



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

Distr.: General  
9 February 2007

Original: English

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**  
**Thirty-seventh session**

**Summary record of the 759th meeting (Chamber B)**

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 17 January 2007, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Šimonović

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Convention (*continued*)

*Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Viet Nam*

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention** (*continued*)

*Combined fifth and sixth reports of Viet Nam (CEDAW/C/VNM/5-6; CEDAW/C/VNM/Q/6 and Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Viet Nam took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Ha Thi Khiet** (Viet Nam) said that the fifth and sixth combined reports of Viet Nam, which covered the period 2000-2003, had been prepared by an interdisciplinary board led by the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW) and adopted by the Prime Minister. Under article 102 of the Law on Signing, Joining and Implementing International Conventions, which had entered into effect on 1 January 2006, all national reports on international treaties and conventions to which Viet Nam became a party would be submitted to the National Assembly for adoption.

3. Since the period covered by the fifth and sixth combined reports, Viet Nam had continued to pursue its original reform policy and its Strategy for Socio-Economic Development for 2001-2010 and in 2006 had had a growth rate of 8.17 per cent and an average per capita income of 723 dollars. Thirty per cent of the State budget had been allocated for socio-economic development. Viet Nam had reached the Millennium Development Goal on poverty reduction 10 years ahead of schedule, with a reduction of 60 per cent in the previous decade. The human development index had also increased sharply to 0.704 in 2004. Although those achievements had created better conditions for Vietnamese women to participate and benefit equally in the development process, certain difficulties and challenges remained. Living standards remained lower than in many countries of the region, and the income gap between social groups and regions was widening.

4. In terms of the implementation of the Convention, various legislative, executive and judicial policies and measures had been deployed to promote equality between men and women, and to ensure the full development of women for their advancement in all areas. The principle of equality, non-discrimination, and combating gender-related prejudices had been included in all new legislation, notably the 2006 Law

on Gender Equality, the content and spirit of which reflected the fundamental principles and provisions of the Convention. She described the national medium-term and long-term strategies that integrated the Government's policies on gender equality into quantitative targets in the areas of growth and poverty reduction, reproductive health care, education development and the advancement of women. Attention continued to be paid to social benefits to women and the ratio of women to men in positions of leadership. The Government considered that safeguarding the health, dignity and honour of women and children was a permanent political task, and it therefore remained committed to the fight against the exploitation of women for prostitution, violence against women and trafficking in women and children through the strictest means at its disposal.

5. She outlined the work of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women, which had been consolidated and currently acted in an advisory capacity to the Prime Minister on legal and policy issues relating to women and coordinated the implementation of laws and policies with other government agencies. She also stressed the importance of the Women's Union of the Vietnamese, the Vietnamese Women Entrepreneurs' Council and the women's affairs units, under the Confederation of Labour Unions of Viet Nam in spearheading activities to empower women. Under the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam, several programmes had been undertaken to assist urban and rural women to find employment and to achieve stability for themselves and their families through increased income.

6. Turning to the gains made by Viet Nam, she said that the gender gap in most areas had narrowed considerably, with women representing 49 per cent of the labour force. An assessment report sponsored by, among others, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, had ranked Viet Nam among the leading countries in terms of women's participation in economic activities and of gender equality. The proportion of women in elected bodies and the ratio of female to male judges in the People's Supreme Court had also improved over previous terms. Gender equality was a priority target of the national programme on education towards the year 2015, and there was no significant gender gap at any level of education. Progress had been made in the legal, policy

and institutional areas of health care, in credit policy reforms and in poverty reduction programmes. The State budget had recently allocated approximately 2.6 billion dollars for the Women's Union to establish a support fund for poverty reduction.

7. Nevertheless, many challenges, such as gender stereotyping, girls' access to education, abuse, and gaps between the laws and their enforcement, still confronted the Government. In addition, some problems had been exacerbated owing to the negative impact of the market economy and the expansion of international interactions, in particular, the problem of trafficking in women for prostitution and as "mail-order" brides. The NCFAW intended to propose several measures that would bring the achievements into full play and help to overcome any outstanding problems. The measures included a further review of the legal and institutional mechanisms on gender equality, capacity-building in NCFAW itself and accelerating the integration of gender perspectives into all socio-economic strategies, plans and development targets. Sensitization of the rural population and mobilization of international resources for the promotion of gender equality and women's advancement were expected to be crucial areas for intensive action. The Government, which remained committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Convention and the Millennium Development Goals, deeply appreciated the support it had already received from the Committee and the broader international community in its endeavours.

#### *Articles 1 to 6*

8. **Ms. Gumede Shelton** asked the delegation to comment on the issues discussed during the formulation of the Law on Gender Equality, and whether a specific strategy had been devised to protect the interests of women belonging to ethnic minorities. She also wished to know whether the rights enjoyed under the revised Land Law and land use right certificate could be applied retroactively, and whether the introduction of the land use certificate in its new format had helped to change cultural attitudes and gender stereotypes with respect to inheritance. Noting that in 2003 very few gender discrimination cases had been filed by women under the provisions of the Law on Complaint and Denunciation, she asked whether the number of cases had increased in the intervening years, or whether the Government had established a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to determine

how effectively the Law had been used by women for their protection.

9. With reference to the Law on Marriage and Family among ethnic minorities and their interrelationships, she wished to know what steps had been taken to ensure that the views of women belonging to ethnic minorities were adequately represented. Moreover, given the challenges of providing adequate education coverage to ethnic minority populations, she was interested in knowing what steps the Government had taken in that area. With specific reference to the labour unions, she asked the delegation to explain what factors had led to the rise of women's unions, and whether they had emerged because the interests of women had been inadequately represented by the traditional labour unions. She was curious to know the proportion of women's unions, compared to that of traditional unions, and whether the majority of working women were represented by women's unions.

10. With regard to the implementation of article 2, she asked to what extent information material on human rights issues, including the content of the Convention, Government strategies and initiatives had been translated into the languages used by ethnic minorities.

11. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, asked whether the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality would have a positive influence on the Government's decision to ratify the Optional Protocol. She welcomed the fact that, in accordance with the Law on Signing, Joining and Implementing International Conventions, the submission of periodic reports on international conventions to the National Assembly for approval would raise the visibility of instruments such as the Convention at the national level. She was interested in knowing whether international treaties would, under the terms of that Law, be directly applicable in domestic law. She took the opportunity to congratulate Viet Nam on the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality and asked for further information on the content of the Law, particularly with respect to the definition of discrimination, in line with article 1 of the Convention, and its provisions on equal rights, anti-discrimination mechanisms and temporary special measures.

12. **Ms. Tavares da Silva**, noting that the Government of Viet Nam had adopted a number of new

laws and guiding strategies with established targets, pointed out that many parts of the report tended to express vague intentions and objectives, rather than specific measures and programmes, or clear assessments of the effect of newly adopted legislation. Periodic reports should state firmly the action envisaged by the Government to address outstanding problems and achieve tangible results, and they should describe specific policies for the implementation of legal provisions. She cited a number of examples of inconsistencies between the principles expressed and actual practice, and between the wishes expressed by the Government and real progress made in several areas, and suggested that subsequent reports should go beyond the statement of intentions to firm commitments, which must be reflected in measures to bring about change. She also hoped that future reports would contain an evaluation of progress achieved through Government intervention.

13. **Ms. Gaspard** said that article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention encouraged the adoption of temporary special measures in favour of women to address imbalances, but she was of the impression that the Government had not grasped the meaning of special measures. She therefore urged Viet Nam to give closer consideration to article 4 and general recommendation No. 25, which clarified the meaning of article 4, paragraph 1, and aimed at facilitating and ensuring the full use of temporary special measures by States parties.

14. **Ms. Arocha Dominguez** said that it was important to consider each periodic report in a specific context. In the case of Viet Nam, tremendous effort made to overcome the residual effects of a protracted period of war and achieve development deserved to be acknowledged. There was clearly a need for the adoption of a special strategy for implementing the Convention, raising the standard of living, and improving social conditions. Within that general situation, however, women faced special challenges that were perpetuated by the traditional patriarchal mentality regarding the role of women and men in society.

15. It was therefore of concern that the report had not referred to specific proposals for changing the educational system to eliminate stereotypes, for example, by improving textbooks and teacher training or making adjustments to the curriculum. Noting that there was no mention in the report of special

programmes to educate men and young boys in rural areas, she asked whether any action had been taken in that regard. Furthermore, changes in stereotypes in family relations needed to go beyond the promotion of equality in domestic work to include issues such as maternity, paternity, responsibility and respect. In addition, she suggested that the mass media, including the written press, should adopt a strategy for addressing gender stereotypes, and she asked the delegation to provide additional information on any efforts undertaken to that effect.

16. **Ms. Ha Thi Khiet** (Viet Nam) assured the Committee that the Government was trying its best to identify the measures by which to conduct activities aimed at the advancement of women and admitted that there had been shortcomings in its approach. The issues discussed in drafting the Law on Gender Equality reflected the areas of concern raised by members of the Committee and fell within the ambit of mainstreaming gender issues and equality in all fields of family and social life, and the measurement and verification of mainstreaming. A number of measures had also been established to handle violations of that Law. The proposal for its adoption had been submitted to the National Assembly on the initiative of the Vietnamese Women's Union in 2003. With the support of the National Assembly and the commitment of that Union, the Law had been adopted within a relatively short period, in 2006, and was expected to enter into force in July 2007. The content of the Law on Gender Equality had received much attention during the process of its elaboration because it related to crucial issues within Vietnamese society, such as the importance of raising public awareness and the level of education of Vietnamese women, objectives that the Government hoped to achieve within the following five years. Certain assurances for the inclusion of benefits to ethnic minorities had also been addressed during the debate on the content of the Law.

17. The format of the land right use certificate had been amended to include the names of women, instead of only the names of their husbands.

18. **Ms. Tran Thi Mai Huong** (Viet Nam) said that article 5 of the Law on Gender Equality defined terms and that its definition of "gender discrimination" was in conformity with the definition of "discrimination against women" under article 1 of the Convention. As far as the application of international treaties on gender equality was concerned, she explained that according

to the terms of article 3 of the Law on Gender Equality, international treaty provisions prevailed over Vietnamese legislation.

19. Trade unions in Viet Nam were large organizations with groups of workers throughout the country. Women formed more than half of their membership. There were equal numbers of women's unions and traditional labour unions. The interests of women were protected and advanced by a wide network of unions which extended to all geographical regions and covered many spheres of activity, including government ministries and agencies.

20. Turning to the role of education in raising public awareness of gender equality, she said that a comprehensive report on the subject had been issued in 2006. Much emphasis had been placed over the previous five years on the dissemination of information on gender issues in schools and throughout society. Gender-related content had been incorporated into teaching programmes and the curricula of educational institutions. Following an initial trial period, it was hoped that further action would be undertaken.

21. **Ms. Duong Thi Thanh Mai** (Viet Nam) said that the Government had given due consideration to article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention relating to temporary special measures, and that input from parliamentarians had been incorporated into the drafting of the Law on Gender Equality. The relevant government authorities would apply measures to promote gender equality, aimed at ensuring practical and effective equality between men and women. She drew attention to various articles of the Law on Gender Equality which stated the basic principles of gender equality and its relevance in various fields, such as the economy, politics, labour, education and training, and expressed the Government's determination to enhance the capacities of men and women, ensure equitable development and define fair working conditions for all.

22. The laws pertaining to the election of public officials provided gender-based ratios for representation of delegates, and Viet Nam was particularly proud of its achievement in being among the countries with the highest ratio of women to men in parliament.

23. The amended Law on Complaint and Denunciation of 2005 adhered to international standards and sought to ensure that all citizens had the possibility of seeking recourse for the violation of their

rights before national courts. The Law on Gender Equality contained provisions that, in effect, constituted a monitoring mechanism to allow citizens the full enjoyment of their right of complaint and denunciation. The Law relating to complaints procedures was designed to raise awareness among women and to convince them of their rights. According to the statistics issued by the Ministry of Justice, the number of cases for which free legal assistance was provided between 2002 and 2005 stood at 50,000, more than half of which had been brought by women. She was therefore pleased to note that women were increasingly gaining understanding and knowledge about the legal system and legal procedures.

24. **Mr. Vu Anh Quang** (Viet Nam) said that the mass media in Viet Nam played a very important role in the dissemination of information on the Convention and advancement of women and had been instrumental in raising the public's level of awareness on other human rights instruments to which Viet Nam was a party, and pertinent laws and policies, including the Law on Gender Equality. The Vietnamese Women's Union had relied heavily on media participation in its campaigns against domestic violence and trafficking in women and children. The communications media had clearly contributed to gradual changes in attitudes, because of its role in raising awareness. Since 2003, much debate had taken place on the promotion of human rights at the domestic and regional levels. In its schedule of activities on human rights promotion, the Government had given priority to the application of the Convention, especially with regard to the ethnic minority populations in far-flung parts of the country.

25. Viet Nam had no objection to the content and goals of the Optional Protocol; its reservation pertained to the question of sovereignty and the overall structure of Viet Nam. The ratification process would require further amendments to domestic legislation that would take time. Ratification of the Optional Protocol, and of other instruments elaborated by other human rights treaty bodies, would receive careful consideration.

26. **Ms. Tran Thi Mai Huong** (Viet Nam) said that, henceforth, the National Assembly of Viet Nam would adopt reports in accordance with the 2005 Law on Signing, Joining and Implementing International Conventions. With respect to the sharing of domestic responsibilities, she said that a recent study by a Vietnamese institute for social sciences had shown that men were increasingly assuming domestic roles, and

that at least 30 per cent of households were run on a shared basis. It had also been shown that the couples that had lived together for longer periods tended to share housework more readily, an encouraging sign for the goals of the National Committee for Women and Family, which advocated a vision 2020 for the family, under which women would be able to have deeper and broader participation in society, outside the context of the family.

27. **Ms. Zou** Xiaoqiao said that the Committee had received information that many violent deaths in Viet Nam were related to domestic violence. She therefore regretted that the report had not provided enough details on domestic violence and its various forms, nor had it sufficiently described the policies and preventive measures adopted by the Government to control such violence. Furthermore, given the persistence of patriarchal values throughout Vietnamese society, she believed that it might be useful for the Government to conduct an in-depth analysis of domestic violence in relation to gender equality. She was also interested in knowing whether the Government planned to provide facilities, such as shelters and rehabilitation centres to support women in need. With regard to the draft law on domestic violence prevention and control, she asked the delegation to describe the mechanisms envisaged for its implementation.

28. In addition to the publicity campaigns on domestic violence led by women's unions, she asked whether the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Justice or law enforcement agencies were also engaged in such programmes to raise awareness, and whether training programmes or other activities had been organized or planned to curb the incidence of domestic violence.

29. **Ms. Begum** said that national legislation should be strengthened to improve the general situation of women in rural areas. She cited a number of factors that increased their vulnerability to trafficking, HIV/AIDS infection, sexual abuse, and the risks of abortion and underage marriage. It appeared that Viet Nam lacked the institutional capacity to address international organized crime, and she therefore wondered whether current and future legislation on marriage and family matters would provide the comprehensive coverage required to strengthen law enforcement, tackle poverty reduction, heighten awareness and address the range of social and economic issues that bolstered the fight against

trafficking. She asked how many cases of trafficking in women and children had been detected and prosecuted annually, and whether government officials had been implicated in trafficking. In that context, she urged Viet Nam to establish mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of the regional agreements on trafficking it had so far concluded.

30. **Ms. Chutikul** welcomed the adoption of a number of legal instruments introduced by the Government in an effort to suppress trafficking and exploitation of women for prostitution and expressed support for the view that it was vital to strengthen the enforcement of such regulations. She suggested that the Government of Viet Nam should consider the imposition of stringent penalties on officials found to be involved in trafficking activities. She was curious to know whether the women's unions would be offered the level of support that would enable them to work alongside the authorities in their surveillance of at-risk communities, design interventions, identify problems and take preventive action where possible. She enquired whether Viet Nam was a party to multilateral anti-trafficking agreements, and, in that context, whether allegations that Vietnamese women were being sent to Taiwan could be investigated under the terms of the bilateral agreement concluded between Viet Nam and China. She also wished to know how former victims of trafficking and their foreign-born children were treated upon their return to Viet Nam, given the reports that such returnees encountered social and legal obstacles in resettling and no longer had rights as nationals of Viet Nam.

31. **Ms. Maiolo** said that trafficking in women and children appeared to have expanded by alarming proportions, and that women were being forcibly sent to countries with which Viet Nam had anti-trafficking agreements. She noted that the sanctions adopted in 2003 against public officials involved in prostitution were administrative, rather than criminal, sanctions. She was therefore curious to know whether current legislation was considered sufficiently effective, or if there were plans to amend the laws. Had any thought been given to ensuring that existing laws were effectively enforced?

32. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, was pleased that the Government had followed up on the Committee's recommendation to develop a comprehensive law on violence against women, to the extent that it had prepared a draft law on

domestic violence prevention and control. Given the urgent need for women to be protected against such violence and for sanctions to be imposed against the men who inflicted it, she wished to know the time frame for the adoption of the draft law.

33. In follow-up to an earlier query, she asked how much assistance the Government provided to restore the citizenship rights of rescued women and children upon their return to Viet Nam. She also asked the delegation to explain the trend in trafficking by which women were offered to men on a rental basis. It was a matter of concern that young girls who had engaged in prostitution were placed in administrative rehabilitation centres; she therefore wished to know what complaints procedures were available to those young women, and she wondered whether the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality would affect the operation of those centres, and whether it would offer detainees the possibility of gaining access to legal procedures and other protective measures, as required under international treaties.

34. **Ms. Tran Thi Mai Huong** (Viet Nam) said that through preventive action the Government was doing its utmost to handle the complex issue of domestic violence. In the process of elaborating the draft law on domestic violence prevention and control, the competent bodies had conducted extensive surveys and studies, which had produced a rich body of information on the forms, sources and manifestations of domestic violence. Male chauvinism was clearly at the root of many forms of domestic violence, and it represented a bias that had to be overcome in all parts of Viet Nam, and especially in rural areas.

35. She informed the Committee that the draft law was expected to be resubmitted to the National Assembly for final approval by the end of 2007. Discussions during the elaboration of the draft law had touched on mechanisms and firm measures for the prevention of domestic violence, and on the importance of sensitization campaigns and consultations, among other means, to provide information to victims and the wider society. Provisions had been made under the draft law for state managerial agencies to monitor and direct its implementation after it entered into force.

36. **Ms. Pham Nguyen Cuong** (Viet Nam) provided statistics that confirmed that trafficking had become much more prevalent in various forms in recent years, and she referred to the responses to the list of issues

with respect to questions 9 to 11 inclusive. In addition to the clarification of legal measures, and the revision of legal documents and procedures for the reception and rehabilitation of women and children who fell victim to traffickers, emphasis had also been placed on the preservation of the personal dignity of victims, through the judicious application of United Nations human rights instruments criteria and standards. Vocational training, financial assistance and medical care were offered to victims before they were reintegrated into their communities of origin.

37. The Government operated in conjunction with international organizations and under the terms of memorandums of understanding with various agencies in the Mekong subregion and with Governments of neighbouring countries, in an effort to streamline border control and cooperation to facilitate the return and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking.

38. **Mr. Vu Anh Quang** (Viet Nam) said that the Criminal Code of Viet Nam contained very specific provisions for the punishment of crimes relating to trafficking in women and children, and especially stringent measures for involvement in organized crimes. Many perpetrators had received the maximum sentence of up to 20 years' imprisonment. In a display of determination, the Government had decided in 2006 to amend the criteria for the traditional amnesty granted to prisoners on New Year's Eve, with the result that criminals guilty of drug-related crimes or the trafficking of women and children would no longer be released.

39. Since trafficking in women and children was virtually non-existent within the territory of Viet Nam, it constituted a transnational crime; international cooperation was therefore indispensable for its eradication. Although the terms of legal assistance agreements with 14 countries contained tough measures, their outcome had remained modest. He reiterated the view expressed by the head of the delegation in the oral presentation that the development of Viet Nam as a market economy and its international interactions had contributed to the phenomenon of trafficking. Motivated by sizable profits, criminal elements had taken advantage of the discrepancy between Viet Nam's domestic laws and those of other countries to lure Vietnamese women and children into trafficking and exploitation. Closer cooperation at the international level could facilitate the identification and rescue of victims. However, the Vietnamese

authorities were also hampered by the feelings of shame of the local people, who were often reluctant to cooperate in providing information on the fate of their women and children. The Government remained undaunted in its desire to fight the crime of trafficking according to its Action Plan up to the year 2010.

40. **Ms. Tran Thi Mai Huong** (Viet Nam) said that women's unions were active in promoting activities to enhance the role of women in community building, the improvement of local government, and the protection of women's rights and interests. Women's unions represented employees at all levels, including the lowest. In 2003, the Government had further institutionalized them as the core organizations for community building and socio-economic development at the grass-roots level. They also provided an effective critique of the Government's policies, laws and development plans and participated in the mechanisms to promote grass-roots democracy through major decision-making within their communities.

41. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, invited the delegation to discuss the content of the new Law on Signing, Joining and Implementing International Conventions with respect to the application of international conventions ratified by Viet Nam, as there seemed to be a contradiction with the terms of the Law on Gender Equality in that regard. She was also interested in knowing whether the Convention had been translated into the languages of the ethnic minorities.

42. **Ms. Duong Thi Thanh Mai** (Viet Nam) explained that the Law on the implementation of international conventions provided that the National Assembly would decide on the application of international legal provisions. International provisions could be directly applied if they did not conflict with domestic laws; otherwise, they could be incorporated into domestic provisions. The Government was in the process of amending domestic legislation to ensure its harmonization with international instruments.

43. The Criminal Code provided for sentences of up to 20 years of imprisonment for anyone found guilty of organizing prostitution or trafficking, without distinction between officials and non-officials. In general, public servants found guilty of violations were sanctioned in accordance with the regulations and legal provisions applicable to their official posts.

44. **Ms. Ha Thi Khiem** (Viet Nam) said that there were 53 ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam with a total population of more than 10 million. Viet Nam did not have the capacity to provide translations of international conventions in each of the minority languages; moreover, some languages had no written form. Although minority languages were highly valued and were maintained within the ethnic groups, it was considered more practical for Vietnamese to be used as a common language of study and communication, thereby facilitating the integration of ethnic minorities into society. At the same time, it was deemed more pragmatic to focus efforts on practical activities that would be of benefit to all sectors of the population rather than divert resources to a massive project for the translation of international instruments. The Government would continue to identify appropriate measures to show its responsibility towards the ethnic minorities and to safeguard their rights and interests. Consideration would be given to providing versions of international treaties in the minority languages that already had a written form. The Government sponsored public radio broadcasts in the languages of the minority groups and would endeavour to use that medium for spreading information on the Convention.

#### *Articles 7 to 9*

45. **Ms. Gaspard** said that she was pleased to note the growing participation of women in the political and public life of Viet Nam, in line with articles 7 and 8 of the Convention. She asked what measures had been taken in order to ensure the achievement of the objectives to improve the status of women.

46. **Ms. Zou Xiaqiao** said that the data on the representation of women in the National Assembly and People's Council were encouraging and noted that some targets for the strategy for the advancement of women in public life had been reached. She asked whether the Government planned the adoption of other measures to fully achieve the strategic objectives, and why such low targets had been set for local communities. She also wondered whether the Government planned to establish a quota for achieving the desired number of female government ministers or of posts within the education system. She would like the delegation to explain the discrepancy in retirement age between men and women.

47. **Ms. Begum** referred to the chart presenting the updated figures on the ratio of female to male leaders

in executive bodies, which showed that the representation of women remained low. Given the abundance of qualified and active Vietnamese women, she was somewhat surprised by the statistics and recalled that articles 4 and 7, and General Recommendation No. 25, encouraged Governments to use temporary special measures, possibly through a quota system, in order to increase the participation of women at the decision-making level. She commended the measures already adopted to mainstream gender issues into national life and advocated the consideration of additional approaches.

48. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** said that Viet Nam was to be congratulated on its achievements, particularly within the context of the difficulties it had overcome in reaching its current position. Many countries that had not had the disadvantage of a protracted war had not fared as well. It was commendable that Viet Nam had reached or surpassed its goals. She also praised Viet Nam for having adopted excellent mechanisms for the application and implementation of the Convention, reaching the most remote regions, with ample follow-up in order to gauge its achievements, in addition to an impressive output in terms of the number of instruments adopted for the improvement of the status of women.

49. **Ms. Ha Thi Khiet** (Viet Nam) said that any substantial improvement of the ratios of female to male representation would take time, which was why the Government was aiming at gradual but sustainable progress. The situation at the local level could be explained by the fact that in small communities the village elders customarily received the most votes, and therefore women were less likely to be elected to office in the local administration. However, the Government was interested in gradually raising the proportion of women and would consider improving the number of seats occupied by women in elected bodies, as suggested by members of the Committee.

50. Turning to the issue of the age of retirement of civil servants, she said that an extensive survey had shown that the majority opinion, particularly among women, was in favour of retaining the retirement age for women at 55 years. There were plans to adjust the retirement age for specific groups of workers, and in some cases for men and women to have the same age of retirement.

*The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.*