



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

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

Summary record of the 675th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 19 January 2005, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Manalo

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*Combined initial, second, third, fourth and fifth periodic reports of the Lao
People's Democratic Republic*

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

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

Combined initial, second, third, fourth and fifth periodic reports of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (CEDAW/C/LAO/1-5, CEDAW/PSWG/2005/I/CRP.1/Add.5 and CRP.2/Add.4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Lengsavad** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), introducing his country's combined reports (CEDAW/C/LAO/1-5), said that this was the first time the Lao People's Democratic Republic was presenting its reports on the implementation of the Convention. The reasons for the delay in submitting them were principally due to the country's efforts to bring about economic, political and institutional reforms in order to modernize the country and the shortage of skilled personnel.

3. Women made up over half of the Republic's total population of 5.6 million. The country had 49 ethnic groups with approximately 80 per cent of the Lao people living in rural and remote areas. Traditionally women had a low social status and lived in poverty, and they had also been denied freedom of expression and the right to enter politics. However, women were among the national heroes who had fought for the country's independence, a fight which had lasted for two centuries and had ended with the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975. A new era of independence, freedom and gender equality had opened up for Lao women and the entire Lao people. The Republic's first Constitution, enacted in 1991, guaranteed equal rights for men and women in political, economic, cultural, social and family life.

4. The Lao Women's Union was a national mass organization and the agency for ensuring the observance of those rights. Its organizational network extended down to the grass-roots level. The Union served as a forum for forging solidarity among Lao women from all walks of life, and encouraged the women's movement to participate in national defence and socio-economic development by creating the necessary conditions for women's greater access to

education, health care, vocational training and job opportunities.

5. Thanks to the institutional mechanisms, both constitutional and legal, to ensure gender equality, and to the Government's political will, Lao women had made progress in that area. They had become a significant force contributing to socio-economic development and occupied leadership positions at all levels. That increased representation was reflected in the composition of the National Assembly: the number of women deputies had increased from 8, 9.4 per cent, during the 1992-1997 legislative term to 25, 22.9 per cent, during the 2002-2007 term. A woman from the Hmong ethnic group was currently serving as Vice-President of the National Assembly, the first ever in his country's history.

6. The Lao People's Democratic Republic had become a State party to the Convention in 1981. Since then the Government had made every effort to implement the Convention taking into account the country's specificities and realities. The Government had also taken steps to establish a domestic legal system that would gradually meet international standards, and existing laws on gender equality had also been enacted and implemented. In 2003, the Constitution had been amended and stipulated that society and the family should focus on the implementation of women's advancement and on protecting the rights and interests of women and children. To further implement the provisions of the Constitution, in late 2004, the National Assembly had passed a law on the development and protection of women. Subsequently, the Lao People's Democratic Republic had issued a decree officially promulgating that law, whose aims included the promotion of women's economic, social and political betterment, fighting trafficking in women and children, and combating domestic violence against women and children.

7. The Government had given priority to education as a key element in its efforts to modernize, which included the aim of achieving universal primary education by 2010. With regard to female literacy, it planned to raise the figure to 75 per cent by 2010 and to 85 per cent by 2020. Primary school enrolment of girls had risen from 68 per cent in 1995 to 75 per cent in 2000, and the target was 89 per cent in 2010 and 95 per cent in 2020. In the health sector, the Government was providing health care to the country's multi-ethnic

women, particularly those living in remote areas, through its expanded medical-treatment network down to the grass-roots level. Developing primary health-care services was an important priority for the Government and included a number of projects involving nutrition and safe motherhood, sanitation for mothers at the village level and birth spacing. Such efforts had led to a decline in the country's aggregate fertility rate from 5.6 in 1995 to 4.9 in 2000. Other indicators, such as the mortality rate of women of reproductive age, the infant mortality rate and that of children under five, had also declined.

8. The Government had established a National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy aimed at implementing rural development programmes in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals. The Lao Women's Union had been instrumental in developing various sub-projects including microfinancing and microcredit; female capacity-building; promotion of agricultural and handicraft production; as well as small and medium-sized enterprises for women. A Village Development Fund Network was now being established throughout the country: 6,947 families were involved in three pilot project sites located in three provinces, 35 districts and 562 villages. The Fund, which received contributions from both villagers, the State budget and various social organizations, allowed rural small-scale entrepreneurs to secure loans to start their own businesses.

9. To further promote women's advancement and as a follow-up to the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Government had established the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, whose tasks included assisting the Government in formulating a national strategy for the comprehensive advancement of women; serving as a focal coordination point with local and foreign agencies; and implementing the Government's policy to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination. The Prime Minister had issued an order to Ministries and local administrations at all levels for the establishment of units for the advancement of women within their respective institutions in order to fulfil the above-mentioned provisions.

10. The National Commission for the Advancement of Women was in the process of drafting a National Strategy for the Advancement of Women for 2005-2010 with a focus on five major goals: enhancing women's participation in the implementation of the

National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy; promoting female education; improving health-care services for women; increasing women's representation in decision-making positions; and strengthening organizations that promoted women's advancement.

11. Lastly, notwithstanding the efforts by the Government to implement the Convention and some initial achievements, there were a number of inhibiting factors, including his country's status as a landlocked least developed country; the general low educational level of the population, which was even lower among women; the lack of detailed gender-disaggregated statistics; backward customs and traditions; and entrenched gender stereotypes. None of those factors could be rapidly overcome.

Articles 1, 2 and 3

12. **Mr. Flinterman** asked the reporting State whether a case could be brought before the judiciary if a law was incompatible with the Convention and whether the judiciary could refer to the Convention and apply its provisions in appropriate cases. It was unclear whether the new law for the protection and development of women adopted in 2004 had a definition of discrimination against women, and, if so, whether it was in accordance with article 1 of the Convention. The Committee wanted to know if the new law of 2004 allowed for a mechanism aimed at monitoring its implementation. He also asked whether the reporting State had become a party to major human rights treaties and requested it to define the relationship between the Lao Women's Union, a State organ that played an important role in the Republic, and non-government organizations, in particular those dealing with human rights and women's rights.

13. **Ms. Šimonović** said that additional information should be provided on preparation of the combined reports. She asked who had prepared it, what had been the roles both of the Lao Women's Union and of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women in that process, whether the Government had adopted it prior to its being sent to the Committee, and whether it had been submitted to Parliament. The Committee also wished to know whether the Convention had been translated into all the languages of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, whether it had been published in the reporting State's official gazette, whether international laws were directly applicable in the country, and whether it had any plans to incorporate a

definition of discrimination into the Constitution or national laws that would conform to the Convention.

14. **Ms. Manalo** asked whether the reporting State had envisaged enacting specific laws for women, similar to those relating to ethnic groups. Given the fact that the Lao Women's Union was mandated to improve women's role and status, and that it was actively involved in the development process, the reporting State should define the relationship between the Union and the Government and state whether the Union had the power to amend laws.

15. **Ms. Shin** asked the reporting State for information regarding its national machinery, operational procedures and plan of action. It should also describe how the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women for 2005-2010 would be mainstreamed into the various Ministries and implemented at the village level. The National Plan of Action's principle tasks included the strengthening of women's organizations. The reporting State should indicate the number of such organizations and explain why the National Plan of Action did not include measures to combat violence against women and female trafficking, very important issues, on its list of priorities.

16. **Ms. Gabr** asked the reporting State to provide a breakdown by sector of the budgetary allocations for the National Commission for the Advancement of Women. Information should also be provided on whether the Commission was developing a strategy for women's advancement and how priorities were being set. The Committee would appreciate information on how the country planned to establish a dialogue in society on gender development given the problem of illiteracy among rural women and the existence of the numerous ethnic groups and languages. The Committee also wanted to know if the National Commission was looking at the question of combating the drug culture and assessing its impact on women, particularly rural women, and whether it intended to seek assistance from the United Nations or other international or regional bodies.

17. **Ms. Arocha Dominguez** wondered how the Lao Women's Union, a popular women's movement with no executive authority, interacted effectively with relevant government ministries, and how it was able to represent the interests of all ethnic groups and minorities, and all parts of the Lao People's

Democratic Republic, including the most isolated ones. In a society with a high illiteracy rate, how were Lao women made aware of their rights?

18. **Ms. Saiga** requested clarification as to whether the Lao Women's Union or the National Commission was responsible for implementing the provisions of the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action. She would also appreciate information on funding for the two women's entities. For example, did they have joint or separate budgets?

19. **Ms. Pholsena** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), replying to Committee members' questions, said that the Lao Women's Union was a mass organization representing the legitimate interests of all Lao women, including women from all ethnic groups. It promoted equal rights for women and their participation in national development through capacity-building and interacted closely with other women's groups, such as the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions and the Lao Front for National Construction.

20. **Mr. Kiettisak** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), replying to questions on the application of the Convention in the Lao national legal system, said that his Government had become a party to numerous treaties in recent years and intended to accede to still others in the near future. With support from other countries and international organizations the Lao Government was attempting to establish a hierarchy of domestic and international law. Although it lacked national legislation on children's rights, the Lao People's Democratic Republic complied fully with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which it was a party.

21. The courts had no authority to decide in conflicts between national and international law; the Constitution provided that such situations should be addressed by aligning domestic law more closely with international law. While domestic legislation did not contain a definition of discrimination, two articles of the Constitution clearly established the equality of men and women before the law. Additionally, the meaning of discrimination was clear from the context of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women, adopted in late 2004, if not explicitly spelled out. A Prime Minister's decree would also be drafted to clarify the issue.

22. **Mr. Kittikhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) attributed the delay in submitting the reports to the situation of the Republic as a landlocked developing country with a limited number of qualified human and financial resources, most of which had to be channelled into poverty eradication. His country was making every effort to comply with its reporting obligations to the Committee and other treaty bodies, such as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. While the current national legislation contained no specific definition of discrimination as such, he believed that, overall, it was framed in the right spirit.

23. **Ms. Bouphanouvong** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the Lao Women's Union, the largest women's organization in the country, was tasked with implementing Government decisions while the mandate of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, created to follow up the Beijing Platform for Action, was to help the Government formulate policy and monitor its implementation. Over the next five years, the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women would focus on the most serious problems affecting women and girls, such as poverty, particularly in remote rural areas, and low school enrolment.

24. The National Commission for the Advancement of Women, a non-permanent body, was funded by the Government and headed by the Deputy Prime Minister, whose instructions were carried out by its 15 unpaid members. The Commission promoted the advancement of women in the relevant Ministries, and at the provincial level with support from the local authorities. Since it functioned on a minimal budget, no resources whatsoever were available to pay the persons involved in those activities. However, such work in support of women was deemed to be an honour that did not require compensation. The Commission's secretariat was currently comprised of six staff members; the size of the staff would be tripled over the next five years.

25. **Mr. Kiettisak** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the Government was responsible for monitoring and following up the implementation of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women. To that end, tasks were delegated to the Ministries of Health, Education, Information and Public Security, local administrations, the Lao Women's Union, the other women's associations mentioned earlier and the People's Supreme Court. The Lao Women's Union

served as a focal point, coordinating the activities of all the various executing entities. If necessary, the Government would also establish a supervisory monitoring unit later on.

Articles 4 and 5

26. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said that, while she understood the difficulties encountered in drafting the combined reports, the process of monitoring the implementation of the Convention and, following the current session, the Committee's concluding comments would assist the Government in formulating future policies to advance the equality of women. She therefore encouraged the Government and the Lao Women's Union to seek international assistance in implementing those comments and in drafting the next periodic report. Regarding article 4, paragraph 1 of the Convention, which was a key article in providing a tool for accelerating women's equality, she wished to know whether general recommendation No. 25 had been translated and discussed by the Lao Women's Union.

27. While she welcomed the Presidential decree establishing that National Assembly members must include an appropriate proportion of people of different strata, sex and ethnic minorities (page 14 of the combined reports), she wondered whether any of the 25 female members of the National Assembly were from ethnic minorities. She also wished to know what benchmarks in terms of a percentage-based representation were being used in the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (2005-2010), whether, in addition to quotas, support measures were also being introduced, and whether benchmarks were also being set in other areas.

28. **Ms. Dairiam**, referring to the Lao People's Democratic Republic's response to question 7 (CEDAW/PSWG/2005/I/CRP.2/Add.4, page 3), said that she would appreciate further clarification of its activities to combat culturally entrenched stereotypes, in particular its training programmes on gender role. She was concerned, in particular, about the use of the term "gender role", as the ideology of gender was not only about stereotypical roles, division of labour, etc., but also about entrenched perceptions regarding leadership, rights, privileges, etc. By all accounts, Lao culture validated male leadership and authority. She was concerned by the statement in the response to question 16 that village chiefs were elected democratically by heads of households or their

representatives. In her view, it was incorrect to deem such elections “democratic” when the overwhelming majority of heads of households were men. It seemed that the notion of validating male heads of households was accepted by both men and women. She, therefore, wished to know whether the campaign to eradicate stereotypes sought to raise awareness of power relationships between men and women and their impact on all aspects of life, in particular, the adverse effects of continuing to see men as heads of households.

29. **Ms. Morvai** said that one of the most shocking stereotypes was the notion that the role of women was to serve men’s uncontrollable sexual urges. She strongly objected to the fact that marital rape was not a crime in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and urged the Government to reconsider the issue, as it was wrong to discriminate against married women. She sensed a certain helplessness on the part of the Government regarding the way to deal with the high number of Lao girls involved in prostitution and trafficking. Such girls were exploited, both as women and as Lao citizens, by so-called sex tourists and businessmen from rich, developed countries — primarily Sweden, the other Nordic countries and the United States of America.

30. The Governments of developed countries, therefore, had a duty to assist the Lao Government in tackling the issue, and she urged the Lao Government to be proactive in seeking such assistance. Certain developed countries fought trafficking but at the same time believed that prostitution was acceptable. She hoped that the Lao Government would instead adopt the view that human beings must never be sold as commodities and that trafficking and prostitution went hand in hand and were equally intolerable. It was also essential to punish clients and members of the sex industry.

31. **Ms. Zou Xiaojiao** said that the stereotype that men were superior to women seemed to be deeply rooted in Lao society and, in her view, had a very negative influence on the way in which people thought and behaved, and on the decisions taken by lawmakers. With regard to the attitudes towards domestic violence and rape referred to on page 16 of the combined reports, she was very surprised by the claim that young people perceived violent behaviour between spouses to be “fairly normal”, with almost 54 per cent of young people — 63 per cent of girls, but only 45 per cent of boys — believing that it was acceptable for a man to

hit his wife if she had done something wrong. She would be interested to know what the Government’s approach was to the issue and whether any measures had been adopted in that regard, including education on gender equality. Eliminating stereotypes was no easy task, but she looked forward to learning about further activities in the next report.

32. **Mr. Kiettisak** (Lao People’s Democratic Republic) said that it must be borne in mind that the combined reports had been written in 1998 and finalized in 2000. While the stereotype that men were superior to women might have existed 30 years before, no one in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic thought that it was still true today, a fact clearly articulated in its legislation and Constitution. Indeed, comments had been invited from all Lao citizens, regardless of gender, during the adoption of the Constitution and the drafting of the national policy for the development and advancement of women. He was sure that the general view was that Lao men and women enjoyed equal rights. In that context, a strategy for the development and protection of women had been developed, which, inter alia, ensured that women and children had greater access to education, including in remote areas. Measures had also been adopted in the health sector.

33. While it was true that, 40 years earlier, the law had stipulated that the man was the head of the family, the current Family Law stipulated that the husband and wife could decide between themselves who would be the head of the household and it was therefore no longer an issue. Marital rape was a totally new concept in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and current legislation therefore contained no clause punishing it. The Government was, however, in the process of conducting a study of the issue. In addition, in 2002, the Criminal Law had been improved in that regard and was now in the process of being submitted to the National Assembly. He failed to understand why the claim that violent behaviour between spouses was perceived as “fairly normal” — which was inconceivable for the Lao delegation — had been included in the combined reports and wondered whether it was simply the view of the author. While acknowledging that some minor instances of domestic violence did occur, he said that, generally speaking, it was unacceptable in Lao society for a man to use violence against his wife.

34. Sex tourism was a problem in Lao society, and women and children were the primary victims. The Government had adopted measures to tackle the issue, which had also been discussed at a recent meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Measures included greater cooperation among neighbouring countries and, in 2004, a declaration on combating trafficking in women and children had been signed by six countries in the Mekong subregion. His Government attached great importance to combating trafficking and prostitution — both of which were major problems for countries along the Mekong River, especially in cities — but required assistance in tackling them, particularly from countries with financial resources and expertise.

35. **Ms. Bouphanouvong** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), responding to the question as to whether any female members of the National Assembly were from ethnic minorities, said that she would endeavour to provide that information at a later date. In the meantime, the woman from the Hmong ethnic group who was currently serving as Vice-President of the National Assembly was very influential and successful. The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (2005-2010), meanwhile, had five major goals covering various sectors, including education and health. While the National Commission for the Advancement of Women provided information and advice on improving the role of women, it was up to each sector to draw up its own implementation strategy. For example, the education sector was responsible for incorporating the National Strategy into activities carried out by the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Health would still be responsible for providing health services for women. In short, implementation of the National Strategy was the responsibility of both the Government and the relevant bodies in the sectors concerned.

36. While acknowledging that there were some instances of domestic violence in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, she said that they were fairly minor. The Lao Women's Union and women's organizations had done everything possible to protect the interests of women and children, including taking measures against trafficking and prostitution. Labour migration was widespread in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, owing to the different levels of economic development among the countries of the region, and illegal labour migration was closely related

to trafficking in women and children and prostitution. The Government had, therefore, taken immediate steps to tackle those issues, such as setting up a national commission to combat human trafficking, headed by the Deputy Prime Minister, and establishing a mechanism to assist and protect the victims of human trafficking and prostitution.

Article 6

37. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** said that she had noted the growing phenomenon of trafficking in women and children in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, affecting provinces bordering Thailand and rural women in particular, the results of the study carried out in 1998, and other information received by the Committee that resettled minority groups from the highlands had no sustainable livelihood and were therefore more susceptible to traffickers. In that regard, she wished to know what the Government was doing to address the poverty of such people, who were either trafficked or chose to go to Thailand to alleviate their poverty, despite knowing full well that they might be forced into prostitution or subjected to sexual abuse. Referring to the Government's participation in the subregional project entitled Trafficking in Women and Children in the Mekong subregion, she wished to know how successful that project had been in curbing trafficking, whether any information was available on the number of women and children trafficked, whether any follow-up projects had been undertaken and, if not, whether any were planned.

38. **Ms. Gaspard** said that she hoped that the dialogue with the Committee would help the Lao People's Democratic Republic, a relatively young State, to combat discrimination against women, which was essential not only in its own right, but also for development. Violence against women was often hidden for the reason that it took place mainly in the home. According to the combined reports, article 22 of the Criminal Law stated that exemption from penal liabilities might be granted in cases of physical violence between close relatives. The response to question 9, however, stated that legislation had been adopted including a clause on combating violence against women. She therefore wondered whether article 22, which was clearly not in line with the Convention, had been annulled. Lastly, she wished to know whether any awareness campaigns were being carried out to encourage women to report cases of

domestic violence and, in that regard, drew the attention of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to general recommendation No. 19.

39. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that the State party's combined reports (CEDAW/C/LAO/1-5) indicated that prostitution appeared to be a major problem, and urged the Government to do more to analyse and solve the situation. Furthermore, trafficking in women was a major human rights violation, and the State party must take urgent measures to address it. She had been struck by numerous references in the report to the difficulties encountered by the Government. While she understood those difficulties, it was as if they were being presented to the Committee as an excuse for failure to make more progress.

40. **Mr. Kiattisak** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that his Government had made great efforts to reduce poverty and indeed aimed to eliminate poverty completely by 2020. The Lao People's Democratic Republic had participated in the project on trafficking in the Mekong subregion, and had signed an agreement with Thailand on the prevention of trafficking in persons. Success would not be achieved overnight, but the Government had made an encouraging start. Article 22 of the Penal Code did provide for the offence of domestic violence, but the perpetrator could not be penalized unless the injured party sought redress from the courts. However, various actors, including the Lao Women's League, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions, the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union and other agencies, were working with the Government to solve the problem of domestic violence, which required a radical solution. Although the clients of prostitutes were not regarded as offenders under the law, women's organizations were fighting for the right to bring them to court.

41. **Mr. Kittikhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that he wished to make it clear that prostitution and trafficking in women were illegal in his country. However, since Thailand was more developed than his own country, and thus relatively attractive, the problem of cross-border trafficking could not be so quickly solved, despite the Government's vigorous efforts. The problem of how to assist and educate ethnic groups living in rural and mountainous areas was also a very complex one, and his country required more financial assistance from the international community.

Articles 7, 8 and 9

42. **Ms. Zerdani** said that, despite the difficult legacy of colonial occupation, the State party had demonstrated the will to address the situation of women, having ratified the Convention as early as 1981. Moreover, women had played a significant role in the country's struggle for independence, and through its Constitution of 1991, the State party had demonstrated the will to address the problem of gender inequality. It must continue to appoint women to public positions in all areas, whether in Parliament, the Government or local authorities, as those appointed would in turn serve as examples to their countrywomen. According to the Beijing Platform for Action, the reporting State had the right to ask international organizations for assistance, and it was duty bound to avail itself of that right.

43. **Ms. Popescu** said that she was gratified to learn that one of the aims of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women 2005-2010 was to increase women's participation in decision-making positions, and she urged the State party to continue those efforts. However, it was clear that many obstacles remained, including illiteracy among women and the weight of traditional attitudes. Moreover, the combined reports indicated that there was also considerable psychological resistance from women themselves, who suffered from low self-esteem. That was a serious issue, which must be addressed as an important responsibility of the Government and the Lao Women's Union. She would therefore be grateful for more information about concrete measures taken to increase women's participation in public life at the central and local levels, about concrete actions taken under the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women, and about the efforts of the Lao Women's Union to make its members aware of their rights as citizens.

44. **Ms. Gaspard**, noting that according to page 21 of the combined reports, women's participation in the National Assembly had increased from 9.4 per cent to 21.1 per cent in 1997, inquired whether that trend had continued, and whether it was likely to develop further in the future. However, women's participation at the local level was very low, and the measures taken to remedy the situation very weak. Moreover, the level of will demonstrated within the National Assembly had not been reflected in the number of administrative posts held by women, and she wished to know whether

the Government planned to take measures to resolve the situation.

45. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that, according to data included on page 21 of the State party's combined reports (CEDAW/C/LAO/1-5), women's participation in political and public life was not just low, but stagnating. The report also stated, on page 22, that of the country's total 8,505 village chiefs, only 88 were women. That figure was not just extremely low, it was also unfair, unjust and undemocratic. Furthermore, the reports often discussed the difficulties of promoting women's advancement while failing to offer solutions. The Lao Women's Union was mobilizing women and implementing programmes and training, but was doing so in its capacity as an executing agency. It was the direct responsibility of the State to take a more proactive approach in its efforts to guarantee women's effective participation in political life, and she hoped that the newly set up National Commission for the Advancement of Women would work to address that issue.

46. **Ms. Pholsena** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that there were women representatives at all levels of public administration — including the village level — who were actively engaged in promoting women's interests. However, her country remained very underdeveloped following many years of foreign occupation. As part of that legacy, women continued to face many obstacles, as well as entrenched stereotypes concerning their role in society. Their general level of self-esteem was poor, and their level of education low. The Government had introduced laws and regulations designed to increase respect for women's rights, and was aiming to raise their education level with a view to making them economically self-sufficient. Although the Lao Women's Union received aid from international partners, more such aid would be required in order to improve women's situation.

47. **Ms. Bouphanouvong** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that her Government was striving to promote women's political participation at all levels of society, including through affirmative-action measures. It was because the situation had remained unsatisfactory that the Government had formulated its National Strategy for the Advancement of Women.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.