



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Twenty-fifth session

Summary record of the 519th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on 11 July 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Manalo (Vice-Chairperson)

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Ms. Manalo, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

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

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (continued)

Second and combined third and fourth periodic reports of Viet Nam (continued) (CEDAW/C/VNM/2 and 3-4, CEDAW/PSWG/2001/II/CRP.1/Add.5)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Ha Thi Khiet and Ms. Trinh Thi Hoai Duc (Viet Nam) took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Ha Thi Khiet** (Viet Nam), in response to a question from Ms. Abaka regarding land allocation in rural areas, said that the State guaranteed access to family land for rural women. She agreed that women over age 55 could be disadvantaged under the current law, a problem which could be addressed when the amendment tabled to update that legislation was discussed. Most of those women, however, could be covered by “five per cent land”, land held in reserve for distribution to those not covered by the law.

3. Despite the obstacle of traditional social customs, she agreed that contraception procedures should be made available to unmarried women, in order to counteract the negative impact of abortion and child-bearing outside marriage. Women represented 14 per cent of those affected by HIV/AIDS, and although the figure was relatively low, the Government was accelerating efforts to prevent and curb the progress of the disease through education, advocacy and training at the grass-roots level. Men’s attitudes towards family planning in general and condom use to protect their partners in particular had not yet been adequately addressed, but there had been a marked increase in use of contraceptives by men, from 6 per cent in 1997 to 31 per cent in 1999, which was an encouraging trend. As part of its efforts to reduce the abortion rate, the Government had adopted plans to encourage the use of contraceptives.

4. **Ms. Trinh Thi Hoai Duc** (Viet Nam), in reply to questions about breast cancer rates and treatment for rural women, said that currently, the highest number of deaths from cancer were caused by breast cancer. Treatment was available only in the three largest cities;

provincial hospitals did not have the facilities or financial resources to treat it effectively. A large-scale programme of education on breast self-examination was being conducted in rural areas, but international and United Nations assistance would be needed to improve access to treatment.

5. **Ms. Corti** said that her concerns centred on the status of the nearly 79 per cent of the female population living in rural areas. Rural society was the most traditional, and custom tended not to favour women’s advancement and equality. Women were a decisive force in many development projects, but were still disadvantaged at many levels. She would like to hear more about their access to social insurance and the policy for integrating them in hunger and poverty eradication programmes. More information about health conditions and literacy for rural women was also needed. Noting that article 14 of the Convention also addressed the right to housing, she asked for information on housing policy as it applied to women in rural areas.

6. **Ms. Shin** asked whether domestic violence was included in the category of “social evils”. The “reconciliation groups” to which the delegation had referred would be the primary source of counselling for a couple in conflict, yet the experience could be a negative one for a battered woman unless the power relationship between men and women was properly understood. She wondered if the reconciliation groups oriented their efforts towards empowering victims of domestic violence, and whether any training was offered to group members in dealing with such issues. According to World Bank statistics, between 1994 and 1997, up to 20 per cent of murders were the result of domestic violence. Severe penalties for domestic violence were not enough; prevention and protection were also needed. She wondered if there were any shelters for victims of domestic violence. More statistics on the subject should be included in the next report.

7. **Ms. Gaspard**, noting that nearly 20 per cent of the population of Viet Nam belonged to ethnic minorities and tended to live in rural areas where stereotypical attitudes persisted, asked whether the Government could add an ethnic minority dimension to the statistical information on gender. She asked whether the Government provided any assistance to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and, if so, to which types? Noting that prostitution was apparently

severely punished in Viet Nam, she asked whether it was the prostitutes and they alone who were punished. The reports referred to centres for the re-education of prostitutes and their re-insertion into the labour market. Were prostitutes free to enter and leave such centres? With regard to the participation of women in political life, which still seemed low at the government level, she would welcome statistics on the representation of women from ethnic minorities in the Government and the legislature. She asked further whether the target of 30 per cent participation of women in politics set by the Government was intended as a ceiling. On the subject of domestic violence, she noted that the reports indicated that a significant number of women who had migrated internally had given family problems as the reason, whereas only half that number of men had cited those grounds. She would be interested to know more about the exact causes of migration, such as abandonment, violence, etc. Many girls seemed to leave school early and few seemed to choose technological subjects for study. The representative of Viet Nam had stated in her oral presentation that girls chose their fields of study on the basis of their talents and abilities. Did that mean that girls lacked the necessary talents and abilities for technical studies?

8. **Ms. Gabr**, noting that the Constitution of Viet Nam apparently allowed the creation of NGOs, asked about the size of the membership in the various NGOs involved in promoting the status of women and whether international NGOs were free to operate in Viet Nam. She also asked about the rights of women in rural areas, whether they had access to credit and title to land. Finally, she wanted to know more about the participation of women in international affairs, in particular the number of women in senior diplomatic posts.

9. **Ms. Cui** noted that, although the principal women's organization of Viet Nam was very large, not all women were members. Was there any discrimination against non-members, particularly in rural areas in poverty eradication programmes and in the granting of loans? The law on land ownership seemed to indicate that unmarried women were entitled to land under the distribution programme only if they were over 30 years old. Such a rule could well lead to discrimination against younger women, many of whom were single heads of household and needed land to farm for subsistence. She failed to understand the references to various numbers of issues in the third

sentence of paragraph 248 of the second report (CEDAW/C/VNM/2) and requested clarification. Finally, she wanted to know what percentage of the employees of the new non-state-owned enterprises, were women and whether unions were allowed and had female members and committees on gender issues?

10. **Ms. Raday**, noting the very progressive legislation Viet Nam had adopted for the protection of women, asked whether stereotypical attitudes about family roles and the division of labour within the family still persisted. The Constitution explicitly prohibited sex discrimination and actions damaging to the dignity of women, but it would be useful to know whether any court case had dealt with complaints on those grounds. She commended the Government for reducing the wage gap by half in recent years and asked whether the figures given in the report were based on general income from wages or hourly wages. With regard to the retirement age, she asked why not all women were given the choice of continuing to work beyond 55 years of age, since some professions apparently allowed it. She asked for sex-disaggregated data on the promotion of women in the civil service, in particular whether women in the civil service reached the same rank as men with equivalent education. Similar information for women in the non-state-owned enterprises would also be appreciated. Did the incentives for employers to employ women apply to both the public and the private sectors and what percentage of women served in the academic faculties? The Committee would also like to have more precise information on the pension rights of older women who had not been in the work force owing to traditional family responsibilities. Did they receive a pension nevertheless? Noting the many cases apparently settled by the Women's Union, she asked if the Union dealt with other issues besides family matters.

11. **Ms. Myakayaka-Manzini** asked how the economic renewal process manifested itself in the household or family. Did it have any deleterious effect on the education of girl children, who often had to participate in the household economy? She asked how much success the Women's Union and other groups had had in fighting prostitution and trafficking in women. She was concerned at certain reports that some parents were apparently involved in encouraging their daughters to become prostitutes. The reports mentioned a commission on the advancement of women but did not specify which women's organizations and NGOs

were represented on the commission. The commission apparently had only an advisory role, but what recourse did the Women's Union have if the Government failed to follow the commission's advice? The involvement of women in the political decision-making process had been guided by a national plan of action, and she wondered whether that plan of action would be renewed in order to sustain the progress made. Finally, noting that Viet Nam was a one-party State, she asked by what specific procedures women candidates could be selected to stand for office.

12. **Ms. Regazzoli** asked how rural women were assisted and encouraged to participate in the decision-making process.

13. **Ms. Achmad** stressed the importance of expertise in gender-mainstreaming for appropriate planning, research, training, and the analysis and implementation of programmes. A gender-perspective must be introduced into textbooks, labour inspection, health training including medical schools, the political arena, and the courts and law schools. Immigration offices needed to be made aware of such issues, especially in dealing with trafficking in women. She asked whether Viet Nam had introduced graduate programmes in women's studies and gender issues.

14. **Ms. Manalo**, speaking in her personal capacity as an expert, asked what was being done in Viet Nam to combat communicable diseases, including tuberculosis, which often impacted women especially severely.

15. **Ms. Ha Phi Khiet** (Viet Nam) acknowledged that there was need to eliminate the discrepancy between standards of working and living conditions in rural and urban areas.

16. Women were actively involved in the national plan for poverty reduction which had yielded tangible results. Close collaboration between the Viet Nam Women's Union, government agencies and the implementation of agricultural extension programmes, among others, had helped to lower the number of poor households from 30 to 10 per cent in recent years. Similarly, success had been achieved in literacy, and the goal of universal primary education for all was close to being achieved.

17. In the area of primary health care, she said the Government had implemented firm measures, including the monitoring of health centres at all levels, under its programme for the advancement of women. As a rule,

no distinction was made between men and women in terms of access to primary health care. However, some priority was given to women in diagnostics, treatment and the distribution of medicine.

18. Under Viet Nam's improved economic status, household sanitation had been improved. The Government had invited the Women's Union to join efforts to address the issues of rural environment hygiene and water supply.

19. In connection with the right of women to participate in the rural development, she said that women had greater involvement in decision-making than men by virtue of the fact that attendance at community meetings was predominantly female.

20. Every Vietnamese citizen had a right to housing and land, and assets were divided fairly between the event of a divorce. Women enjoyed full inheritance rights and other basic rights. Older, unmarried women customarily lived with other family members. Nevertheless, they were entitled to own land and in some cases, could be awarded grants for that purpose through the village land fund.

21. Membership of the Women's Union was not a criterion for receiving loans. There were over 80,000 savings and credit groups in which women could participate.

22. Social insurance was encouraged under article 46 of the Vietnamese Constitution. Articles 23 and 24, dealing with collective law, also stipulated that members of cooperatives should contribute to the social insurance fund. As stated in paragraph 14.5 of the report (document CEDAW/C/VNM/3-4), pilot programmes in voluntary social insurance were being tried out in rural areas.

23. Social policies instituted by the Government included assistance to the elderly, the indigent and women who had contributed to the war effort. Other State-supported entities encompassed youth and community agencies, non-governmental organizations and the Women's Union. Privileges and protection for survivors of the war were guaranteed under a government decree and other legal instruments.

24. While there was no prohibition against the establishment of unions, the Vietnamese women recognized the value, experience and effectiveness of the Viet Nam Women's Union, which had been extremely active in all areas of life. In addition, she

commented on successful cooperation with other social organizations which enhanced the work of the Government. Among such groups, she highlighted the tremendous role played by non-governmental organizations and their active support for programmes aimed at the advancement of women.

25. The Vietnamese Government had made efforts to combat malaria and tuberculosis, with particular attention to areas where the incidence of disease was the highest. Priority was given to the treatment of women — the caregivers of families — medicine was provided to all persons, without distinction as to sex. The Viet Nam Women's Union and the National Committee on the Advancement of Women were monitoring the malaria situation through the Ministry of Public Health. The Women's Union had distributed information leaflets, and was introducing such innovative measures as soaking nets in anti-mosquito solutions. It had also participated in a campaign to combat tuberculosis, with emphasis on rural afflicted women.

26. In education, she said that the school dropout rate was an issue that must be addressed. Traditionally, Vietnamese boys had been accorded more respect than Vietnamese girls. Girls learned the Vietnamese characters, and stayed home to take care of the family business. Recently, however, the number of girls attending secondary schools had considerably increased. A literacy campaign had been conducted, and Government and private funds had been pooled to permit poor students, many of whom were girls, to attend colleges and universities.

27. In addition, the Government provided funds to the Women's Union to set up and maintain vocational training centres for girls, in such areas as hairdressing, sewing, electronics, and computer skills. Government centres also existed, and girls could choose the type of centre they wished to attend.

28. Under Vietnamese law, all acts of discrimination against women were prohibited, and all persons whose rights were violated had the right to recourse before the law. The Civil Court handled marriage and family issues, and protected women's rights in such areas as divorce and property. The Labour Court dealt with many cases involving maternity leave and unfair dismissal of women workers. If a woman was dismissed because she was pregnant, the Labour Court required the employer to rehire her and to compensate

her for losses. The Administrative Court also protected women's rights in cases where, for example, a woman was wrongly disciplined or victimized by inappropriate administrative delays. The Criminal Court handled cases involving such matters as violence against women and sexual harassment.

29. Domestic violence was considered to involve not only the family but the whole society, and any such acts had to be brought to the attention of the courts. There was one shelter for battered women in Ho Chi Minh City; in other cities the issue was not currently considered urgent. If a wife was beaten, she returned to her parents' home, and the parents protected her against her husband. After some time passed, the husband usually invited his wife to return home. Community reconciliation groups were made up of people who themselves had benefited from the group reconciliation method. Members met with the spouses both individually and in a group. The Government had requested the Ministry of Justice to establish guidelines for the work of the reconciliation groups. It worked with NGOs and social organizations to provide legal training and to update information on citizens' rights and women's rights and conducted seminars teaching reconciliation skills. The reconciliation groups had made a considerable impact at the grass-roots level, and had helped many people.

30. There was considerable internal migration in Viet Nam towards more profitable economic zones in the cities, in the fertile lands in the south and in the central highlands. In such migrations, wives tended to follow their husbands.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.