



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

Distr.: General  
31 May 2023

Original: English

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Eighty-fifth session

### Summary record of the 1985th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 18 May 2023, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Peláez Narváez

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

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

*Ninth periodic report of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (CEDAW/C/VEN/9; CEDAW/C/VEN/Q/9; CEDAW/C/VEN/RQ/9)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Guzmán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), introducing her country's ninth periodic report (CEDAW/C/VEN/9), said that her Government reaffirmed its commitment to eliminating all forms of discrimination and ensuring women's advancement, comprehensive development and enjoyment of human rights. Since the refoundation of the Republic in 1999, Venezuelans had striven to build a democratic, participatory and equal society, transforming the social and cultural patterns and unequal power relations that were the legacy of an oppressive and patriarchal capitalist system. That same capitalist system, at the international level, had found a mechanism of political coercion that undermined the equality, sovereignty and free determination of States. Unilateral coercive measures constituted a crime against humanity and had a direct adverse impact on the lives and the rights of women.
3. In recent years, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had brought unexpected change to Venezuelans' lives, throwing new light on existing gender inequalities and causing further suffering for the people. Women in particular had been obliged to shoulder the additional burden of caring for their families and communities amid a worsening economic situation.
4. Nevertheless, the Venezuelan people had resisted and had preserved a thriving democracy. The National Assembly elections in 2020, and regional elections in 2021, had been held under rules that required gender parity among candidates. The change in the legislature had been followed by a judicial revolution, with the passage of a law amending the Organic Act on the Supreme Court. Other laws that took a gender mainstreaming approach and included specific elements to combat discrimination, eradicate all forms of violence and empower women had been enacted. They included amendments to the Organic Act on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence, the Act on the Care for Life System, the Act on the Promotion and Use of Gender-Sensitive Language, the Indigenous Languages Act and the Organic Act on Science, Technology and Innovation. The revised Organic Act on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence required State bodies and entities to adopt gender, feminist, human rights, intercultural, generational and intersectoral approaches, defined 4 new types of violence, bringing the total to 25, and established the National Commission to Guarantee Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence.
5. The return to constitutional order and a new climate of respect for State institutions had created new possibilities for the consolidation of feminism. One example was the Patria System, through which the State attended to the needs and demands of 21 million Venezuelans, including through social protection policies that mainly benefited women. Social programmes with a gender perspective included the Apacuna Programme for the comprehensive care of Indigenous women, programmes for the protection of Indigenous women who experienced gender-based violence in border areas and programmes for rural women, through which the State had granted land titles covering 1 million ha. Progress had been made in guaranteeing women's access to credit, including through investment programmes, a new entrepreneurship law and the creation of a National Enterprise Fund.
6. In the area of higher education, more than 34,000 teachers had received gender studies training. Women made up the majority of students of basic sciences, education, health, social sciences and humanities, literature and the arts. Over half of scientific researchers were women, placing Venezuela among the top three countries in the world for female participation in scientific research. Women led some 60 per cent of projects financed by the National Fund for Science, Technology and Innovation. They also made up half of the economically active population. Venezuelan women were breaking barriers in sport, leading 32 out of 67 sports federations and accounting for almost half of registered participants.

7. Regrettably, unilateral coercive measures had had a serious impact on the health system, affecting women in multiple ways. They had prevented the purchase of parts and supplies needed for the preventive maintenance and repair of medical equipment used in specialist treatment, and of laboratory reagents, surgical materials and medicines. International banks had stopped the country from making a US\$ 9 million purchase of dialysis supplies that would have been used to treat 15,000 patients and blocked the transfer of funds for the payment of COVID-19 vaccines, which had delayed the country's vaccination campaign by four months. Despite such problems, life expectancy in Venezuela stood at 79 years for women and 73 years for men. Venezuela had a system for the distribution of expensive medicines, which were currently provided free of charge to over 121,000 women suffering from breast, ovarian, cervical and other forms of cancer. Of the 333,000 registered persons with disabilities, 47 per cent were women. Almost 90,000 women with disabilities had received treatment provided by medical and rehabilitation services. In 2023, the Government had provided training and support for almost 25,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women in all 24 States under the National Plan for Humanized Childbirth and Breastfeeding. It had recently rolled out the national *Semilla para la Vida* (A Seed for Life) programme, in which the families of newborns were invited to plant a tree, connecting new human life with the care and preservation of the environment.

8. Recognizing the importance of data, the Ministry of People's Power for Women and Gender Equality had designed a system of gender statistics through which it had collected, between March and May 2022, data on the problems, aspirations and life projects of more than 713,000 women. The United Nations Development Programme had provided technical assistance in order to strengthen the Ministry's statistical infrastructure. Moreover, the Ministry maintained a registration system through which it had collected the details of more than 910,000 Venezuelan women, who were regularly consulted on issues such as entrepreneurship, care for life, gender-based violence and comprehensive care. More than 5 million women had participated in a recent consultation, conducted jointly with the Patria System. The information gathered had resulted in the launch, on 8 March 2023, of the Great Women's Mission – a set of coordinated actions designed to overcome the problems women faced in areas such as justice, sexual and reproductive rights education, the productive economy, care for life and symbolic violence against women. Furthermore, the Venezuelan Observatory for Women's Rights, which had been established to collate and consolidate information on violence against women, had recently set up a network of researchers, composed of centres for women's studies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) conducting research on women's issues and academics working on gender mainstreaming.

9. The Organic Act on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence required the adoption of plans, programmes and projects for the awareness-raising and training of justice officials. Accordingly, the National School for Public Prosecutors, attached to the Public Prosecution Service, regularly provided training in women's rights and gender parity for lawyers, prosecutors and other legal staff, as well as members of the police force and crime investigators. Training on the Convention was provided for criminal investigation officers responsible for cases of gender-based violence against women and girls. Civil servants were made aware of the serious problem of gender stereotypes and prejudice and the proper application and enforcement of the law. The National School for Public Prosecutors had trained 21,755 officials in the handling of complaints submitted by victims of gender-based violence, while the Public Prosecution Service had carried out 2,686 training activities for officials responsible for handling complaints in all 24 states. Over 121,000 officials had participated in training or awareness activities that included the topics of gender and women's human rights. Furthermore, in 2022 the Public Prosecution Service had launched two national campaigns on bullying and sexual abuse of children and adolescents, aimed at justice officials, police officers and the general public, including children and adolescents themselves.

10. The Public Prosecution Service had established 73 special prosecutors' offices with jurisdiction for the protection of women. They included a national prosecutor's office with full powers, a national special prosecutor's office for the offence of femicide and a national special prosecutor's office for offences against women's sexual integrity. There were 47 prosecutors' offices with jurisdiction over ordinary criminal offences in which the victims

were children or adolescents. National special prosecutors' offices for the offence of trafficking in women, children and adolescents had been established in 2019.

11. Despite significant progress in the area of awareness-raising, the Public Prosecution Service had also had to withstand the onslaught of unilateral coercive measures. The challenges it faced included increasing the number of national special prosecutors' offices for gender-based violence, expanding its national pool of experts to enhance the conduct of investigations, integrating sign language specialists into victim support units, approving a standardized complaint form; disseminating the Organic Act on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence and raising officials' awareness about gender stereotypes, training the first cohort of special prosecutors for the protection of women and increasing human resources, acquiring latest-generation technology and improving infrastructure.

12. Additional courts and judicial circuits had been established with jurisdiction over cases involving violence against women. The judiciary currently had 2,290 judges, of whom 1,594 (69.4 per cent) were women. The Supreme Court was composed of 10 male and 10 female judges and its President was a woman. Between 2018 and 2023, 1,433 judges had participated in 18 academic courses, notably a diploma course in gender and human rights that had been introduced in November 2022. Unfortunately, the impact of unilateral coercive measures had prevented the judiciary from acquiring the necessary technology for the effective functioning of the special courts for offences involving violence against women. Nevertheless, the Government intended to ensure that special judicial circuits with jurisdiction over offences involving violence against women were present in all states, and to expand training and awareness activities for judges and other justice officials working in the special circuits.

13. Through its efforts, the State hoped to usher in a new era in which Venezuelan women of all professions could build decent lives. The Government invited the Committee to support its initiatives, and in particular to urge an end to the criminal unilateral coercive measures that hindered the development of public policies for the advancement of women and gender equality.

#### *Articles 1–6*

14. **Ms. Bonifaz Alfonzo** said that she was pleased to note that since 2021 the State party had passed several laws designed to ensure respect for human rights, including the Act on the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Abuse of Children and Adolescents and the Organic Act for the Comprehensive Care and Development of Older Persons. She wished to know, however, whether the Government intended to introduce a criminal offence of femicide. She wondered whether shelters for the comprehensive support and protection of victims and survivors of gender-based violence were functioning properly, and whether the State party ensured that victims were not referred to conciliation mechanisms. What training was provided to judges to ensure that they took the gender perspective into account in decisions affecting women? To what extent did rural women have access to justice? What measures of protection and reparation were afforded to women who were parties to legal proceedings?

15. **Ms. Bethel** said that the Committee noted that the State party had not engaged with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. She wished to point out that national action plans for the implementation of the resolution highlighted measures that countries could take to protect the human rights of women and girls in conflict settings and prevent armed conflict and violence. Recalling that Venezuelan women, including Indigenous women, continued suffer disproportionately from the ongoing humanitarian crisis, she wished to know whether the State party would consider drafting a national action plan on women and peace and security, in full consultation with women's civil society organizations. She wondered whether a gender perspective had been integrated into the national negotiations that had been held to find a solution to the country's conflict.

16. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the Organic Act on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence had recently been amended to introduce the offences of femicide and aggravated femicide under articles 73 and 74. Conciliation had been prohibited in some cases. All judges and judicial officials received training on the gender perspective, including through regular workshops organized by the National School of

Magistrates and the Supreme Court. Special courts or ordinary criminal courts guaranteed access to justice for women victims of violence throughout Venezuelan territory. The law provided for reparation and compensation for victims of sexual harassment.

17. **Ms. Guzmán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that Venezuela currently had six shelters that afforded protection for women and girls. In respect of women and peace and security, the Government had launched the Women's Movement for Peace and Life, which tackled all forms of violence in society. Gender parity and the gender perspective had been guaranteed during the national dialogue process in Mexico City.

18. **Mr. Constant Rosales** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) specifically referred to the adoption of a gender perspective in post-conflict situations. The Government did not consider that Venezuela fell under the scope of the resolution, as it had not experienced a conflict. The Government was fully committed to peace and to the incorporation of a gender perspective in its diplomacy. Reports that Venezuela was mired in a humanitarian crisis were part of a false media narrative, which exaggerated the negative economic and social impact of the unilateral coercive measures that had been imposed on the country.

19. **Ms. Tisheva** said that, besides the Ministry of People's Power for Women and Gender Equality, the national machinery for the advancement of women included the People's Government Presidential Council for Women, the State Council for Gender Equality and Equity and the National Commission to Guarantee Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence, which had been established in 2021. She wished to know how those bodies were coordinated and resourced, how they ensured the coherence of gender equality policies on important issues, and what positive changes for women they had achieved. She would be interested to know when the National Commission would become operational, and whether the State party intended to establish observatories to collect and analyse data on femicide and disappearances of women. It would also be interesting to know how the mechanisms for the advancement of women interacted with other bodies and branches of government. For example, what was the relationship between the Ministry of People's Power for Women and Gender Equality and the Republican Moral Council?

20. The Committee would appreciate information on measures taken to provide the Ministry with sufficient technical, human and financial resources, including information on its budget. She wondered when the State party intended to draft its next gender equality strategy and corresponding plans, and whether those plans would explicitly provide for gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting and collection of gender-disaggregated statistical data. It would be useful to know how women's organizations participated in the work of the Ministry, how they were consulted and what financial support they received. She asked what plans the Government had to redesign the State party's institutional framework for the advancement of women in line with the Convention and with a view to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Lastly, she asked whether the State party planned to adopt new legislation on gender equality.

21. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that article 21 (2) of the Constitution afforded a strong guarantee of substantive equality, as it provided that the law must guarantee legal and administrative conditions to make equality before the law real and effective, including affirmative measures for the benefit of any person or group that might be discriminated against, marginalized or vulnerable. She wondered whether the State party considered article 4 of the Convention to be a useful tool for the interpretation of the Constitution.

22. Recalling that the International Criminal Court was currently investigating crimes against humanity allegedly perpetrated in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela since 2014, she pointed out that one way to ensure accountability for past crimes and to prevent similar crimes in the future would be to increase women's representation in law enforcement and the judiciary. She wondered whether the State party might introduce temporary special measures to promote women's representation in the criminal justice system and to ensure their participation in transitional justice. Similarly, noting that the State party's ecosystems were under threat from mining and oil extraction, she asked whether the State party had introduced any temporary special measures to promote women's participation in climate justice.

23. **Ms. Guzmán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that policies relating to statistics were coordinated by the Ministry of People's Power for Planning, which was tasked with monitoring and following up on public policies and ensuring that gender was mainstreamed in plans and programmes. The National Institute of Statistics designed and conducted studies and analysed their findings.

24. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that, during the previous three years, the Government had doubled the number of special prosecutors for the offence of femicide. Femicide was recognized as a serious offence that carried a maximum penalty of 30 years' imprisonment. The Public Prosecution Service had developed a specialized training curriculum for its officials; the first cohort of special prosecutors for the protection of women was expected to graduate in the coming months. In the area of victim support, the Government worked closely with NGOs, one of which had proposed to establish *casas de paso* – shelters where victims of trafficking or physical violence could stay while their cases were investigated.

25. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that article 204 of the Constitution provided that legislation could be introduced by, inter alia, the executive branch, the legislative branch and the Supreme Court. Article 211 required that civil society be consulted during the discussion and adoption of laws. The current legislature had adopted 21 laws that incorporated gender perspectives. Moreover, it was envisaged that the National Assembly, during its 2023/24 session, would adopt an organic act on women's equality, which would rigorously adhere to the Committee's recommendations.

26. **Ms. Guzmán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the Government was in the process of renewing and redesigning policies and plans in relation to women's rights. Women's organizations were consulted during all policymaking processes in order to take into account the diverse perspectives of women. Feminist councils and gender-equality councils had been established at the community level to ensure that women were themselves responsible for implementing policies that guaranteed their rights.

27. **A representative of Venezuela** said that the Government considered that the proceedings before the International Criminal Court were politically motivated and were one of the forms of aggression directed at Venezuela by the United States Government, which was seeking regime change. One of the countries that had referred Venezuela to the Court in 2018 had since withdrawn its complaint. Venezuela had amply demonstrated that it had not committed any crimes against humanity; therefore, the Court had no jurisdiction to consider the situation in the country. The proceedings before the Court were currently suspended, in accordance with the Rome Statute, as the Venezuelan justice system was duly investigating all allegations of human rights violations, including complaints related to sexual violence.

28. Venezuela had not experienced an armed conflict that would necessitate the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms. Rather, the country had suffered several episodes of politically motivated violence, instigated by an opposition faction that had rejected democracy and sought to gain political power through force.

29. **Mr. Constant Rosales** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the Government did not see any contradiction between the Constitution and article 4 of the Convention. Article 4 formed part of the domestic legal order, allowing the Government to adopt a range of measures to address inequality.

30. Venezuela was currently experiencing an unprecedented phenomenon of induced migration, in which part of the population had decided to emigrate owing to the severe economic impact of the unilateral coercive measures. The Government roundly rejected the claim, reported by some international agencies and media outlets, that more than 5 million Venezuelans had left the country – a figure it considered to be inflated. Similarly, the claim that Venezuela was one of the world's most violent countries was not borne out by any of the statements of senior United Nations officials, many of whom had visited the country in recent years.

31. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that Industria Canaima was a State enterprise established under a pilot programme that aim to democratize access to technology for disadvantaged students. Under the programme, more than 6 million

laptop computers and more than 1.5 million tablets had been distributed to educational institutions at all levels.

32. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the Government had been developing a participatory planning model under which it consulted relevant institutions and civil society actors on policies, plans and projects intended to address particular problems. Local communities and vulnerable groups were consulted on their needs, priorities and opinions. The views of women and girls were taken into account, ensuring that a gender perspective was mainstreamed.

33. **Ms. Guzmán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that it had been proposed to establish a People's Government Presidential Council for Women during consultations on the Act on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence. The Council was made up of representatives from several ministries, the justice system and civil society and was chaired by the Vice-President. It represented a step forward in guaranteeing that women's rights were respected. Feminist councils had also been established and there were plans to set up an anti-patriarchy council, which would develop plans for the advancement of women.

34. **The Chair** said that the views expressed about the International Criminal Court were unfair and unjustified. The Committee disagreed completely with the delegation's assessment of that important and fundamental human rights body.

35. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she would like to know whether the National Commission to Guarantee Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence was operational and, if not, when it would be. How would the Commission work with the Ministry of People's Power for Women and Gender Equality?

36. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that it would be interesting to learn whether the State party was developing temporary special measures to include the most disadvantaged women, including Indigenous and minority women and women of African descent, in political and economic life.

37. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that his Government recognized and respected the International Criminal Court and had worked with it and the Office of the Prosecutor of the Court. It had been the first country in the region to ratify the Rome Statute. His delegation's statement concerned not the Court per se but the politically motivated referral of the situation in Venezuela to the Court by a hostile regional group of Governments as a form of aggression against the country that had begun in 2017 aimed at undermining Venezuelan institutions.

38. **Ms. Guzmán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the National Commission to Guarantee Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence would begin operating in 2023. Work had been ongoing since 2021 in that regard and progress had been made in setting up mechanisms throughout the country to enable the Commission to fulfil its functions.

39. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that her Government took an intersectional approach and ensured that public policies for women and gender equality were tailored to the specificities of different groups with full respect for their human rights. The Ministry of People's Power for Indigenous Peoples worked with the Ministry of People's Power for Women and Gender Equality to develop culturally sensitive projects and programmes on, for example, sign language. Persons of African descent had been involved in the development of programmes that concerned them to ensure their specific needs were met. The needs of different age groups were also considered as well as conditions of vulnerability such as living in a border area. Work was being undertaken to eliminate stereotypes and encourage girls to pursue careers in non-traditional areas such as science and technology.

40. **Ms. Rana** said that it would be helpful to have some examples of how the Act on the Promotion and Use of Gender-Sensitive Language was being implemented and how that implementation was monitored. She would be interested to hear about any efforts to effectively promote gender equality through the educational curriculum and remove from it any harmful gender stereotypes. Details of the efforts being made to eliminate any representation of girls, adolescents and women, including trans women, that violated their rights in the media, advertisements and official communications would be appreciated.

41. She would like to know when the regulatory framework for the reform of the Act on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence would be enacted. It would be useful to learn whether the State party had adopted any measures, other than those already mentioned by the delegation, to ensure that victims of gender-based violence were not revictimized when they came into contact with law enforcement and during judicial proceedings. She wished to know how the State party planned to halt the rising rate of femicide and make data on femicide available to the public.

42. The Committee had received information that cases of child sexual abuse often went unreported because victims were not offered protection by State institutions, or they did not have the means to report the incidents. She wondered how the State party might create an environment that was more conducive to reporting sexual abuse, including by lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons.

43. It would be useful to know what measures the State party was planning on taking to address gender-based violence in public spaces. The delegation had mentioned six shelters for women victims of gender-based violence and she would like to know whether they were fully operational. She wondered whether the State party might consider opening more shelters throughout the country as provided for in the legislation.

44. She wished to gain a greater understanding of the public consultation process for the development of a national plan to prevent and eradicate violence against women for the period 2022–2025. She wondered whether the process had been concluded and how civil society had been engaged in its development and would be involved in its implementation.

45. She asked whether the State party intended to implement a system that provided the public with access to statistics with gender-sensitive indicators. Was the data on gender-based violence in the State party's report publicly available?

46. **Ms. Hacker** said that she would welcome any available information on prostitution in the State party and plans to improve data collection on human trafficking on its territory. It was her understanding that the National Plan against Human Trafficking 2021–2025 had not yet been published and she would like to know why. She asked how the State party planned to bring that plan into line with international standards with respect to prevention, protection, prosecution and partnerships. She wondered whether there were any plans to establish shelters for victims trafficked into the country and for Venezuelan nationals trafficked abroad. It would also be useful to hear about any legal measures to address trafficking of minors and to enforce anti-trafficking legislation in mining operations and in relation to Indigenous women and girls.

47. She asked what the State party was doing to combat criminal groups such as Tren de Aragua, which were reportedly responsible for making the lives of women and their children unbearable and trafficking them abroad when they felt compelled to leave the country. She would like to know how the State party prevented the posting of fake job announcements on the Internet that were designed to lure women into prostitution and whether it prosecuted those who posted such announcements. Further information on any legislation on prostitution or violence against women in the context of prostitution and any steps taken to enforce such legislation would be helpful. She wondered how the State party warned its citizens of the risks of being exploited and trafficked, especially during migration, and whether education was provided that would enable victims of trafficking to identify themselves as such, especially in relation to prostitution and in the context of migration. The delegation might clarify whether the State party helped citizens who wished to emigrate by ensuring that they retained all their formal documents, including diplomas, to enable them to find employment other than sex work. Did the State party offer assistance to its citizens who had been exploited or trafficked in other countries?

48. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that prevention of violence was a key element of Venezuelan public policy and all public officials must guarantee respect for human rights. The Ministry of People's Power for the Interior and Justice followed a preventive approach and was present throughout the country, including in Indigenous communities and rural areas. Gender-based violence and femicide could be reported anonymously through a dedicated hotline and it was not necessary to be a victim to make a report. A campaign had been undertaken to encourage the reporting of such crimes.



The National Office for Victim Support offered psychological and legal support to women who had been affected by trafficking, abuse or violence.

49. A National Commission on Trafficking had been established to address the serious challenges related to human trafficking in the country. There was also a national plan to combat human trafficking, which was being implemented even though it had not been made public, and a subcommittee on trafficking that brought together officials from different ministries and law enforcement bodies to coordinate work on that issue. The human trafficking unit of the Research Corps dealing with scientific, criminal and forensic topics collaborated through the International Criminal Police Organization with their peers from countries of destination for victims of trafficking in order to repatriate victims. Upon their return, victims were offered assistance from the National Office for Victim Support.

50. Rules of conduct for officials had been published in the Official Gazette to avoid the revictimization of women and, since their entry into force, 190 officials had received penalties for crimes of omission or revictimization. There was a network of specially trained police officers to whom gender-based violence or revictimization could be reported.

51. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that a special prosecutor's office, known as *Fiscalía 98 Nacional*, had been established to assist victims of discrimination on the grounds of sexual diversity. High-level coordination mechanisms had been set up in the justice system for the relevant bodies to use a standard form for registering complaints and offer comprehensive and individualized care for victims of gender-based violence. Victims of gender-based violence had a legal right to take paid time off work. Officials who did not address reports of gender-based violence in a timely fashion could be subject to penalties under the law.

52. In 2022, the Attorney General's Office had designed campaigns to raise awareness of the phenomena of bullying in schools and paedophilia with a view to ensuring that victims were aware that they were victims of a crime and understood how to report it to the authorities. There were bodies to provide support to victims throughout the country.

53. The Office of the Attorney General was part of the Ibero-American Network of Specialized Prosecutors against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants, through which her country engaged in international cooperation on that issue. Such cooperation helped national authorities to locate and repatriate victims of trafficking. Repatriated victims were met at the airport by a specialized prosecutor and offered support to avoid their revictimization. Preliminary evidence was taken from them before they returned to their region of residence. National authorities had worked with the United Nations Children's Fund to develop a manual for investigating cases of human trafficking which would be distributed to public prosecutors.

54. The Office of the Attorney General worked continuously and thoroughly to investigate and punish femicide. In more than 85 per cent of ongoing cases the accused was deprived of their liberty. More than 550,000 protection measures had been ordered by the Office of the Attorney General for those who had lodged complaints of violence. There were no measures for reconciliation in cases involving violence.

55. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that, in relation to the Act on the Promotion and Use of Gender-Sensitive Language, guidelines had been issued to all officials in the justice system advising them to use gender-sensitive language in all official documents and communications, which was a requirement under the law. Officials had been trained to understand the importance of gender-sensitive language. Progress had been made towards eliminating negative gender stereotypes and justice system officials had been trained to that end.

56. Penalties for online violence were provided for in the Act on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence and other legislation covering the online space. Awareness-raising was being carried out at the national level with a view to ensuring that all Venezuelans understood that violence against women was a crime.

57. In cases of gender-based violence, preliminary evidence was taken from victims before the proceedings to prevent their revictimization. Victims were protected during court proceedings and, if it was necessary for them to provide a second statement, that statement

would not be taken in the presence of the perpetrator. There were special support groups for women who were reporting crimes. Special legal protections existed for those victims, including prohibiting the suspected perpetrator from contacting the victim. It had been challenging to establish new women's shelters as a result of the unilateral coercive measures that Venezuela confronted. The State response to any violence against women was to impose penalties and protect the victim.

58. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that Venezuelan consulates abroad had well-established protocols to address human trafficking and worked in cooperation with countries of transit and destination on that issue. Some countries had cut diplomatic and consular relations with Venezuela, which made assisting victims of trafficking more challenging. Nevertheless, efforts were being made to improve that situation, and support had been provided by the United Nations Children's Fund and the International Organization for Migration.

59. **Ms. Guzmán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that her Government was committed to ending gender-based violence and would continue its efforts. In that regard, the role of community defenders was fundamental. Community defenders were women who voluntarily undertook training in women's rights, which were enshrined in the Act on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence. There was an interministerial programme for the protection of women who worked in mining.

60. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the National Human Rights Plan 2016–2019 included discrimination as a cross-cutting issue and raised the profile of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community. Under the plan, some 1,300 training activities on equality and non-discrimination had been conducted. Rules of conduct for public officials issued in 2017 prohibited any discriminatory action on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Those rules had been approved by the National Assembly. In 2020, the Ombudsman's Office had established a department for the protection of sexual diversity. In 2021, the National Assembly had declared a national day against hate and all types of discrimination based on sexual orientation and created a subcommittee for issues related to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex population. The Office of the Attorney General and the Ombudsman's Office both had special units for the human rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community. The Supreme Court had adopted a decision partially annulling a provision of the Code of Military Justice on the grounds that it affected the right to equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons.

61. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that a bill on an Act against all forms of discrimination had been submitted to the National Assembly in March 2023. That bill, like all legislation in her country, was the product of wide-ranging consultations that were undertaken throughout the country with civil society, social movements and any other interested parties. The aim of the bill was to construct a diverse and egalitarian society and promote respect for the most vulnerable sectors of society, including women, Indigenous Peoples, persons of African descent and persons with disabilities.

62. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that programmes, plans and projects were being developed to eliminate gender stereotypes involving science and technology. The curricula for all levels of education were being revised, along with the related textbooks. A programme was in place to encourage some 500 children to pursue science career pathways. Women were encouraged to become involved in technology and innovation and were well-represented in the Venezuelan space exploration programme and the telecommunications sector.

63. **Ms. Bonifaz Alfonso** said that she would like to know how many victims of trafficking had been repatriated.

64. **Ms. Guzmán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that, while economic measures against Venezuela made it impossible to open more shelters, the shelters that were in place were operational and were well maintained.

65. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that information on repatriated victims of trafficking was collated by the Public Prosecution Service and would be provided in writing. Statistics on femicide could be found in the annual report of the Attorney General to the National Assembly regarding the number of charges brought by the prosecutors specialized in the protection of women's rights.

66. There were educational guides, which had been endorsed by United Nations Children's Fund, for teaching children and young persons about the crime of human trafficking in a language that they could understand. Prosecutors were present in educational centres to teach children about that crime.

67. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that a plan against trafficking had been developed and would be published following consultations. Action against trafficking was being taken by the Preventive Front (*Frente Preventivo*) throughout the country. There were also ongoing awareness-raising campaigns, including social media campaigns, on different issues related to trafficking.

*Articles 7–9*

68. **Ms. Mikko** said that, in its previous concluding observations, the Committee had expressed regret that the measures to promote gender parity in elections were not mandatory. She wondered whether there had been any developments in that regard during the reporting period. She wished to know how many of the standing committees of the National Assembly were chaired by women. It was her understanding that a climate of threats and violence often discouraged women from participating in politics. She would therefore like the delegation to indicate why the State party had not adopted legislation on a gender parity system to ensure that women were represented in political and public life, especially in electoral processes, with penalties for political parties in the case of non-compliance. It would be useful to know how the State party planned to combat violence against women in politics and whether any preventive measures or penalties would be introduced.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*