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Chair: Ms. Shepherd

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined twelfth and thirteenth periodic reports of Tajikistan (CERD/C/TJK/12-13; CERD/C/TJK/Q/12-13)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Tajikistan joined the meeting.*
2. **Mr. Ashuriyon** (Tajikistan), introducing his country's combined twelfth and thirteenth periodic reports (CERD/C/TJK/12-13), said that the Constitution of Tajikistan guaranteed the enjoyment of rights and freedoms for all, regardless of nationality, race, sex, language, religion, political beliefs, education or social status, and the country's legal framework prohibited all forms of discrimination. The definition of racial discrimination was embedded in law, and article 10 of the Constitution ensured that the provisions of international instruments, including the Convention, were directly applicable. The Act on Equality and Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, adopted in 2022, defined the legal basis for safeguarding equal rights and opportunities for all persons and established a legal system for the prevention of and protection against discrimination. Under the law, discrimination was defined as any difference, exclusion, limitation or preference, formed on real or assumed grounds, related to any person, group or legal entity on the basis of race, skin colour, origin, gender, language, religion, nationality, ethnicity, disability, health, age, citizenship, appearance, property or social status, the aim or effect of which was to deny, diminish or derogate from the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by all persons, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) had been legally established as the competent body to ensure equality and elimination of discrimination in the country.
3. As part of the country's focus on establishing gender balance, the Act on State Guarantees of Equal Rights for Men and Women and Equal Opportunities in the Exercise of Such Rights had been adopted in 2005, and Tajikistan had acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2014. The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act had been adopted in 2013, in order to establish clear legal definitions of family and domestic violence and to implement support measures for affected families; a State programme on the prevention of family violence for the period 2014–2023 had been developed to ensure effective implementation of the Act. Both the Criminal Code and the Code of Administrative Offences penalized any deliberate, direct or indirect violation or restriction of rights based on gender, race, nationality, language, social status, property, official status, residence, religion, conviction or political affiliation. Women made up a significant proportion of workers in areas such as the civil service, including at the managerial level, and in education and health, and presidential grants were available to support women's business activities; in 2022, banks had extended credit facilities amounting to 3.4 billion somoni (SM) to over 600,000 women.
4. The National Development Strategy for the period up to 2030 had been adopted in 2016 and aimed at attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular by ending poverty, ensuring sustainable consumption and making rational use of natural resources for economic and social development. The first phase of the strategy's implementation had concluded in 2020 and the second phase, a medium-term development programme for the period 2021–2025, was currently under way. Implementation of the strategy in areas such as education, health and employment, combating inequality and corruption, and ensuring food security and social protection were national priorities and the focus of the country's economic policy.
5. There were 100 different ethnic groups in Tajikistan. The 2020 population and housing census had found that 86.1 per cent of the population were Tajik, 11.3 per cent Uzbek, 0.4 per cent Kyrgyz, 0.3 per cent Russian, 0.1 per cent Turkmen, 0.01 per cent Tatar, and 1.8 per cent other nationalities or ethnic minorities. In areas with a high concentration of persons of a given ethnic group, education was provided in that group's language. In addition to the 3,967 Tajik schools in the country, there were 77 Uzbek, 60 Russian, 15 Kyrgyz and 5 English schools; 608 educational establishments offered mixed language teaching. Of a total

of some 95,000 general education classes available in the country, more than 20,000 were offered in the language of ethnic minorities.

6. Under national legislation, persons of national or ethnic minorities enjoyed all rights and freedoms, including the right to participate in elections and to exercise freedom of association, assembly, expression and religion. Article 14 of the Voluntary Associations Act prohibited the establishment or activity of any voluntary association that aimed to incite racial, national, social or religious hatred or called for the violent overthrow of constitutional order. There were over 2,000 voluntary associations in Tajikistan, including 45 associations of ethnic minorities, 192 sports organizations, 45 trade unions, 65 international organizations and 100 branches of foreign organizations. More than 600 organizations were headed by women. Seven political parties were registered and active in the country.

7. Article 26 of the Constitution provided that everyone had the right freely to determine his or her position towards religion and to profess any or no religion. The Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations Act of 2009, which was aligned with international legal instruments, had simplified the process for registration of religious associations. As well as the 3,988 mosques and 3 Shiite communities in the country, there were 66 non-Islamic religious associations that had been founded by members of national minorities.

8. Of the 20,000 civil servants in central and local executive authorities, 1,093 were members of ethnic minorities, 300 of whom held senior positions.

9. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press were enshrined in the Constitution, and State censorship or reprisals for criticism of the Government were prohibited. A large number of mass media outlets operated in various languages; 27 of the 376 newspapers and 10 of the 245 magazines published in Tajikistan were in Russian. A number of other newspapers and magazines were published in a combination of languages, and 17 newspapers and magazines had been founded by persons of ethnic minorities. The national television station's daily news programme was broadcast in Tajik, Russian, Uzbek, English and Arabic, and a number of daily and weekly radio programmes were also broadcast in languages of national minorities.

10. All persons, including refugees and victims of trafficking, had access to free State health care; private health care was also available to those who wished to use it and was regulated by the country's legal framework. Measures were routinely taken to improve environmental health and ensure the availability of sport, exercise and tourism facilities. Access to reproductive health services and free antenatal care was ensured for all ethnic minorities, such as the 674 pregnant women registered in the Jugh (Roma) community. Through the online portal of the National Registry of Social Protection, some 300 low-income refugee families had received a one-off payment during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and 539 had received a payment of SM 600 in 2022. Access to HIV/AIDS testing had improved in the previous five years; more than 440 test facilities were currently operational and 420 specialists had been trained in carrying out voluntary consultations and testing. Preventive programmes were implemented by both State bodies and voluntary associations. There were 34 support centres for drug users and 14 centres for sex workers. Current health care reforms were aimed at ensuring high-quality preventive services and vaccination against COVID-19 and other infectious diseases for all persons resident in Tajikistan.

11. **Ms. Ali Al-Misnad** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would welcome comprehensive data on the ethnic composition of the population, including asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless persons and migrant workers, and on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. She was particularly eager to learn whether the 2020 national population and housing census had yielded information on the Pamiri and Yaghnobi ethnic groups. It would be useful if the delegation could provide disaggregated data on the socioeconomic situation of minority groups and of non-citizens.

12. She wondered whether the State party intended to ratify the amendments to article 8 of the Convention and to make the optional declaration under article 14. It would also be interesting to learn whether it planned to incorporate an explicit prohibition of descent-based discrimination into the 2022 Act, what resources had been allocated for its implementation,

and what preliminary outcomes had been achieved. She wondered whether incitement to racial discrimination and racially motivated violence would be criminalized.

13. She would appreciate receiving information about the current status of the draft national human rights strategy for the period up to 2030 and about measures taken to prevent and eliminate racial discrimination under the 2021–2023 action plan.

14. She wondered whether the State party had conducted an in-depth analysis of the reasons for the absence of complaints of racial discrimination. It would be useful to obtain statistical data, disaggregated by age, sex and ethnic or national origin, on complaints of racial discrimination received by law enforcement agencies, the Ombudsman's Office, domestic courts and other complaints mechanisms, as well as information on the respective investigations, prosecutions, convictions, penalties and remedies. She wished to know whether any campaigns had been conducted to raise awareness of Convention rights and encourage the submission of complaints of racial discrimination. The delegation should also indicate whether law enforcement officers, prosecutors and other civil servants were trained to identify and register incidents of racial discrimination and describe how the Government was working to ensure that victims had access to effective remedies and redress.

15. She was curious to know whether the action plan designed to bring the activities of the Ombudsman's Office into conformity with the Paris Principles had been successfully implemented. She would also appreciate it if the delegation could shed light on the Ombudsman's alleged unresponsiveness to 15 complaints of abuse and ill-treatment in places of detention lodged with the Office.

16. It would be useful to find out about measures taken to combat discrimination and stigma against Jughli (Roma) people, improve their socioeconomic status, facilitate access to personal status documents, and protect them from police violence, ethnic profiling, exploitation and harmful traditional practices. She would be glad to obtain statistical data in that regard. It would also be interesting to learn of measures taken to combat discrimination and negative stereotyping of the Pamiri and to foster socioeconomic development in Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province, where most of them lived. She wondered, in particular, what had been done to ease tensions in the region, protect the Pamiri minority and promote an open and constructive dialogue between that minority and the State party authorities. Could the reporting State kindly clarify its definition of "autonomous" in that connection?

17. Additional details were needed on progress made towards equitable representation and participation of ethnic minorities in public and political life. She wished to receive disaggregated data on the representation of ethnic minorities at all levels of public administration and wondered, in particular, how many of the 616 women recently recruited to the civil service belonged to ethnic minorities. The delegation might wish to provide information on actions aimed at promoting the participation of persons belonging to ethnic minorities in elections and giving them a voice in decision-making processes that affected their communities.

18. She asked whether investigations were being conducted into the killing and wounding of activists in the course of an anti-terrorist operation in Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province in May 2022. It would also be useful to find out about the State party's position vis-à-vis the alleged arbitrary detention of four human rights defenders and representatives of the Pamiri minority of that province, namely Mr. Khursand Mamadshoev, Mr. Faromuz Irgashov, Mr. Manuchehr Kholiknazarov, and Ms. Ulfathonim Mamadshoeva. Was anything being done to ensure that human rights defenders, journalists belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and those advocating for their rights could conduct their work in a safe and enabling environment without fear of restrictions or judicial prosecution and of being designated as "terrorists"?

19. **Ms. Li** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to congratulate the State party on the adoption of the Amnesty Act in December 2019 and the introduction of amendments to article 499 (3) of the Administrative Code. However, she was curious to know whether regulations 325 and 328, which restricted the freedom of movement and residence of refugees and asylum-seekers, remained in effect and, if so, whether there were any plans to repeal those provisions.

20. The Committee would welcome information on measures taken to improve access to health care, education and other basic services for refugees and asylum-seekers. Given the 24-hour deadline for appealing administrative decisions, it was unclear how the State party ensured fair and effective access to justice for asylum-seekers and prevented their penalization for irregular entry or stay. Further information was needed on the status of the bill aimed at prohibiting the use of deportation as a punishment. She wondered when the bill was expected to be signed into law and what safeguards were in place to prevent precipitate deportation until that date. Was it true that Afghan asylum-seekers were refused the residence permits they needed to file asylum applications? If so, could the delegation kindly elaborate on the situation of those persons?

21. **Mr. Kut** (Follow-up Coordinator) said that, in its concluding observations following the previous dialogue with the State party ([CERD/C/TJK/CO/9-11](#)), the Committee had requested the State party to provide follow-up on its recommendations contained in paragraphs 12 and 14; the Committee appreciated the timely submission of the follow-up report ([CERD/C/TJK/CO/9-11/Add.1](#)). In regard to the recommendations in paragraph 12 of the concluding observations, he would be grateful to know whether the interdepartmental working group tasked with reviewing a series of codes, acts and regulations to ensure their conformity with the Convention had achieved its objectives. Given the absence of a proper response to the Committee's concerns about the situation of Jughhi (Roma) people and its recommendations in paragraph 14 of the concluding observations, he would be keen to receive additional information in that regard.

22. **Mr. Diaby** asked whether the State party intended to develop specific legislation to protect human rights defenders. He would be grateful for information on investigations conducted into alleged acts of violence committed by law enforcement officers and on any convictions handed down in that respect. How many of the State party's 2,000 voluntary associations had been involved in the preparation of the periodic report?

23. **Ms. Esseneme** said that she would welcome additional details of the visiting legal clinics set up by the Ombudsman's Office, the nature of the consultations, the individuals delivering those services, and the number and outcome of consultations related to racial discrimination.

24. **Mr. Yeung** asked whether any asylum-seeker had ever appealed against administrative decisions, given the short time window to lodge such appeals. If so, he wondered whether they were heard by duly constituted courts of law and whether any such appeal had succeeded.

25. He would be interested to learn more about the reasons underlying the ongoing conflict in Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province. How many Pamiri lived in the State party?

26. **Ms. Stavrinaki** said that she wished to know how the State party made sure that persons belonging to ethnic minorities had equal access to its free health-care scheme. She wondered how language barriers to health care were being overcome and whether health outcomes of Roma women were monitored to inform public health policy.

27. **Mr. Payandeh** said that it had struck him that the combined periodic report made no reference to the Pamiri, despite the Committee's many concerns, and he wondered whether they were recognized as an ethnic minority in the State party. The delegation might indicate whether the State party was taking any special measures to promote and facilitate the active participation of ethnic minorities in public life and political institutions.

28. **Ms. Ali Al-Misnad** said that she, too, had been surprised that no information had been provided on the State party's approximately 200,000 Pamiri residents.

29. Given the extensive use of counter-terrorism measures in a country that ranked comparatively low on the global terrorism index, she was curious to know how terrorism was defined in the State party. The delegation might wish to clarify whether domestic anti-terrorism legislation and strategies employed the definition of terrorism established by the United Nations.

30. She was somewhat unconvinced by the State party's assertion concerning freedom of religion and would appreciate it if the delegation could comment on reported lengthy prison sentences for persons belonging to certain Muslim groups, and harassment of women wearing hijabs and men with long beards.

31. She was curious to know which civil society organizations had cooperated in drawing up the periodic report, given that no organization based in the State party had participated in the Committee's informal meeting with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). She would be grateful if the delegation could shed light on reports whereby NGOs in Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province had been pressured to dissolve their organization and that 30 NGOs had suspended operations for fear of persecution. Could the State party kindly provide statistics on the number of NGOs in that region dissolved in 2022 and 2023?

The meeting was suspended at 4.20 and resumed at 4.40 p.m.

32. **Mr. Ashuriyon** (Tajikistan) said that the Pamiri community living in Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province had not been referred to as a minority in the State party's report because most research by experts in the field showed that Pamiris had always considered themselves to be ethnic Tajiks, rather than a separate ethnic minority. The Pamiris were one of a number of peoples of Iranian descent living in the Badakhshan region, which spanned four countries, and spoke various dialects of eastern Iranian languages. In the nineteenth century, the British and Russian empires had divided the region and stoked rivalries among local leaders, and by the end of that century the Panj river had become a natural border between territories controlled by those powers. In the twentieth century, the region had been split between the countries of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and Tajikistan. The inhabitants of the region considered themselves to be Tajiks and were also considered as such in China; in fact, until recently, they had also been referred to as Tajiks in Afghanistan. Pamiris belonged to a group of people with their own identities and languages and had close linguistic, cultural and religious connections to similar communities living in neighbouring countries.

33. The term "Tajik" had two definitions: a narrow definition that included only inhabitants of present-day Central Asia and Afghanistan who spoke Persian, and a broader definition encompassing people from Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan and other areas where various ancient Persian dialects were spoken. In a web-based questionnaire on ethnic identity, administered in connection with the 2020 population and housing census, all respondents from Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province had described their ethnicity as Tajik and none had described themselves as Pamiri. It was therefore clear that Pamiris should be considered to be Tajiks; as a consequence, they would not be referred to as an ethnic minority in future reports.

34. **A representative of Tajikistan** said that the population and housing census was conducted every 10 years and that the 2020 edition was the third such census conducted since the country's independence. For the first time, it had been possible to complete the census using the Internet, an option selected by over 40 per cent of respondents in general and 31.8 per cent of respondents in Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province. International classifications had been used to determine regional boundaries for the purpose of data collection. The 2020 census had asked questions on employment, language, ethnicity and nationality and had included the Karluk ethnic group as a separate minority group for the first time. The census results would be published in stages between 2022 and 2024. The Government had not been able to provide more detailed information on housing in its report as those data were still being processed.

35. The rights of the Jughī (Roma) community in Tajikistan were protected. According to the 2020 census, there were almost 3,400 Jughī (Roma) in the country (1,739 males and 1,626 females), a 1.4 per cent increase on the figure recorded in 2010. The Jughī (Roma) community constituted around 0.035 per cent of the population. Some 1,780 Jughī (Roma) were of working age and around 1,400 were under working age. Among men aged 15 years and over, 597 were married, 314 had never been married, 19 were widowers and 2 were divorced. Among women in the same age group, 599 were married, 41 were widows, 30 had never been married and 6 were divorced. Of the Jughī (Roma) population aged over 10 years, only one individual had completed higher education; 575 had completed secondary

education; 249 had received some secondary education; 937 had completed primary education; 608 had not completed primary education; and 242 were illiterate.

36. There were 1,936 Jughi (Roma) aged over 15 years, of whom 486 were in employment and 24 were migrant workers. Of those 486 workers, 483 were unskilled agricultural workers, 2 worked in services and trade and 1 was a skilled agricultural worker. Some 199 Jughi (Roma) were self-employed; 153 worked on smallholdings; 36 were employed on contracts; and 98 had said that they were in work but had not provided details. In terms of economic activity, 364 were working in agriculture, 44 in domestic service, 38 in construction, 23 in trade, 12 in personal service, 2 in regional bodies, 1 in finance and insurance, 1 in manufacturing and 1 in education. Of the 1,450 unemployed Jughi (Roma) aged 15 years and over, 639 had other sources of income; 400 were dependents; 362 were engaged in subsistence agriculture; 29 were pensioners; and 20 received money from relatives.

37. Jughi (Roma) were able to receive targeted social security benefits, which were available to all persons in the country. Under article 35 of the Constitution, everyone in the country had the right to work and choose their profession, to be protected at work and to receive social security when unemployed. In addition, chapter 4 of the Employment Promotion Act contained provisions on eligibility for social security benefits. Between 2018 and 2022, 64,546 unemployed people, including individuals from minority groups, had received unemployment benefits under a State programme to support employment.

38. **A representative of Tajikistan** said that he wished to confirm that discrimination based on descent was prohibited in article 1 of the Act on Equality and Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination. The Government would look closer into the issue when drafting a report on its follow-up to the Committee's recommendations. A department for equality and the elimination of discrimination established within the Ombudsman's Office would address issues regarding the allocation of resources for implementation of the Act and would draft an annual report on the matter.

39. The Criminal Code contained 11 articles that provided for the criminalization of acts of discrimination, including racial discrimination. In addition, discrimination was deemed to be an aggravating factor in the Code. A new criminal code was currently being drafted and relevant issues, including the definition of discrimination, would be taken into account in its development. In addition, a draft human rights strategy had been developed and was likely to be adopted soon.

40. Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province had been created and granted autonomy because of the remoteness of the mountainous region and the particular challenges experienced by people living and working in such harsh conditions. As a consequence, workers in the region received 40 per cent higher wages than in other regions, and the region's borders could not be modified without the consent of the representative authorities. The region was represented in the Majlis-i Oli, the parliament of Tajikistan, and chapter 7 of the Constitution was dedicated to the region.

41. Regarding freedom of movement, it was not true that migrants and asylum-seekers could not go to Dushanbe or Khūjand. Those working in Dushanbe lived in a town 17 kilometres from the city to ensure their safety and security. In the light of the challenging security situation at the border with Afghanistan, people had been relocated away from those areas for their own safety.

42. **A representative of Tajikistan** said that around 200,000 people lived in Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province. The Government had already allocated SM 21 million to 33 investment projects to support the region's socioeconomic development and planned to allocate another SM 3 billion to fund 14 more projects. Between 2021 and 2025, SM 4.8 billion were to be invested into a further 135 projects to support the construction of homes and improve living conditions. Some 3,765 hectares of land had been allocated to the region's inhabitants to create homesteads. In total, 373 kilometres of roads had been built in the region to international standards and SM 2.3 billion had been invested in 11 infrastructure projects. Thanks to those efforts, poverty had fallen to 29 per cent in 2019 from a peak of 97 per cent. Visits to other parts of the country had been organized for 1,000 of the region's young people, to improve relations between inhabitants of the country's different regions and expose them

to different traditions. The Government would continue to implement regional development programmes in the coming years.

43. Despite those efforts, representatives of Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province had obstructed several initiatives. Furthermore, organized criminal groups had returned to the area. Those groups were formed of members of extremist movements funded by foreign groups and terrorist organizations. They were disrupting public order, systematically fomenting mass unrest, causing huge economic damage to the region and disseminating extremist ideology. Moreover, they had set fire to administrative buildings, had killed individuals working with the law enforcement agencies and had taken local government representatives and public officials hostage. Other criminal offences committed by those groups were currently being investigated.

44. The military activities carried out by State agencies in Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province had been intended only to protect the legitimate interests and safety of law-abiding citizens, re-establish public order in the region and combat extremist groups. Following a number of illegal rallies held in Khorugh in 2021, law enforcement agencies had called on those groups to terminate their illegal activities if they wished to avoid being subjected to criminal or civil proceedings. After negotiations, the leaders of those rallies had voluntarily agreed in writing to cease their activities and consequently no participants had been charged with any offences. However, in May 2022, an illegal rally had been organized, at which young people had been incited to engage in criminal activity. Molotov cocktails and other makeshift weapons had been used against State agencies and a checkpoint had been attacked. In line with international practice, tear gas had been used to stop the unrest, and no civilians had been injured during the operation.

45. In recent years, criminal groups in Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province had instigated many serious crimes, including murder, rape, drug trafficking and the possession and use of unregistered weapons. As a result of the special military operation, the leaders and members of those groups had been apprehended and large caches of weapons and drugs seized. Some of the weapons had formerly belonged to the Afghan armed forces and NATO forces in Afghanistan. Representatives of the Embassy of the United States of America had been invited to verify the weapons that had been seized. In addition to plentiful evidence of criminal activity, it was clear that the informal leaders of Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province had direct links with terrorist organizations active in Afghanistan, including al-Qaida and Da'esh, and had received the weapons from them in order to perpetuate further crimes. Indeed, the authorities had intercepted telephone conversations between one leader and the representatives of terrorist organizations.

46. The individuals who had been imprisoned had been held accountable for belonging to terrorist organizations and for organizing mass unrest, during which they had incited citizens to take part in armed acts of subversion against the Government. Mr. Mamadshoev had held regular meetings in Dushanbe with the special services of foreign countries, and the intelligence services had uncovered evidence of his participation in a criminal association. He had subsequently been found guilty of charges including terrorism; murder; storage and transport of illegal weapons, ammunition and explosive devices; armed subversion; and membership of an extremist organization. Mr. Irgashov, formerly the leader of the "Commission 44" terrorist group, had been arrested, tried and found guilty of participation in a criminal association and of publicly calling for the overthrow of the State.

47. **Mr. Ashuriyon** (Tajikistan) said that it was important to identify the source of the weapons obtained by organized criminal groups, some of which had been in the hands of opposition forces during the 1992–1997 civil war. Under the peace agreement that had brought an end to the war, it had been intended that members of armed groups would be disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated into State power structures, including the law enforcement agencies and the armed forces. However, most of them had refused to give up their weapons and were now using them to terrorize the population, undermine law and order and disrupt people's lives. The special operation had been carried out in order to combat such groups, who refused to abide by the law and preferred to engage in criminal activities. The operation had restored calm to Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province, with the result that government and business were functioning normally and the region was developing economically and attracting investment.

48. **A representative of Tajikistan** said that one of the aims of the National Development Strategy for the period up to 2030 was to improve access to health services. The equal access of all to quality health care was being achieved through improvements in human resources, the modernization of facilities and the introduction of new standards. The Government had doubled the health budget and intended to increase access to medical care in remote areas.

49. The small Jughi (Roma) community was concentrated in a number of regions of Tajikistan; among women of childbearing age, approximately 900 pregnancies had been registered in 2022 and the first three months of 2023. Antenatal care would be provided for pregnant Jughi (Roma) women, although health workers had identified certain challenges connected with the mobility of the population group.

50. In July 2020, a presidential decree had been adopted setting out measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to strengthen the protection of vulnerable population groups. Three hundred families, including those with refugee status, had benefited from a special payment of SM 500 somoni. In a second stage, 539 families had received a payment of SM 600.

51. **A representative of Tajikistan** said that 705 Afghan refugee children, including 252 girls, had been enrolled in 57 schools, mainly located in large towns and cities. Regarding the various languages used in Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province, it should be noted that the President had met with representatives of the Shughnon community, an ancient people who had arrived in the region millennia before and who were among the ancestors of the Tajiks. They had retained their language and traditions, despite difficult living conditions. The Government was strongly committed to preserving the ancient languages spoken in Tajikistan. During the Soviet period, the National Academy of Sciences had only a single section on Pamir languages, which had employed three specialists. Now there was an entire institute, with its seat at Khorugh, which was well funded and employed 38 researchers working on the history and languages of the Badakhshan region.

52. **A representative of Tajikistan** said that the Ombudsman's Office was fully compliant with the Paris Principles. A working group had been set up under the Executive Office of the President, with the participation of officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance, to consider measures to provide the Office with an appropriate budget. In 2020, representatives of the Ministry of Justice and of the Majlis-i Oli, the parliament of Tajikistan had joined the working group, but its activities had been temporarily interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. With the support of the Government and the technical assistance of partners, the Office's budget had increased from SM 2 million in 2022 to over SM 3 million in 2023.

53. Following the entry into force of the Act on Equality and Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination in July 2022, the Office had set up a specialized anti-discrimination unit. The Office examined and responded to all complaints in a timely fashion and worked with the competent authorities to resolve them. In the first three months of 2023, the Office, working in conjunction with the relevant State bodies, had resolved 20 complaints. The Ombudsman had access to complainants who were deprived of their liberty.

54. **Mr. Ashuriyon** (Tajikistan) said that, on 4 July 2020, amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences had been signed into law, as a result of which asylum-seekers and refugees now had seven days in which to file an appeal against an administrative decision expelling them from Tajikistan.

55. **Ms. Ali Al-Misnad** said that the Committee would be grateful for information from different sources about the alleged terrorism and criminal activities in Kūhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province. The information before the Committee, including reports published by international organizations, did not mention any such activities but indicated that there had been a deterioration in the human rights situation. She would also appreciate information on the historical causes of unrest in the province, on any attempts at reconciliation, and on efforts to address the grievances that led people to turn to violence.

56. **Ms. Li** said that she wished to know whether refugees and asylum-seekers in Tajikistan came from any countries besides Afghanistan.

57. **Mr. Diaby** said that, in the context of the Government's struggle against terrorism, genuine human rights defenders were at risk of being confused with insurrectionists. He therefore wondered whether the State party planned to enact a law for the protection of human rights defenders.

58. **Ms. Esseneme** said that she would be interested to know more about the nature of the activities of the Ombudsman's Office, and whether it considered complaints in relation to judicial proceedings.

59. **Ms. Stavrinaki** said that she would welcome additional information on access to health services, including the challenges connected with the mobility of certain groups and the availability of health services in remote areas. The Committee would be particularly grateful for data disaggregated by ethnic group and region, which might be submitted in writing after the dialogue.

60. **Mr. Diaby** said that, as the delegation had indicated that the Pamiri people were in fact Tajiks, he was curious to know why the name Pamiri had attached itself to a certain group of people.

61. **Mr. Ashuriyon** (Tajikistan) said that the name Pamiri referred to the inhabitants of the Pamir Mountains, located in Kūhisoni Badakhshon Autonomous Province. The people in question were indeed Tajiks – it was highly unlikely that anybody from that region would in good faith identify as being of Pamiri ethnicity. It was possible that some people who were unfamiliar with the region had mistakenly formed the view that the Pamiri people were a separate ethnic group, which was simply not the case.

62. **A representative of Tajikistan** said that participants in the 2020 population and housing census had been asked to indicate their ethnic group. Respondents had not been required to show identification and had been free to answer as they liked. The vast majority of persons living in the Pamir Mountains had self-identified as Tajik.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.