



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

Pre-session working group

Forty-fourth session

20 July-7 August 2009

**Responses to the list of issues and questions with regard
to the consideration of the combined initial, second, third,
fourth, fifth and sixth periodic reports**

Liberia*

* The present report is being issued without formal editing.



The pre-session working group considered the combined initial to sixth periodic reports of Liberia (CEDAW/C/LBR/6)

General

1. *The report states that it was written with the assistance of eight working groups. Please provide more information on the process of elaboration of the report specifying which Government departments and institutions were involved and the nature and extent of their participation, whether consultations were held with non-governmental organizations and whether the report was adopted by the Government and presented to Parliament.*

Based on the content areas of the CEDAW Convention, the report writing was divided into the following eight (8) content areas with each content area constituting a working group:

Legal Working Group
Social/Institution Working Group
Political Working Group
Employment, Culture, Marriage and Social Working Group
Education Working Group
Health Working Group
Action Plan and Data Working Group
Rural Working Group

Legal Working Group:

The Legal working group comprised of four Institutions including the Ministry of Justice-Chair, the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL), the Foundation for International Dignity (FIND), and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). This group was responsible for collecting and compiling information on Articles 1, 2, & 15 of the CEDAW Convention.

Social/Institution Working Group:

The Social/Institution group consisted of eleven Institutions. These Institutions were the Ministries of Gender & Development-Chair, Health & Social Welfare, Education, and Internal Affairs. Others were the Liberia National Police (LNP), UNMIL-Office of the Gender Advisor (UNMIL-OGA), UNIFEM, Women Legislative Caucus, House of Representatives Gender Committee, Women In Peace building Network (WIPNET), and Women NGO Secretariat Of Liberia (WONGOSOL). This group was responsible to collect and compile information on Articles 4, 5, & 6 of the Convention.

Political Working Group:

The Political group had ten Institutions including the National Elections Commission (NEC)-Chair, and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Gender & Development. Other institutional members of this group were the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN), UNIFEM, UNMIL-OGA, UNDP, Liberian Women Initiative (LWI), Women Legislative Caucus, House of Representatives Gender Committee, and WONGOSOL. The Political group was responsible for Articles 7, 8, & 9 of the Convention.

Employment, Culture, Marriage and Social Working Group:

This working group comprised of six Government Ministries/Agencies, which included the Ministries of Labor-Chair, Commerce & Industry, Health & Social Welfare, Gender & Development, Information, and Youth & Sports. Other members were UNIFEM, UNDP, WONGOSOL, Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) and WIPNET. The group dealt with Articles 11, 13, & 16 of the Convention.

Education Working Group:

The Education working group had two Government Institutions: the Ministries of Education-Chair and Gender & Development. Other members were UNICEF and UNESCO and the Forum for African Women Educationalist (FAWE). This group worked on Article 10 of the Convention.

Health Working Group:

The Health working group comprised of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare-Chair; other members were the Ministry of Gender & Development, IRC, Society of Women Against AIDS-Liberia (SWAA-Liberia) and Touching Humanity In Need of Kindness (THINK). This group worked on Article 12 of the Convention.

Action Plan and Data working Group:

This group consisted of the Ministry of Planning & Economic Affairs-Chair, Gender & Development, the Liberia Institute for Geo-Information Survey (LISGIS), and New Africa Development and Research Agency (NARDA). This group worked on Article 3 of the Convention.

Rural Working Group:

The Rural working group comprised of five Institutions including the Ministries of Agriculture-Chair, Gender & Development, and Internal Affairs. Other members were FAO, OXFAM, and the Rural Women Associations. This group drafted the report on Article 14 of the Convention.

These working groups met weekly as a team while meeting bi-monthly in a general working session for regular updates and review with the assistance of a technical team from the Ministry of Gender & Development and a United Nations sponsored local consultant.

With regards to whether the report was adopted by the Government and Parliament, the report was adopted by the Liberian Cabinet chaired by the President of Liberia. However it has not been adopted by the Liberian Parliament.

2. *Kindly describe the manner in which the provisions of the Convention are reflected in national development strategies and in instruments such as the 2008 Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Millennium Development Goals reports.*

The Government of Liberia is strongly committed to gender equality as a means of maintaining peace, reducing poverty, enhancing justice and promoting women's empowerment and national development. As such, while provisions of the Convention may not be mentioned in the PRS and MDG report article by article, both documents are unequivocal in terms of addressing gender inequalities, women's and children's rights promotion and empowerment. The PRS specifically lays the framework for the achievement of gender equality, women's and girls' empowerment, and equitable access to resources and benefits. The PRS Priority interventions were developed with the CEDAW report in mind and all recommendations from this report are included in the PRS document.

3. *The report provides limited disaggregated statistical data by sex on the situation of women in areas covered by the Convention. Please provide information on the status of data collection in the country in general, and to what extent such data collection takes place on a sex-disaggregated basis. Please indicate how the Government intends to support the collection of data disaggregated by sex pertaining to the areas of the Convention so as to assist policymaking and programme development and to measure progress towards implementation of the Convention.*

The Government through the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) recently launched the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS). The NSDS is a framework aimed at rebuilding statistical capacity and strengthening coordination across the Ministries and Agencies responsible for collecting data.

As part of Government's support to data collection, LISGIS, in collaboration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, will establish and equip County Statistical Unit with a LISGIS County Statistical Officer in place in seven counties immediately and in the rest of the counties by the end of 2009. LISGIS and the University of Liberia will also develop an in-service training program to train at least 100 staff over three years, conduct annual trainings for county officers, and develop a statistic degree program at UL.

LISGIS, working with sector Ministries and Agencies, has put into place a plan to train staffs from sector Ministries and Agencies in sector ministries data collection methodology and techniques.

With regards to sex-disaggregated data, improvements have been made in this area as evidenced by the results of the recent National Population and Housing Census, the 2007/08 National School Census report, the Demographic and Health Survey and Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire; all of which have comprehensive sex-disaggregated data.

Constitutional, legislative and institutional framework and status of the Convention

4. *The report indicates (para. 3.4) that the Convention has not yet been domesticated into the national legal system and that discrimination against women is not defined in the Constitution or in any other statutory laws. Please indicate if, as part of the Constitutional reform to be undertaken between 2008 and 2011, the Government intends to domesticate the Convention as well as take the necessary action to amend and/or repeal all discriminatory statutory provisions and reform the national legislative framework with the view to guarantee the equal rights and non-discrimination of women.*

The domestication process of the Convention will be considered during the Constitutional review process. The President has set up a Constitutional Review Taskforce which is chaired by the Governance Commission. The Ministries Gender and Development and Justice along with other key sector Ministries and Agencies are members of this taskforce. During the deliberations of the taskforce, the Gender Ministry will work along with the other members of the taskforce to ensure the Convention is domesticated into the national legal system.

5. *As the report states, customary law (see para. 4.4) legalized through the Revised Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia discriminate in purpose or effect against women. Please provide information on the steps the Government has taken, or intends to take, to identify and amend all statutory and customary laws that are discriminatory against women and not in compliance with the Convention. In this connection, please indicate whether the Law Commission has been established, as mentioned in the report (para. 4.12), and what progress has been made up to date.*

Legislation for the Law Commission has been completed by the Ministry of Justice and is awaiting passage in the Legislature. A panel of Liberian Law experts has been convened to assess the nature of Liberia's dual legal system and traditional justice. This panel is expected to produce a legal opinion for use by a larger body of stakeholders for recommended reform of the Hinterland Regulations.

To date, as noted in the report, changes have been made to the traditional law with respect to customary wives. The Inheritance Law provides for all rights of the statutory wife to be likewise accorded all customary wives. The human rights of the customary wife are to be protected. Additionally, the Act provides that: compulsory marriage of a widow to the deceased husband's kin is unlawful; it shall be unlawful for any customary female under the age of 16 to be given in customary marriage to a man; compulsory wife is prohibited; the recovery of dowry, confession damages and confession names are prohibited; the property acquired or owned by a customary woman either before or during marriage, belongs to her exclusive of her husband; and it is unlawful for parents to choose their daughter's husband. Legislative reform is still required to bring the age of consent into line with other statutory provisions, including the Rape Law which provides for 18 years.

6. *The report notes also (para. 4.7) that women's access to justice is very limited, particularly in rural areas. Please provide information on measures in place to enhance access to justice for women; encourage women to use the courts to enforce their rights; and to raise awareness and sensitize judges, lawyers and law enforcement officers with regards to the State party's obligations under the Convention to achieve gender equality. Please include details on any efforts to decentralize the judiciary, legal aid offered to women and measures in place to raise awareness among women of their rights under existing legislation.*

Extensive awareness raising as to the rights of women in rural areas has been undertaken in the past couple of years. In addition, training workshops were held for personnel of the justice system on the Convention. This was intended to educate these personnel of the justice system on the Convention and their roles in ensuring its implementation.

The newly established Ministry of Justice SGBV Crimes Unit with the mandate to persecute sexual offenses will work with Partners, through its Outreach and Training Coordinator, on public education in relation to SGBV and the Unit's work, enhancing public trust, promoting engagement with the formal justice system in cases of SGBV, and thereby

reducing resort to violence or alternative practices to formal justice such as trial by ordeal or Sassywood. There are ongoing difficulties in ensuring victims and witnesses come to trial, that media does not distort the case and endanger the survivors, and similarly that the rights of defendants are also protected from public misunderstanding to ensure a free and fair trial. Public outreach and education is thus a crucial component of the new prosecution unit.

There are ongoing specialized trainings for prosecutors and police in the investigation and prosecution of SGBV crimes.

In terms of enhancing women, particularly rural women access to the Justice system, organizations like the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) has embarked on the campaign of bringing the law to the people. It should be noted that most times people are only told that laws exist but the actual laws are not fully explained to the people especially the targeted beneficiaries. What has been done over the years was to simplify these laws that inform women especially rural women of their rights (Devolution of Estates Act/Inheritance Law and the Rape Law). AFELL and other human rights organizations have traveled throughout the fifteen counties of Liberia disseminating the contents of the law in simple English. Most recently the law has been translated into seven local languages and disseminated via radio dramas and radio messages on five of the fifteen counties. Efforts are underway to have more translations in the other remaining languages to be able to reach the entire population. It is only when the laws are brought to the women and they understand the implications of reporting abuses that they can safely access the justice system. What is also being done through visuals is explaining the stages and procedures for reporting and prosecution of crimes to the population. Most persons are not aware of the stages and procedures so much effort is being made at getting them to appreciate how the system works from the instance a report is made to the time when trial commences and up to the conclusion of the trial.

The Judiciary has convened a Non-Lawyers Taskforce to consider the issue of introducing the paralegal system in Liberia. This idea stems from the fact that there is an inadequate number of lawyers to handle issues of citizens especially in the rural areas. A consortium of paralegals has also been set up which comprises of five local organizations that provide free legal services. These institutions are AFELL, Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, Foundation for International Dignity (FIND), Prison Fellowship and Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy (FOHRD). These Institutions are invited to the Task Force set up by the Chief Justice of Liberia to chart the way forward in setting up a Paralegal program in Liberia. It is hoped that the paralegal program will bring the basic knowledge of the laws to the people especially those in the rural areas. Community persons who are trusted by their people will undergo trainings to assist their communities access the justice system.

There are efforts to decentralize the judiciary with the construction and/or renovation of courts especially in the rural areas. The Justice Ministry also has a mobile persecution unit that persecutes cases around the country. Additionally the recently established James A.A. Pierre Judicial Training Institute has begun training magistrates and judges in collaboration with the American Bar Association, Carter Center, etc. to ensure an effective judicial system.

7. According to the report, the State Party has adopted a number of important policies and action plans for the promotion of gender equality. In this connection, what is the status of the drafting of the National Gender Policy mentioned in (para. 5.21) the report? Please provide more information outlining its goals, objectives and strategies. Please also provide information on the impediments to the effective achievement and implementation of the policies and action plans currently in place as well as on remedial measures undertaken.

Currently there is a draft of the National Gender Policy (NGP) that needs to be validated, finalized and submitted to Cabinet for endorsement. After being endorsed by the Cabinet the document will be forwarded to the National Legislature for enactment into law.

Goal of the Policy:

The overall goal of the National Gender Policy is to mainstream gender in the national development process, enhance women's and girls empowerment for sustainable and equitable development; and to create and strengthen gender responsive structures, processes and mechanism for development in which both women and men participate with equal access to and control over all resources and benefits.

Objectives of the Policy:

The overall objective of the National Gender Policy is to serve as a reference in engendering the national development process and as a mean of empowering women and children. Specific objective are as follow:

- Provide all sectors with guidelines for gender mainstreaming, and to strengthen human resources capacity for gender analysis;
- Support women's equal access/participation in development processes, and decision-making structures, and redress gender imbalances in society;
- Eradicate GBV;
- Promote equal access/control over productive resources, services and opportunities;
- Promote recognition and value of women's multiple roles, responsibilities and contribution towards national development, and as beneficiaries;
- Influence the domestication of regional and international instruments of gender equality;
- Ensure the collection and use of gender disaggregated data;
- Establish institutional framework for coordinating, implementing and monitoring the NGP;
- Mobilize resources for the implementation of the NGP; and champion for gender budgeting;
- Develop a communication strategy, and an advocacy program for the NGP to create awareness and popularize its existence.

Included within the draft National Gender Policy is a detailed implementation strategy or action plan intended to enhance the full implementation of the Policy. This implementation strategy provides that the Ministry of Gender and Development carries out its coordination and supervisory role, while all Government Institutions along with the local and international non-governmental Institutions operating in Liberia serving as implementers of the policy.

8. *The report indicates (para. 5.10) that the Ministry of Gender and Development is understaffed and lacks adequate resources. Please explain the measures the Government is taking, or intends to take, to provide the national machinery for the advancement of women with adequate decision-making capacity and financial and human resources.*

The Government of Liberia as part of its Civil Service Reform Strategy has initiated several programs aimed at building the capacities of Government Ministries and Agencies that will lend structural support for development, growth and productivity in the public sector. The Ministry of Gender and Development is an integral part of this process. The Ministry has benefited from two of these civil servant reform programs: The Senior Executive Service (SES) and the Scott Family Foundation/Nike Fellow program. The SES attracts Liberian professionals to public service with the goal of providing support to the post-conflict Government to re-energize and re-build the capacity of the public service while the Scott Family Fellows program is aimed at filling the capacity gap and supporting the work of Ministers and senior officials. Currently the Ministry of Gender and Development recruited two SES professionals: a Program Officer and a Senior Policy Coordinator. The Ministry has also received one Scott Family Fellow through the Civil Service Agency. The Ministry will also benefit from another SES personnel during the final phase of the program.

In addition to the recruitment of these professionals, the Ministry has also been involved in strengthening its capacity by providing training opportunities for its employees both nationally and internationally.

The Ministry also benefits from international consultancy and technical assistance to boost its service delivery capacity.

In order to enhance the performance of the Ministry's staffs across the country, the Ministry purchased and supplied the needed logistics and equipment to its County Offices to enhance their work. Fifteen Child Welfare Officers have been hired and trained to assist the County Coordinators and enhance the operations and functioning of the Child Protection Network at the County level.

Additionally, UNDP and the Ministry of Youth and Sports have a National United Nations Volunteer Program that places recent college graduates in the various counties as volunteers. Under a special arrangement, the program has assigned volunteers to strengthen the Ministry's offices in the Counties as well as support the County Coordinators. These volunteers help build the capacity of the various county coordinators especially in the areas of report writing and work plan development, amongst others.

In terms of resource support, budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Gender and Development has increased over the years manifesting Government's commitment to the work of the Ministry. For example, budget allocation for the Fiscal Year 2006/2007 was US \$767,994; US\$ 995,436 was allocated for Fiscal Year 2007/2008 and US\$ 1,084,447 for 2008/09.

Special temporary measures

9. *According to information provided on the report (para. 6.2), the Government has adopted special temporary measures in the areas of education, political participation and in the security sector. However, also according to the report, the proposed 30 per cent quota for women representation in all political parties has not been fully adhered to. What specific enforcement mechanisms have been established to ensure that the special measures adopted effectively contribute to accelerate de facto equality between men and women? Does the Government intend to enact legislation providing for quotas and thereby binding on all political parties?*

Currently there are no specific concrete mechanisms put into place to enforce the proposed 30 per cent women's political participation measure in the absence of legislation. However, the Women Legislative Caucus in collaboration with its Partners including the National Machinery, International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, UNIFEM, and the Coalition of Political Parties Women of Liberia has submitted to the National Legislature a Bill known as "the Fairness Bill/Bill for the Equal Participation and Representation of Women in the Political Process". This Bill intends to amend the New Election Law of Liberia and therein create Chapter 11 with the caption "Equal Participation and Representation of Women in the Political Process". It provides that there shall be a minimum of 30 per cent representation of women as national elected officers and heads of the principal and subsidiary organs and structures of each registered Political Party in Liberia and should also be reflected in the list of candidates submitted by all registered Political Parties to the National Elections Commission for inclusion on the ballots for National and Constituency and Municipal Elections. The Bill is being debated and pending enactment into law.

Stereotypes and cultural practices

10. *According to the information provided on the report (para. 7.1), women suffer from the pervasive impact of entrenched cultural stereotypes on the enjoyment of their rights protected under the Convention. Besides the work of the Ministry of Education on a revised curriculum to eliminate stereotyping, please provide information on other concrete measures that have been taken to address discriminatory practices and stereotypes as well as on their impact.*

Besides the work of the Ministry of Education on a revised curriculum to eliminate stereotyping against women, there is currently no additional concrete measure put into place to combat stereotypes in particular. However the Government has formulated policies and legislations to address discriminatory practices against women. Amongst such legislations is the enactment of an Inheritance law which provides equal rights to property ownership to everyone including women.

In addition, the Ministry of Gender and Development in collaboration with the United Nations Agencies and local and international Partners has also conducted awareness programs around the issue of discrimination against women. Dramas have been produced to be aired on local and national radio stations and performed in the communities throughout the country.

Violence against women

11. *The report indicates (para. 7.11) that rape continues to be a problem even now that the conflict has ended. In addition, there are reportedly serious deficiencies in the implementation of the Rape Law, enacted in 2006, including failure to investigate allegations according to the law, failure to provide adequate medical and forensic services to victims of rape, possible inappropriate release of suspects on bail, imposition of illegal fees on victims and out-of-court settlements. Please provide information on the concrete measures taken by the Government to address this situation. In this context, please provide the Committee with details on the recent establishment of the national special court to deal with sexual offences.*

There are ongoing specialized trainings for prosecutors and police in the investigation and prosecution of SGBV Crimes.

The Ministry of Justice is making efforts to improve forensic services for the investigation of SGBV crimes. A full review of available facilities and recommendations for forensic services has been carried out by a consultant in the past months, for the Ministry in order for an approach to donors to be made. The Ministry has also recently employed the services of a qualified forensic pathologist to perform autopsies in criminal cases.

The Ministry of Justice has worked with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and Ministry of Gender and Development to develop a medical reporting form for the use by medical officers in the examination of victims of sexual violence. The Ministry of Justice has supplemented this form with a Medical Reporting Consent to Release form, which requires the victim's consent for the release of medical records to law enforcement officials and prosecutors. These forms are important steps in assisting the investigation and prosecution of SGBV Crimes, and supporting and protecting victims and respecting confidentiality.

The Judiciary has responded by establishing a specialized division of the Country's circuit court to deal with sexual and gender based violence, provided for by statute which the Ministry of Justice drafted in consultation with relevant stakeholders. This court has been staffed by judges trained to adjudicate sex crimes. Eventually there are plans to have "sexual offences" divisions of the court sitting in all 15 counties of Liberia. A Judge has been appointed to the court and persecution of cases have commenced.

Provision has been included in the new legislation pertaining to the sexual offences court for the prohibition of the paying of fees by victims.

12. *Given the impact of the war on women and girls in Liberia, including their association to the fighting forces as sexual servants, please provide details on the steps that are being taken to provide rehabilitation and support programmes, including psychological recovery and social reintegration, for women and girls who were victims of violence. In this connection, has the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission integrated a gender perspective?*

The Government through the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare (MOH&SW) is providing a wide range of awareness programs aimed at informing women and girls about the rehabilitation and support services that are available to them including legal, protection, health and psychosocial, and how they can access those services. In addition the Ministry also provides the following services:

- Creating awareness on GBV and the roles play by all actors at the individual and community level;
- Integrated GBV prevention and responses activities in all national health and psychosocial programs;
- Building the capacities of health workers for the management psychosocial process;
- Skills training and is attempting to create employment opportunities to victims of GBV in order to make them self reliant and provide them some form of economic empowerment.

In terms of support, the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) manages an endowment fund that provides support to survivors especially survivors of GBV and their families; these support range from medical treatment, educational opportunities to victims of abuse, transportation costs for families to appear in court and support to facilities that provide psychosocial support to survivors while they are going through trials.

13. *According to the report, a significant number of women (32%) who experience sexual violence reported it coming from their husbands/partners. The report also indicates (para. 4.6) that statutory laws do not make specific provisions for the protection against discrimination in the private or domestic sphere. What steps has the Government undertaken or is planning to undertake to address the problem of domestic violence, including the drafting of a comprehensive domestic violence bill?*

There have been no steps taken as yet to draft a domestic violence bill. However Liberia's domestic relations law gives women the right to take their husbands to court for hurting their bodies and or damaging their reputation or property.

The Ministry of Justice SGBV Crimes Unit's public education and outreach work will seek to raise awareness on domestic violence issues.

The Government with support from its Partners has developed and launched a GBV Plan of Action which created the GBV Taskforce with Secretariat based at the Ministry of Gender and Development. This document lays out a clear strategy for combating the rising wave of GBV in the country. Though the document does not specifically mentioned domestic violence, it however covers all forms of GBV of which violence within the domestic sphere forms a part.

14. *According to the information provided on para. 7.6 and paras. 14.37, 14.38 and 14.39 of the report, female genital mutilation is traditionally practiced in certain regions of the country, particularly in the rural areas. Please inform the Committee about the specific measures undertaken by the Government to eradicate this practice, including the enactment of legislation to prohibit it.*

There have been no steps taken as yet to draft legislation pertaining to FGM. However the Government through the Ministry of Internal Affairs has banned the practice of FGM through its 'Zero Tolerance Policy'. In addition, several Civil Society Organizations are involved in community awareness activities to educate the community members on the dangers of FGM.

Furthermore, the Government through the Ministries of Gender and Development and Internal Affairs has initiated programs that intend to provide alternative sources of income for Zoes and other traditional leaders who practice FGM. This program has seen a relative success thus far. Already 750 individuals have been trained to enable them get involved in those activities that will generate income for them. This has resulted in 350 individuals deciding to lay down their tools.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

15. *The report indicates on para. 8.5 that many women, especially girls, are forced into prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation. Please provide information on laws or measures adopted to prevent and punish the exploitation of prostitution as well as measures taken to provide rehabilitation and support for the social reintegration of women who wish to leave prostitution.*

Currently there is no data on the rate of prostitution and sexual exploitation taking place in the country. However plans are underway by the Ministry of Gender and Development, with support from the World Bank, the Nike Foundation and the Danish Government, to target vulnerable adolescent girls and young women aged 16 to 24 through an economic empowerment program. The program will provide both job skills training and business development skills training for adolescent girls and young women. This program is being targeted in areas with active night life. The Government believes that economic empowerment would serve as a disincentive for engagement in prostitution and inhibit sexual exploitation.

16. *The report mentions in para. 8.1 that despite the Anti-Human Trafficking Act passed in 2005, police reports indicate that women are being trafficked within the country to engage in domestic work, labour and prostitution. What concrete measures has the Government undertaken or plans to undertake to ensure the effective enforcement of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, including its dissemination amongst law enforcement personnel?*

With reference to the report that despite the Anti-Human Trafficking Act passed in 2005, Police reports indicate that women are being trafficked within the Country to engage in domestic work, forced labor, and prostitution. The Government does not have solid evidence on the rate of human trafficking in the country in the absence of a comprehensive research. The Research on trafficking in persons in Liberia is expected to commence within a couple of months.

However, the Government of Liberia has taken the following measures to effectively enforce the Anti-Human Trafficking law:

- Established a ministerial Task Force to supervise the fight of trafficking in persons in Liberia;
- Built the Capacity of seventy senior Law Enforcement Officers through a training of trainers' workshop, to enable them respond quickly to issues of trafficking in persons;
- Carried out massive awareness in 10 of the 15 Counties in Liberia on the dangers of trafficking in persons and measures rural communities need to take to prevent the crime;

- Succeeded in ensuring that the 1956 Adoption Law of Liberia is revised to prevent adoption agencies from trafficking children in the name of adoption; The new adoption law is presently before the House Committee on Health & Social Welfare pending approval;
- Built the capacity of 35 civil society organizations aimed at encouraging and empowering them to design programs to fight trafficking in persons in Liberia;
- Signed the ECOWAS Plan of Action for the combat of trafficking in persons;
- Signed the ECOWAS Policy for the Protection, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of victims of trafficking in persons;
- Established focal points in all Government Ministries and Agencies for effective networking through the fight of the crime;
- Incorporated the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) into its programs intended to protect the interest of women and prevent them from being trafficked.

Participation in political and public life

17. *According to information provided on paras. 9.7 to 10.3 of the report, women's participation and representation at various levels of political and public life remains very low. What concrete measures are envisaged to achieve women's full and equal participation and representation at all levels of Government, in Parliament and the judiciary, as well as at the international level? Are women's local groups receiving sufficient support and being effectively represented at the national level? Please provide information on awareness-raising and capacity-building programmes or policies are in place or envisaged to encourage and facilitate women's further participation in public and political life.*

The Government of Liberia remains committed to the full participation and representation of women at all levels of governance as evidenced by its unflinching support for the Fairness Bill which mandates a minimum of 30 per cent representation of women as national elected officers and heads of the principal and subsidiary organs and structures of each registered Political Party in Liberia. Additionally women should also be reflected on the list of candidates submitted by all registered Political Parties to the National Elections Commission for inclusion on the ballots for National and Constituency and Municipal Elections.

The Government in collaboration with its development partners has also designed and implemented programs wherein training workshops were conducted for women and women's groups with the aim of strengthening their political participation at all levels.

In addition, through the rural women structures, Government is currently implementing various projects geared towards empowering women for leadership and decision making.

Nationality

18. *In connection to the information provided on para. 11.5 of the report, please clarify whether women of Liberian origin are able to pass on their citizenship to their children born abroad to a non-Liberian father.*

Article 28 of the Liberian Constitution allows women of Liberian origin to pass on their citizenship to their children born abroad to a non-Liberian father. However such children have to declare their choice of citizenship at the age of maturity which is when they reach the age of eighteen (18) year-old.

Article 28

“Any person, at least one of whose parents was a citizen of Liberia at the time of the Person's birth, shall be a citizen of Liberia; provided that any such person shall upon reaching maturity renounce any other citizenship acquired by virtue of one parent being a citizen of another country. No citizen of the Republic shall be deprived of citizenship or nationality except as provided by law; and no person shall be denied the right to change citizenship or nationality”.

Education

19. *The report states (para. 12.5) that women are much less educated than men. Please provide information on measures taken by the Government to improve enrolment and literacy rates of girls as well as address the high drop-out rates, particularly in rural areas. In this connection, what has been the impact of the National Girls Education Policy launched in 2006 and the Free Compulsory Primary Education Policy?*

The Government of Liberia is committed to the improvement of enrolment and literacy rates in Liberia particularly of women and girls. The Government is also committed to reducing the high drop-out rates in the Country. These commitments are manifested through the following initiatives by the Government through the Ministry of Education and its Partners to boost girls' enrolment and improve literacy rate:

- The promulgation of a National Policy on Girls' Education intended to bridge the gender gap (gender disparity) that exist within the educational system;
- The creation of a Girls' Education Unit with a resource room at the Ministry of Education as a coordinating and monitoring arm of the Ministry of Education for the proper implementation of all programs/initiatives relative to girl's education by institutions operating in the country;
- The simplification and dissemination of the National Policy on Girls' Education. In November 2008, a nationwide dissemination exercise was carried out in collaboration with local implementing partners at which time over 6,000 copies of the Policy were distributed during discussion with PTAs, school authorities, students, county authorities, and local NGOs staffs; and
- The establishment of the Special Girls' Education Initiative (SGEI), an All Girls' Night School Program, for teenage girls that are pregnant school drop-out mothers including older women who want to be educated.

As a result of the Free Compulsory Primary Education Policy and the National Policy on Girls' Education, the following initiatives/policies have been instituted:

- Free tuition and other fees for all primary school students;
- More schools are being repaired or constructed while school materials including text books are being provided;
- School feeding and Take-Home Rations program;

In terms of the impact of the Free Compulsory Primary Education Policy and the National Policy on Girls' Education, since the proclamation of the National Girls Education Policy and the Free Compulsory Primary Education Program, there has been a marked improvement in girls' enrollment. Overall, enrolments in public primary schools have increased by 82 per cent between 2005/06 and 2007/2008, or from 597,316 to 1,087,257. Enrolment in secondary schools increased by 16 per cent over the same period, from 132,224 to 153,467 (PRS 2008: 112). This has contributed to the closing of the gender gap in school enrolment rates.

In Liberia, it is estimated that teenage pregnancy is on the increase and is believed contributes to the problem of school drop-out rate among girls. The Government through the Ministry of Education is making plans to establish a 'Preventing and Reporting System' under which Counseling Centers would be set up in major public primary and secondary schools in order to monitor cases of GBV, teenage pregnancy, school drop-out rate, along with human rights abuses.

Regarding women's literacy, the Ministry of Education is working alongside the Ministry of Gender and Development within the newly signed UNJP Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment (signed February, 09) to expand the adult literacy curriculum and roll out programs for women throughout urban and rural Liberia. This program is receiving financial support from the Danish Government.

20. *According to para. 12.13 of the report, girls are exposed to sexual harassment by the part of male teachers who are the majority of the primary and secondary school teachers. What measures has the Government adopted or plans to adopt to protect schoolgirls from sexual abuse and harassment?*

The Ministry of Gender and Development working with the Ministry of Education are making plans geared towards boosting the enrolment of female students at teachers training institutions in the country. Part of this plan will involve the provision of stipend, with funding from UNICEF, to female students enrolled at the various Teacher Training Institutions

in the Country. This will induce female enrolment and retention thus reducing the gap between the male and female teachers in the country which will eventually help to reduce the cases of sexual harassment of female students by male teachers.

Under the PRS three years deliverables, the Government intends to revise the school curriculum to include GBV, sexual exploitation and abuse, and human rights to create awareness and protect particularly girl students from sexual harassment and abuse.

Employment

21. *The report indicates (para. 13.11) that women are disproportionately clustered in the least productive sectors of the economy with 90 per cent of them being employed in agriculture or the informal sector. Please provide information on the measures that the Government has taken to promote equal employment opportunities for women and men. How does the Government ensure that opportunities are available for women in occupations that are not traditionally pursued by them?*

The Government of Liberia with financial support from the World Bank, the Nike Foundation and the Danish Government will in a couple of months be launching the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls Project. This project will provide, for adolescent girls and young women, economic skills training with emphasis on job skills in non-traditional sectors of the Liberian economy.

Liberia also hosted the International Women Colloquium in March of 2009 showcasing women in non-traditional sectors including in the security sector, construction, maintenance, mining, and women in business.

In addition, the Government of Liberia feels that the active participation of women in the competition for jobs depends on their level of education, therefore, the Government has provided over 200 scholarships to women in both secondary school and Universities. The Government also appointed the highest number of women ever in Government in the history of the Country. The Government has also encouraged and continues to encourage NGOs to recruit women in key positions within their Institutions which is working well.

Additionally, Women in Parliament in the Country are being supported by the National Machinery and other Partners to advocate for 30 per cent representation of women in Government. This Bill is before the House of Representatives awaiting approval.

The Ministry of Gender and Development is currently implementing a Rural Women's Empowerment Project which is aimed at strengthening the institutional capacity of female producers' and entrepreneurs'. The Program includes skills and business training, access to credit, technical assistance and business support services and market information.

22. *What percentage of men's wages do women receive? How can women challenge discrimination in pay? Please provide information on the obstacles and challenges that affect the implementation of pay equity laws or regulations.*

The Labour Law of Liberia states that the Minimum wage in the Country is 25 cents per hour. This Law does not distinguish whether men should be paid higher than women. In other words, this law does not in any way discriminate but rather levels the employment field for everyone regardless of sex, race or disability.

23. *According to para. 13.7 of the report, at present, there are no childcare facilities available in places of employment. What types of childcare facilities are there available in the country for working women? Does the Government support childcare, financially or otherwise?*

Currently the Government does not have childcare facilities nor does it provide childcare assistance for working women due to competing priorities amidst limited resources. However, the Sirleaf Market Fund has built in its project designs the creation of childcare facilities in all of its reconstructed or newly built market facilities to especially meet the childcare needs of market women.

The Government is also encouraging private entities that are presently providing childcare services on a very limited basis to not only expand their services but to also make them affordable.

Health

24. *The report indicates (para. 14.14) that the high incidence of teenage pregnancy in the country is a cause of major concern. Please provide detailed information about women's access to affordable reproductive and sexual health services and educational programmes, including their content and their availability to particular groups, such as adolescent girls and rural women.*

With the development of the Basic Package for Health Services (BPHS), the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare is providing free sexual and reproductive health services to women and adolescent girls at all public health facilities managed by the Government and INGO Partners in the country. SRH services are also provided at some private facilities at an affordable cost. RH commodities, which include RH kits and contraceptive products are provided by our partners and subsequently provided at no cost to women and adolescent girls at various public health facilities in the country through the county health teams on a monthly basis.

Concerning education services on RH, flipcharts have been developed for education purposes at health facilities. Local NGO partners such as FPAL, YMCA and PSI have health education programs at their facilities and communities for women and adolescents. Health education on RH services, STIs, HIV/AIDS and sex education is being provided on local community radio and peer education groups are being established in schools targeting adolescent girls and young adults.

25. *According to the information provided on para. 14.9 of the report, between 2000 and 2007 maternal mortality has increased due to, amongst other factors, the increasing number of illegal and unsafe abortions. What measures has the Government adopted to revert this negative trend?*

The Ministry of Health & Social Welfare has developed a Road Map for accelerating the reduction of maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality. The Road Map is an integral component of the PHC conceptual framework adapted by the GOL to drive the delivery of basic essential and quality RH care services to the people. A draft operational plan to reduce maternal and newborn mortality has also been developed from the Road Map and includes four major strategies:

- Availability of skilled birth attendants at all levels of the health care delivery system
- Availability of 24 hours EmoNC services
- Strengthening the referral system at all levels of service delivery
- Provision of FP commodities and services

Interventions are being put in place to address the problem of abortion through the provision of RH kits at health facilities and training to manage post-abortion care. In addition, training is being provided in Life Saving Skills for mid-level health professionals to improve delivery services and care at health facilities. Traditional midwives, who carry out most of the deliveries in communities, are also being targeted with training in Home-based Life Saving Skills, to enable them timely refer pregnant women to health facilities for skilled delivery.

Additionally, the Government has focused on improving comprehensive EmONC services at all the county referral hospitals in the country and basic EmONC services at all health centers in the public and private sectors.

Family planning services are being provided at no cost and are made available at all public health facilities around the country for women and adolescent girls. Training is being provided for health workers on how clients can be educated on making informed choices for contraception.

The Health Ministry is working with communities to recruit community health volunteers (CHVs) to provide evidence-based community services such as distribution of family planning commodities, IPT, etc. at the community level.

To improve and facilitate referral of complicated cases from the communities, the MOH&SW has provided HF ambulances and radios at all the county hospitals and some clinics in the rural areas. Through on of our local partners, a

cell phone company, desk phones have been provided at some hospitals in the country and there are plans to provide such communication equipment to other hospitals and health centers in the rural areas.

In addition, the MOH&SW has also opened two midwifery schools in the rural part of the country to train and deploy midwives in remote rural communities to provide skilled delivery care in these areas.

26. *The report indicates (para. 14.20) that HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections are on the rise and affect women, particularly girls, more than men. Please indicate whether there are any programmes to combat HIV/AIDS and, if so, whether they integrate a gender perspective. Please also provide information on the availability of antiretroviral medication and psychosocial services for women with HIV/AIDS and their children.*

The National AIDS/STIs Control Programme in collaboration with some NGOs have put into place programmes which are designed to empower women. These programmes are aimed at putting women in a better position to negotiate safe sex thus helping to reduce sexually transmitted infections. Behavior Change Communications strategies target specific groups with the aim of ensuring safe sex. There are some community programmes being implemented by NGOs to provide psychosocial services for women with HIV/AIDS. Through the NACP, HIV/AIDS services are readily available at most hospitals and some health centers in the country. These services include VCT, care and treatment, PMTCT, and treatment of STIs. Through Global Funds for HIV/AIDS, ARV and STI drugs are being provided at no cost to the patients.

Rural women

27. *According to the information on para. 14.2 of the report, health care delivery is fragmented and uneven, particularly among rural women and girls. Please provide more information on the impact of the National Health Policy and Strategic Plan as well as on other concrete measures taken to improve the quality and accessibility of the health-care system and services, particularly for women and girls in rural areas.*

The Liberian Government through the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare has adopted a lot of concrete measures to improve quality and accessibility of health care delivery especially to rural women and girls. Key among these measures is the BPHS which is the cornerstone of Liberia's national health care delivery strategy. The BPHS includes essential preventive and curative care services and indicates an integrated care that is to be provided at each level of the system, from the community health volunteer to major referral hospitals. The health system is based on the principles of PHC and the management system is being progressively decentralized.

Under the BPHS, which initially targeted 70 per cent of health facilities, an assessment has been completed to improve the quality of care at these facilities. At BPHS facilities where qualified health professionals, drugs, logistics, equipment, medical supplies, etc. are lacking, the MOH&SW along with its Partners have made them available to improve the quality of care.

Due to the scarcity of HRH, the Government is providing incentives for health workers and deploying them to rural communities to improve access to qualified health workers and services.

The MOH&SW has also rehabilitated a total of 450 clinics, health centers and hospitals in order to improve access to quality health services for rural communities. The county health teams have also identified communities for the construction of new health facilities to improve access for rural dwellers.

With the reactivation of the Community Health Department at the MOH&SW and the updating of the Community Health Policy, community health strategies to improve access for rural communities through the provision of community-based services such as FP, ARV, IPT, and management of common childhood conditions (malaria, diarrhea and pneumonia) has been developed.

28. *According to the information provided on the report, rural women's involvement and participation at the community level is still very limited. Please provide the Committee with information on the specific measures adopted by the Government to enhance the participation of rural women in decision-making processes.*

The Government through the Ministry of Gender and Development has initiated measures to boost rural women's participation in decision making and economic empowerment. Some of such programs include the design of the rural women's program and the establishment of rural women structures at the local and national levels. These rural women structures are used as entry points for women's economic empowerment activities. It is a vehicle through which women collective decision-making capacity is enhanced. The program, which extends down to the village level, will include leadership training for the women over the next three years. This will be a crucial step to increasing their visibility, confidence and voice in the community decision-making.

29. *The report notes (para. 16.15) that, despite the enactment of the Inheritance Law in 2003, traditional customs restricts women, mostly in rural areas, from exercising their right to independently own property. Please provide more information on the measures taken to raise rural women's awareness and empower them to claim their rights, such as those to property and inheritance.*

Through the rural women structures established by the Government through the Ministry of Gender and Development, the Government and its Partners are carrying out massive awareness program and disseminating information about women's rights guaranteed under the Inheritance Law enacted in 2003. Further awareness exercises are being carried out by the Ministry Gender and Development's County coordinators who are based in the 15 political sub-division of Liberia.

The Government through the Ministry along with local women's rights organizations has produced and distributed a simplified version of the national women's rights laws (Inheritance law, rape law, Domestic relations law), as well as the regional and international women's rights laws as part of Government's efforts to create awareness amongst women particularly rural women about their rights under this law and these international conventions.

In addition, the UNDP, working with the Government of Liberia through the Ministries of Planning and Economic Affairs and Gender and Development and the National Elections Commission, designed and launched the "Giving Women a Voice and Leadership Role in Decision-making and Peace-building in Liberia" Project. The project was designed to contribute to actions that target changing of the national mindset to ensure mainstreaming of gender and empowerment of women through creating critical mass to spur women's participation in leadership, reconstruction and peace building processes. It focuses on developing capacities of women to contribute to local and national development. It will promote gender responsive programming and creating awareness on problems faced by women in the society and issues on the girl child, particularly those out in school.

Equality before the law

30. *The report states (para. 16.10) that in traditional courts, women are not allowed to appear before the court without their husbands. Also according to the report, this practice is contrary to the Constitution. Please update the Committee on the measures taken to address this problem particularly within in the framework of the Constitutional reform currently underway.*

A Constitutional Reform Taskforce has been established by the President of Liberia on which the Ministry of Gender and Development sits. However the Taskforce has not commenced its work. It is expected that residual discriminatory practices against women would be addressed within the context of the mandate of the Taskforce.

Marriage and family relations

31. *According to para. 18.3 of the report, in traditional settings, women are given into marriage by their parents at a very young age and without their consent. Please provide information on measures taken to bring the minimum legal age of marriage for girls into full conformity with article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Article 16, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Please also provide information on measures adopted to eradicate the customary practice of early forced marriages.*

Liberia's Inheritance Law states that "before a man and a woman can agree to become husband and wife, the man must be 21 years old and the woman must be 18 years old".¹ By implication the Inheritance Law makes it unlawful for any customary female under the age of 18 to be given in customary marriage to a man. This does bring Liberian laws in conformity with the Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which defines a child as anyone below the age 18 years. However, the implementation component of the law remains a challenge especially in the rural areas. The Government through the Ministry of Gender and Development along with its partners is making plans to begin a robust awareness campaign around this law and the CEDAW Convention in general throughout the country. The Ministry is in the process of producing mini-dramas emphasizing articles of the Convention on both local and national radio stations.

32. *Please provide information on the legal and administrative measures taken to address the problem of rape in marriage, which was not included under the 2006 Amended Rape Law.*

Although the Rape Law does not make specific and explicit note of rape in marriage, rape is clearly defined under section 1 of the Rape Law as follows:

1. Offence: A person who has sexual intercourse with another person (male or female) has committed rape if:
 - (a) (i) He intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus, mouth or any other opening of another person (male or female) with his penis, without the victims consent; or, (ii) He/She intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person with a foreign object or with any other part of the body (other than the penis), without the victim's consent.
 - (b) The victim is less than eighteen years old, provided the actor is eighteen years of age or older.

It is immaterial to the elements of the crime whether the defendant is married to the victim or not. It is not a defense to a charge of rape that the defendant is married to the victim.

The reporting of rape in marriage is an ongoing problem, which the SGBV Crimes Unit also intends to address in its public education work.

Optional Protocol and Amendment to article 20, paragraph 1

33. *Please indicate any progress made with respect to the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to which Liberia is a signatory since September 2004. Please also indicate when the State party intends to accept the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention pertaining to the Committee's meeting time.*

The Ministry of Gender and Development has begun to engage the Ministry of Justice to work out the modalities that would lead to the ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention. An official communication will be sent immediately to the Committee indicating Liberia's acceptance to the amendment to Article 20 paragraph 1 of the Convention pertaining to the Committee's meeting time.

¹ Summary of Domestic Relations law section 2:1-2:14.