



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Summary record of the 2166th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 27 June 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Akia (Rapporteur)

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In the absence of Ms. Haidar, Ms. Akia (Rapporteur) took the Chair.

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

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

Fifth periodic report of Botswana (CEDAW/C/BWA/5; CEDAW/C/BWA/Q/5; CEDAW/C/BWA/RQ/5)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Botswana joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Botswana**, introducing her country's fifth periodic report (CEDAW/C/BWA/5), said that the Government had established a ministry of youth and gender affairs as part of its efforts to build a supportive and protective system of governance that respected the rights of all citizens, irrespective of their socioeconomic, cultural or political status. Recognizing that gender inequality impeded development, the Government had intensified its efforts to mainstream gender across all sectors and to institutionalize gender-responsive budgeting to ensure that priorities, such as efforts to combat gender-based violence, were adequately resourced.
3. In order to ensure girls' access to uninterrupted quality education, the Government had recently launched a national initiative to provide free sanitary pads to all schoolgirls, including girls with disabilities and those living in rural areas. The initiative formed part of a broader effort to restore the dignity of girls and to uphold their rights to health, sanitation and education.
4. On 1 April 2025, the monthly old age pension had been raised by approximately 70 per cent in order to help older persons, including women, to maintain a dignified standard of living. The Government had committed itself to providing monthly financial assistance to families with babies aged 12 months or under. National labour laws would be amended to introduce paternity leave with a view to promoting a better balance between family life and work and encouraging the equal sharing of responsibility for childcare.
5. The Government was making ongoing efforts to build women's capacity and raise awareness of the importance of their economic empowerment. In partnership with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), De Beers Group and the Debswana Diamond Company, the Government had launched a pilot project called EntreprenHer to build women's business and life skills, advocate for their access to funding, promote digital literacy, increase women entrepreneurs' access to markets, enhance the technical and institutional support available to women, introduce women farmers to climate-smart agriculture technologies and strengthen networking between women in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, the three countries where the project was being implemented. To date, more than 900 women-owned businesses had benefited from the project. In order to create more employment opportunities for young persons, including women and girls, the resources for technical and vocational education and training and for the study of science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics would be increased.
6. In December 2023, Botswana had ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), demonstrating the Government's ongoing commitment to promoting women's rights and gender equality. Steps had been taken to enact gender-sensitive laws to promote the rights of women and other vulnerable groups. Such laws included the Bail Act of 2024, the Anti-Human Trafficking (Amendment) Act of 2024 and the Disability Act of 2024.
7. Under the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission Programme, the rate of mother-to-child transmission of HIV had fallen significantly in recent years. Under the National Cervical Cancer Operational Plan for 2022-2026, priority would be given to raising public awareness of cervical cancer and scaling up screening programmes. Women aged 25 years or over had access to a range of screening methods. As of 2024, the screening coverage rate stood at 69 per cent. Access to treatment services for pre-cancerous lesions continued to improve. The treatment rate for the loop electrosurgical excision procedure, for example, had increased to 81.7 per cent. Community-based screening campaigns were

conducted by district health teams, while traditional and political leaders were actively involved in spearheading national mobilization efforts.

8. The Government was committed to promoting gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes and to eliminating harmful gender norms in order to empower women. In that connection, the Human Rights Strategy and National Action Plan had been developed and a commitment had been made to establishing gender parity in the legislature by 2030. A committee responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Human Rights Strategy and National Action Plan had been established.

9. Despite the progress made, women's representation in political life remained limited. In the National Assembly, women currently held only 6 out of 69 seats, which was fewer than in previous years. Women occupied 14 per cent of positions in the cabinet and 15 per cent of positions in local authorities. Young persons and persons with disabilities were also underrepresented in political life.

10. The alignment of national law with the Convention continued to be a priority. An assessment of national law, conducted in 2012, had shown that the articles of the Convention were covered by a number of different pieces of legislation. In order to address that situation, the Government was considering drafting a bill on gender equality that would incorporate all the standards established in the Convention and institutionalize gender mainstreaming across all sectors.

11. The Government was developing a broad range of measures to prevent and combat gender-based violence. At the grassroots level, community leaders campaigned against gender-based violence and civil society organizations provided practical training. The Government had committed to establishing one-stop centres that would provide a comprehensive range of services relating to gender-based violence, including law enforcement and judicial services, healthcare and psychosocial services, and shelters. A national action plan to combat gender-based violence was being developed on the basis of the regional strategy established by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for the period 2020–2030. Under the plan, coordinated psychosocial, legal and shelter services would be provided for survivors.

12. Measures were being taken to promote gender equality in law enforcement, justice and peacekeeping initiatives, including the provision of specialized training for women in law enforcement and of gender-sensitive training, the prioritization of women in peacekeeping and international missions and the preparation of women to occupy leadership positions. Women from Botswana had participated in the SADC Mission in Mozambique and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

13. Botswana had not yet acceded to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), but the spirit and intention of that Convention were reflected in the Public Service Act of 2008, which established sexual harassment as an offence punishable by law. The Government was consulting relevant stakeholders about the possibility of acceding to the ILO Convention.

14. In 2021, the Court of Appeal had upheld a high court judgment decriminalizing same-sex relations. In its decision, the Court had noted that the provisions of the Penal Code prohibiting consensual same-sex relations were unconstitutional and amounted to a breach of the rights to liberty, dignity, privacy and equality.

15. As part of the Government's efforts to digitalize education, 52,000 laptops had been issued to teachers and students, with more being scheduled for distribution. Under the SmartBots project, free, high-speed Internet access was provided in public spaces, including clinics, schools and traditional courts. Over 1.6 million users had benefited from the project. Internet coverage had increased from 42 per cent in 2019 to 77 per cent in 2024.

16. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she welcomed the extensive legal and policy reforms adopted by the Government, including the ratification of the Maputo Protocol, the adoption of the Revised Land Policy of 2019, the granting of equal land rights to married women, the Disability Act and the Anti-Human Trafficking (Amendment) Act.

17. Notwithstanding the gender-sensitive reforms undertaken, significant inequalities persisted in many sectors and places, especially in rural areas. Women and girls still faced unequal access to economic opportunities and benefits and their lives were undermined by poverty and gender-based violence. Power remained unevenly distributed in governance and decision-making, and opportunities for women in the mining sector, which was the backbone of the economy, remained limited. The lack of adequate basic services and infrastructure for many groups of women was exacerbated by disparities in access to the benefits of the digital economy.

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18. **Ms. Akizuki** said that she would be grateful for further information on the proposed gender equality law mentioned by the delegation. In particular, it would be interesting to know whether the law would contain definitions of direct and indirect discrimination and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in the public and private spheres. She wondered what steps had been taken to repeal any constitutional or legislative provisions that were inconsistent with the Convention, what mechanisms were in place to monitor the implementation of laws and what had been done to raise awareness of the Convention among all women, including rural women, women with disabilities, and women who were illiterate or spoke a minority language.

19. She would like to know what mechanisms were in place to monitor and address gender bias and discriminatory practices in the proceedings and decisions of customary courts. She would appreciate information on any campaigns conducted to educate women about their rights, the legal remedies available to them and the mechanisms for gaining access to justice under the Convention. Details of the training provided to judges, law enforcement officers and customary court leaders on the Convention and the principles of gender equality would also be welcome, and it would be useful to know how the effectiveness of such training was evaluated.

20. She wondered what was being done to ensure that survivors of gender-based violence, including those in same-sex relationships, had equal access to protection and legal remedies without discrimination. It would be useful to have data, disaggregated by sex and location, on the nature and number of cases transferred from the customary courts to a magistrate's court and on the beneficiaries of legal aid and judicial services. What measures were being taken to ensure the participation of women, including those from diverse backgrounds, in the development and implementation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security?

21. **A representative of Botswana** said that cases transferred from the customary courts were referred to a magistrate's court or to the High Court. Any case involving assault required the involvement of the police to ensure that the victim received the protection of the law. The Ministry of Justice was responsible for training magistrates to take the gender perspective into account. Under the Bail Act, victims of offences were interviewed by a magistrate, who could issue a detention order against the accused person, if necessary, in order to protect the victim.

22. **A representative of Botswana** said that, in 2012, the Convention had been translated into the national language and meetings had been held to raise citizens' awareness of its provisions. Plans were in place to review the Constitution and establish a constitutional court. The Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs had initiated the process of drafting a law on gender equality. The Ministry was encouraging the promotion of gender mainstreaming across all sectors. The National Gender Commission monitored policies and programmes to ensure that they were in alignment with international instruments and the principles of non-discrimination and gender equality. The law on gender equality, once adopted, would facilitate the work of the Commission.

23. Court rulings were deemed sufficient to repeal discriminatory legal provisions even before the relevant legislation had been officially updated. Rulings handed down by lower courts and customary courts could be appealed in the higher courts. Legal aid was available to persons who required it. Judges had been provided with training on how to make courts friendlier places for children and other vulnerable groups. Women had equal opportunities

for employment in the Botswana Police Service, the Botswana Prisons Services and the Botswana Defence Force. The authorities faced challenges in the area of data collection and would likely not be able to provide the disaggregated statistics requested by the Committee.

24. **A representative of Botswana** said that the President wished to set the tone in terms of the representation of women in leadership positions; her own appointment as Minister for Youth and Gender Affairs at the age of just 26 years was an example of his commitment. The Ministry had a strong relationship with local governments and traditional leaders and had created a manual to assist leaders in addressing issues such as gender-based violence. In June 2025, a week-long series of workshops had been organized to review customary practices to ensure that they were not harmful to women. The gender equality bill had been drafted in response to the Committee's previous recommendation, as set out in the concluding observations on the country's fourth periodic report (CEDAW/C/BWA/CO/4), for the authorities to ensure that all customary laws were brought into line with the Convention.

25. **Ms. Akizuki** said that she wished to emphasize the importance of disaggregated data, which would enable the authorities to assess the concrete impact of the gender equality bill once it had passed into law.

26. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she would appreciate information on any mechanisms, including performance appraisals, that had been put in place to ensure that justice administrators applied the knowledge they acquired through training. She wished to know whether women were directly involved in designing local and national security architecture.

27. **A representative of Botswana** said that traditional leaders who attended training on the Convention and gender equality were given guidelines on how to implement what they had learned.

28. **A representative of Botswana** said that the training provided to judges was already bearing fruit. Courts were now more child-friendly, for example. The police commissioner was a woman and had a number of women in her management team. Women were also present in leadership teams in the Botswana Prisons Service, with the aim of ensuring that all policies and initiatives were gender-sensitive.

29. **A representative of Botswana** said that the authorities were mindful of the fact that conflict had a disproportionate impact on women; for that reason, a national committee had been set up to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security.

30. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she would be grateful for additional information on the substantive results and impact of the National Policy on Gender and Development, the national gender machinery and the National Gender Commission. She would also like to know how the Commission's mandate differed from that of the Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs. She would welcome details of the governance tools and monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems that had been established to strengthen coordination and effectively evaluate the impact of gender-related policies and campaigns. It would be interesting to hear which gender transformation targets had been achieved by the Commission and the Ministry since their establishment. She wondered how women's diverse perspectives, voices and priorities were incorporated into the national political framework and social agenda-setting processes, including the gender strategy for the agricultural sector, the climate change policy and efforts to mainstream gender within the justice system.

31. The delegation might explain whether there were any indicators and targets in place to ensure the effective integration of Convention-compliant gender perspectives across sectoral policies, strategies and action plans in priority sectors and institutions. She wished to know what percentage of the annual statutory funding allocation for gender mainstreaming was disbursed to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to ensure their active participation in advancing gender equality.

32. She would welcome an update on efforts to obtain formal accreditation from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions for the Office of the Ombudsman and to ensure its full compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). It would be helpful

to know whether any formal arrangement was in place between the national gender machinery, the Office of the Ombudsman and women's civil society organizations with the aim of facilitating the provision of redress for violations of women's rights. Data on the number or proportion of complaints to the Office that had been submitted by women would be appreciated, as would information on how the Office's work enhanced women's access to justice.

33. **Ms. Schläppi** said that she would like to know what concrete steps the Government was taking to improve women's participation and representation in education, healthcare, the judiciary and the economy, with a particular focus on rural women and women with disabilities. It would be useful to hear how temporary special measures were being used to address gender gaps in sectors where women were underrepresented or disadvantaged. She wondered whether any temporary special measures were set out in the gender equality bill. Lastly, she wished to know whether the positive impact of the poverty eradication programme had been achieved through specific measures targeting women and whether any future related policy would include such measures.

34. **A representative of Botswana** said that the National Gender Commission had been established in 2016 with a mandate to monitor, facilitate and advise on gender mainstreaming and the inclusion of marginalized groups. The gender equality bill contained provisions to formalize the Commission's mandate and provide it with a solid legal foundation for engaging in oversight in all sectors of the economy. Following the adoption of the bill, the Commission would have powers to conduct investigations, make recommendations and hold institutions accountable for non-compliance with gender equality laws, as well as a broad mandate to address issues including political participation and women's empowerment, and would act as a bridge between the Government, individuals and civil society organizations.

35. **A representative of Botswana** said that the draft national action plan on gender-based violence had been designed by the National Gender Commission, drawing on input from the grassroots level; the Commission had presented the plan to the Interministerial Committee on Gender-based Violence.

36. Soon after taking office, the current Government had set up the Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs, with a functional structure that facilitated a focus on delivery. With support from the World Bank, the National Gender Commission was working on a strategy to boost women's economic empowerment.

37. The mandate of the Office of the Ombudsman had recently been expanded to enable it to deal with human rights violations. The Office was affiliated with the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions and had applied for affiliate status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Efforts were being made to identify and address shortcomings in the Office's compliance with the Paris Principles. No fee was charged for the filing of complaints with the Office.

38. **A representative of Botswana** said that the Office of the Ombudsman had full independence and autonomy. Its mandate included raising awareness among the general public and engaging with civil society organizations, NGOs and international bodies.

39. **A representative of Botswana** said that issues relating to equality and non-discrimination, including the low levels of women's representation in politics, would be examined as part of the upcoming constitutional review.

40. **A representative of Botswana** said that the funding for gender-related initiatives had been increased. The Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs had prioritized the development of programmes to support the work of the Botswana Police Service, the Botswana Prisons Services and the Botswana Defence Force on gender-based violence. Funding had been allocated to building the capacity of front-line responders who encountered cases of gender-based violence on a daily basis and equipping decision-makers in law enforcement agencies with the ability to provide a comprehensive response to such violence. The Ministry provided significant funding for shelters for survivors of such violence and was making efforts to ensure the uninterrupted provision of services at those shelters.

41. A review of the National Policy on Gender and Development was under way and should be completed in the third quarter of 2025. The revised policy would have a costed

implementation plan, with dedicated budget allocations for the prioritized areas; that would ensure support for the civil society organizations and government agencies that were to implement the policy. In turn, government actors would be expected also to set aside a budget for implementation. However, given the state of the national and global economy, additional resource mobilization methods would have to be identified.

42. A number of government departments had established programmes in recent years to lift women out of poverty and improve their status and quality of life. The programmes of the Ministry of Agriculture would be reviewed to ensure that, in the next funding cycle, they adequately responded to gender issues in the agricultural sector. The 2015 directive on age-, gender- and disability-responsive procurement would also be reviewed.

43. The national gender machinery was represented on the Rural Development Council and was therefore in a position to ensure, especially in the face of climate change, that gender issues were mainstreamed in the Council's priority actions. It had also partnered with certain mining companies to promote the economic empowerment of women and was working with local private banks on the introduction of a seed grant.

44. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she would welcome further details about the reach of the subnational units of the national gender machinery and the extent to which their services were available at the grass-roots level. It would be helpful to know what the timeline was for the accreditation of the national human rights institution.

45. **A representative of Botswana** said that there were offices of the national gender machinery in all districts, although capacity still needed to be strengthened so that one staff member was no longer responsible for both gender and youth services. The district offices worked with existing local institutions. At the same time, since rural development was a key part of the Government's agenda, reaching out to rural women and youth was a whole-of-government effort.

46. **A representative of Botswana** said that the application for accreditation of the Office of the Ombudsman, which was a member of the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions, would be submitted to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions in November 2025.

47. **Ms. Rana**, noting the positive steps taken by the State Party to address gender-based violence, said that the situation nevertheless remained serious, with one of the highest rates of reported rape in the world and inadequate enforcement of the Domestic Violence Act. Moreover, survivors of sexual violence faced limited access to shelters and psychosocial support, protracted legal proceedings and stigma, as a result of which many complaints were withdrawn. She therefore wished to know what steps were being taken to improve enforcement of the Act, particularly at the community level; whether justice officials and law enforcement personnel were appropriately trained to handle gender-based violence cases with a gender-sensitive and survivor-centred approach; what the status of the draft national action plan on gender-based violence was; how effective the introduction of the sex offender registry had been; and what plans there were to expand shelters, psychosocial support and legal aid, particularly for women and girls in rural areas.

48. In the light of growing cyberviolence targeting women in public life, including activists, journalists and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, she wondered whether the State Party intended to amend the Cybercrime and Computer Related Crimes Act to enhance protection of women and girls from online gender-based violence and technology-facilitated abuse.

49. Lastly, she would welcome information on the effectiveness of the Men Care and Men in the Kitchen programmes and other such initiatives in engaging men and boys in challenging entrenched norms, and on any similar efforts aimed at religious leaders.

50. **The Chair** said that she would be interested in hearing how, in the absence of a full picture of the situation with respect to trafficking in women and girls in its territory, the State Party could ensure that the legal and policy framework effectively addressed the gender dynamics of trafficking in order to meet the specific survivor-centred and trauma-informed needs of women and girls, and what steps it was taking to secure funding for the urgent conduct of the planned comprehensive study on trafficking in women. She would welcome

information, disaggregated by type of trafficking, on the number of prosecutions, convictions and acquittals in cases of trafficking in women and girls in the past three years, as well as data, disaggregated by age, sex, location and disability, on the number of women and girls subjected to trafficking and the number of victims who had sought protection services.

51. She was curious about the mechanisms in place to ensure that trafficked women and girl were aware of their right to non-refoulement, particularly to a State where they ran the risk of revictimization or serious human rights violations, and about the steps being taken to effectively protect women and girls from the risk of falling prey to trafficking online, including for forced criminality and for sexual or labour exploitation.

52. **A representative of Botswana** said that the Government was taking a multisectoral approach to combating gender-based violence, centred around the establishment of an interministerial committee to address the many gaps in the relevant laws, in particular the Domestic Violence Act, the Sex Offenders Registry Act and the Bail Act, through the bill on gender equality. The Government had tripled the budget allocated to shelters for survivors of gender-based violence.

53. The National Gender Commission included a representative of faith-based organizations, who had organized a week of engagement with religious communities involving in-depth discussion of the religious norms and practices that perpetuated violence. The Government had also partnered with a national Christian association to train religious leaders countrywide in gender mainstreaming.

54. **A representative of Botswana** said that anti-trafficking legislation had been amended to address loopholes and modern-day challenges and dynamics of human trafficking. The Anti-Human Trafficking (Amendment) Act thus introduced corporate criminal liability, addressed the most severe forms of trafficking, included aggravating circumstances and increased penalties so that they were commensurate with the seriousness of the offence.

55. The Ministry of Justice and Correctional Services was implementing the Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan 2023–2028; a midterm review of the Plan was scheduled for October 2025. Significant strides had been made in the prevention and prosecution of trafficking and the protection of victims and in building partnerships, including with the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The Ministry worked closely with other ministries and civil society organizations to raise awareness among vulnerable communities, in rural and border areas and in schools of the dangers of human trafficking and the procedure for reporting suspicious activity. It was currently seeking feedback on how to maximize the impact of its activities.

56. Measures taken in the protection sphere included the activation of referral systems in key districts, the provision of shelter and psychosocial support services to victims, training for front-line police officers and the improvement of early identification of victims by hospitals. Coordination between the Directorate of Public Prosecutions, law enforcement agencies and the immigration authorities had been enhanced, and staff of the Directorate and police officers received ongoing training in the legal framework, on victim-sensitive approaches and on safe repatriation of victims. The authorities were pleased to note that, since the launch of the national referral mechanisms in October 2024, only three victims of trafficking had been identified.

57. **A representative of Botswana** said that the Government was working to improve the enforceability of the Domestic Violence Act. Training for police and judges needed to be made continuous, as there were still complaints about the treatment of victims. The standard operating procedures that had been established for the one-stop service centres for victims of gender-based violence would hopefully help to resolve some of the issues with the prosecution of cases, including procedural delays and the mishandling of evidence. The effectiveness of the measures taken was reviewed and steps were taken to remedy any gaps identified. Botswana was determined to be an example for the continent and counted on the Committee's expertise to achieve that goal.

58. **A representative of Botswana** said that 2.3 million pula had been allocated for local implementation of the SADC Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing

Gender-based Violence (2018–2030). The Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs was working with the Botswana Police Service to that end.

59. Gaps in addressing online violence were likely the result of a lack of understanding of the ways in which gender-based violence extended to the cyberworld. The issue was nonetheless a priority of the Government’s multisectoral approach to gender-based violence, and the Minister of Communications, Knowledge and Technology was responsible for ensuring that policies and their implementation took into account gender issues. In addition, a memorandum of understanding had been signed between the Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority and Debswana Diamond Company in order to reinforce cybersecurity, with a focus on training, threat monitoring and incident response. In 2019, the Botswana Police Service had established a digital forensic laboratory to support investigations.

60. **A representative of Botswana** said that measuring shelter capacity in the various districts had been part of preparations for the launch of the one-stop services centres. The Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs was deeply concerned about the lack of funding for civil society but was limited in its ability to address the situation owing to its own funding shortfalls. It was nonetheless developing guidelines to assist civil society in mobilizing support.

61. The State, primarily through the Ministries of Health and Education, was working to empower young girls. It provided contraceptives and taught them to be assertive, as well as ensuring that all girls had access to education to encourage engagement in productive activities rather than risky behaviour. In recognition of the economic reasons for which girls might engage in such behaviour, it was taking a holistic approach to tackling the problem.

62. **Ms. Rana** said that she wondered whether the State Party would consider establishing a centralized, coordinated and publicly accessible data-collection system on the incidence of gender-based violence, including the number of prosecutions brought and their outcomes. She welcomed the faith-based approach that had been taken to tackling patriarchal gender norms, targeting religious and community leaders. She would appreciate more information on programmes involving men and boys in challenging established gender norms.

63. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that addressing gender norms, prejudices and stereotypes required a multisectoral approach. She wondered whether the Government had entered into arrangements with the film and creative arts industries similar to the memorandums of understanding concluded with the private sector that had been mentioned. In her country, Nigeria, such arrangements had been very useful in changing the culture of silence surrounding abuse and the stigma attached to those who reported it. She wished to know how the State Party would step up its action against stigma and stereotypes, including through education on the social and economic costs of gender-based violence and the burden it placed on the State. She would be interested to hear more about the recently launched Botswana Ignite initiative to expand the country’s television and film sector, in particular whether it might be used to reduce the incidence of gender-based violence.

64. **The Chair** said that she would welcome a response to her question on non-refoulement of trafficking victims and to her request for disaggregated trafficking-related data. She wished to urge the State Party to give priority to securing funding for the planned comprehensive study on trafficking in women so that an appropriate legal and policy framework could be developed to address the issue.

65. **A representative of Botswana** said that she would consider the question regarding the establishment of a centralized data-collection system as a recommendation. Data collection would form part of the work of the one-stop centres for gender-based violence services. An online referral system had been piloted years before through which anonymous reports of gender-based violence could be received. Because the referrals were made online, the Government had been able to collect appropriate data.

66. The Men Sector had very recently been transferred from the Office of the President to the Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs, with a view to improving programming for men. Such platforms for men were needed to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment. Men needed to be engaged to help introduce gender-responsive laws. Members of the National Assembly would be undergoing training in the coming week on

gender-sensitive laws, gender-sensitive budgeting and gender-based violence. The Government worked with various male gender organizations, including Men and Boys for Gender Equality. It had entered into a partnership with the Botswana Prisons Service to work with men who had been convicted of crimes involving gender-based violence.

67. The Vice-President of Botswana had recently highlighted the need to give priority to the creative sector. The Government had already begun to work with the film industry. It had entered into a number of public-private partnerships, for example between the First National Bank and the film industry, under which a documentary series on gender-based violence had been launched.

68. The Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs, formerly the Ministry of Youth, Gender, Sport and Culture, worked closely with the department responsible for sport. Sportswomen were involved in campaigns and documentaries on gender-based violence. Education on and the study of gender-based violence were also priority areas of the relevant national strategy and plan of action.

69. **A representative of Botswana** said that the Government was in the process of developing a gender-based violence data management system, which would be led by Statistics Botswana, the national statistics authority. The system was expected to be rolled out in the next National Development Plan. Botswana had a number of public awareness programmes on gender-based violence. The Government had introduced the Legal Aid Botswana programme to increase access to justice, which it expected to help women in particular. There were also police programmes that focused on gender-based violence.

70. **A representative of Botswana** said that the Government was working in close collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on its strategies and actions regarding refugees. The Government always sought durable solutions, including repatriation, resettlement and local integration. There had never been an instance of refoulement in which refugees had been returned to a country from which they had fled. UNHCR exercised supervision over the country's operations involving refugees.

Articles 7–9

71. **Ms. Draz** noting that, following the 2024 general elections, women held only 8.9 per cent of parliamentary seats, down from 11 per cent in 2019, said that she would like to know whether consideration had been given to legal and policy reforms – such as electoral system changes, gender quotas or temporary special measures – to increase women's representation in elected office at both the national and local levels. She would also be interested in learning about the challenges that were hindering ratification of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

72. Despite constituting 54 per cent of eligible voters, women in Botswana faced significant obstacles to political participation, including patriarchal cultural norms, centralized party control, media underrepresentation and disinformation. There were also structural and cultural barriers that limited their access to political leadership, including political violence, media bias and the absence of work-life balance supports in political and public institutions. It would be helpful to have an account of how the State Party was addressing that situation. She would also welcome information on any campaigns or strategic approaches to raise awareness among politicians, community and religious leaders and other stakeholders of the importance of women's participation in public and political life.

73. Although initiatives such as the Lethhabile outreach campaign were positive steps towards promoting women's participation, they were not embedded within a national or party-level support structure. She wondered whether there were any plans to develop permanent support structures, such as leadership training, mentorship programmes and party-level reforms to expand opportunities for women in political and public decision-making. It would be interesting to learn about the efforts being made by the current administration to provide equal opportunities for women to participate in and represent the Government at the national and international levels. Lastly, she would appreciate updated information on women's representation in the diplomatic service and international forums

and on any policies or initiatives to promote women's inclusion in global and regional decision-making roles.

74. **Ms. Schläppi**, noting the high level of birth registration in the State Party, said that she wished to know what specific efforts were being made to meet the challenge of birth registration in remote areas and among minority groups. There were reports that the legal rules governing citizenship remained discriminatory. Children born anywhere could obtain the nationality of their Botswana father, while only children born out of wedlock could obtain their mother's nationality. Furthermore, while the foreign wife of a Botswana national could be naturalized under preferential terms, foreign husbands did not enjoy the same privilege. She therefore wondered whether the Government planned to revise the law to ensure that women were able to pass on their citizenship on an equal footing with men and that male foreign spouses were treated in the same way as female foreign spouses.

75. According to the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, a considerable number of children – boys and girls – were detained in refugee camps or in a specific centre for illegal immigrants; conditions of detention were reported to be harsh in both types of facility. The Committee noted with concern that the State Party had detention centres for boys but no dedicated centres for girls. Whenever girls, or children in general, were detained alongside adults, the risk of their becoming victims of violence, abuse and exploitation increased. The Committee had also been informed that refugees were not entitled to work permits, which exacerbated the risks even further. She wished to know how the authorities ensured that asylum-seekers and refugees were detained only as a last resort, for as short a period as possible and with appropriate procedural and judicial safeguards to prevent arbitrary detention; how the authorities planned to eliminate the practice of detaining girls with adults; and whether the authorities would allow refugees to apply for work permits in the future.

76. **A representative of Botswana** said that, in the 1992 case of *Attorney General v. Dow*, Unity Dow, currently a member of the National Assembly, had challenged the Citizenship Act, which barred children from receiving their mother's nationality. The High Court had ruled in favour of Unity Dow, declaring that the discriminatory provisions that deprived women of their right to pass on citizenship to their children were unconstitutional.

77. **A representative of Botswana**, replying to the question on women in diplomacy, said that there was always room for improvement. Although there were quite a number of women in diplomacy, there was a need to increase their representation in leadership positions. The current representative to the European Union was a candidate for the position of Director General at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Her candidature had been put forward by the Government in recognition of the fact that there was a need to take a proactive approach to female representation in international organizations, including in areas that were not generally associated with women, such as science and technology. The delegation would provide further information on women in diplomacy in writing.

78. **A representative of Botswana** said that that the Government had released all rejected asylum-seekers who had been held at the Francistown Centre for Illegal Immigrants and relocated them to the Dukwi refugee camp. The Minister of Justice had issued a public apology for the manner in which the persons concerned had been treated. Namibian nationals had also been housed in Francistown, but that matter had been resolved.

79. **Ms. Schläppi** said that she would look forward to seeing how the State Party revised the Citizenship Act to address the issues raised.

80. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that *Attorney General v. Dow* was a landmark case and the first in the world to have cited the Convention.

81. **Ms. Draz** said that she was looking forward to the additional information on women in diplomacy. She would appreciate more details of any strategies or plans to encourage women to participate in political and public life.

82. **Ms. Mikko** said that she was taken aback to learn that women's representation in the legislature had decreased; that was quite a serious development, especially in the light of the Committee's general recommendation 40 (2024). She wished to know what the State Party planned to do to increase women's representation, as 8.9 per cent was a low figure for a country like Botswana, which had made considerable advances in many other respects.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.