained a constant, and was certainly relevant to Israel's implementation of the Covenant. Threats continued on a daily basis for Israelis. Despite the devastating attacks expressly directed towards Israeli citizens, Israel imposed significant restraints on its own actions to conform with principles of international human rights law. There were four new pieces of legislation relating to Covenant issues: on promotion of food and nutrition security, a Students' Rights Law, the amended Equal Employment Opportunities Law, and a law on women's rights in the work place. In June 2011 Israel's Supreme Court affirmed that access to water was a basic human right. The Government was acutely cognizant of the challenges faced by Israel's minority communities, and hoped to significantly reduce economic and social gaps between the Bedouin population in the Negev and Israeli society as a whole. A standing, inter-ministerial human rights monitoring committee had been established to coordinate action, promote and make recommendations on human rights issues.

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Presentation of the Report

ARTHUR LENK, Director, Department of International Law, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that for the 64 years of its independence, Israel had continually aspired to live in peace with its neighbors.

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Questions from the Experts

There was a high suicide rate among divorced men in Israel, amounting to half of all suicides. It was reportedly because family rights for divorced couples were very biased towards mothers and restricted access of men to children and the family home to a degree rarely seen in any other State. The situation for divorced fathers was apparently hellish. Was it true that divorced fathers were not allowed to leave Israel until they had paid approximately 20 years of alimony? Was it true that 30,000 children could not leave Israel because of draconian court rulings? There was little possibility for such men to get redress, and appeal was extremely expensive. What steps was the State party taking to change that practice? Was the Israeli approach to family matters – divorce, custody - secular or sectarian?

Response from the Delegation (Israel)

The issue of divorce was emotional and complex, and was decided by courts such as the Family Matters Court that ruled on custody and property rights. Over 12,000 couples divorced annually in Israel, and most reached custody agreements without judicial intervention. Over the past decade, court decisions on contact between parents and children following divorce had changed; last year 738 rulings on mutual custody were passed down, and children were encouraged to spend more time with their non-custodial parent. Children under the age of six would live with their mother unless it was in the best interest of the child not to. Regarding visitation rights, if a woman had information there might be a problem receiving child maintenance for her children, she could ask a court to grant a delay on the father of her children leaving the country. Once the problem was solved the delay would be lifted. Men's organizations took part in important committee debates about the role of post-divorce fathers, including legal aspects of father's responsibilities. Regarding the claim that 2,000 divorced fathers committed suicide annually, the Ministry of Health's statistics were that there were 400 suicides last year, and 150 of those were divorced men.

Concluding Remarks

ARTHUR LENK, Director, Department of International Law, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, thanked the Committee for the very informative exchange, and said while there were disagreements Israel was no different from the vast majority of countries the Committee faced. Israel very much respected the Committee's point of views, and would take the views and opinions home, and factor them into all three branches of Government.