



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

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Ninetieth session

### Summary record of the 2124th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 6 February 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Haidar

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*Ninth periodic report of Belarus*

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

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

*Ninth periodic report of Belarus (CEDAW/C/BLR/9 and CEDAW/C/BLR/QPR/9)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Belarus joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Belarus**, introducing her country's ninth periodic report (CEDAW/C/BLR/9), said that Belarus was committed to the principles of the Convention and sought to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men in all areas. The high ranking of Belarus in the Global Gender Gap Index, which had steadily improved over the previous decade, reflected the progress that had been made regarding gender issues. The Government recognized the importance of continually striving to improve its implementation of the Convention, which was a key instrument for improving women's daily lives.
3. The political will of the Belarusian State was confirmed by the words of President Aleksandr Lukashenko: "Ours is a life of equal opportunity for all. It is a society of justice. We will surely build a country for the people." Support for the policies of the Head of State had been amply demonstrated in the recent presidential election.
4. The national and regional implementation of gender policy was overseen by the National Council on Gender Policy, which worked in coordination with the Sustainable Development Council. A progress report on gender equality issues, including recommendations for improvement, was submitted to the President and the Government on an annual basis.
5. The goals of the sixth National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2021–2025 were aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2023 and 2024, in collaboration with international partners, the Government had created and adopted methodologies and models for gender-sensitive budgeting and gender impact assessments of legislation.
6. The National Statistical Committee had developed thematic information systems to analyse the situation of gender equality in the country. The Gender Statistics web portal had 178 statistical indicators for gender, disaggregated by various attributes, and showed trends dating back to 2000. In addition, the Universal Data Portal for Child-related Statistics contained statistical indicators related to the situation of children in key social areas.
7. In 2024, further research was conducted to assess the trends in Belarusian women's attitudes towards marriage, children and childbirth, using the methodology of the Economic Commission for Europe Generations and Gender Programme.
8. While studies showed a shift in societal perceptions of gender roles, there was still a substantial imbalance in terms of domestic responsibilities, particularly with regard to child-rearing. In 2020, the Labour Code had been amended to include paternity leave: fathers were entitled to a maximum of 14 days of leave within six months of their child being born. In 2022, Father's Day had been established as a national holiday, alongside Mother's Day, emphasizing the role of both men and women in raising children. Information campaigns were organized in connection with those days to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality in families.
9. In 2023, Belarusian women had accounted for 36 per cent of members of the National Assembly, the parliament of Belarus, and 46 per cent of the House of Representatives, the lower house of the Assembly. They had also held 47 per cent of elected positions in local government bodies, over 30 per cent of which had been headed by women, and represented 54 per cent and 64 per cent of higher-level civil servants and judges, respectively.
10. Over 60 per cent of working women aged 20 to 49 had children aged under 18. Labour legislation contained measures to improve the work-life balance of parents, including additional paid days off on a monthly or weekly basis. Flexible forms of employment, such as working from home, were also available. From 1 January 2025, allocations had been increased for pregnancy and childbirth and for parents with children with disabilities. A family support programme, consisting of a one-off payment worth some US\$ 10,000 for families with three or more children, had been in place since 2015. Women's associations,

such as the Belarusian Women’s Union, implemented social projects to support the interests and rights of women.

11. Secondary education was mandatory for all children and the literacy rate of the population aged 15 or over was virtually 100 per cent. Women represented around 53 per cent of students in higher education, with a growing number choosing science and technology subjects. Almost 92 per cent of women aged 16 to 72 used the Internet. The 2021–2025 programme for the further education of children and young people included family and gender education, which was aimed at fostering a responsible attitude to marriage, family and child-rearing and informed ideas about the role of men and women in society. The secondary education curricula had been improved by taking gender equality into account.

12. Among women of employment age, 84.3 per cent were employed, and female unemployment had decreased from 3.1 per cent in 2019 to 2.7 per cent in 2023. Over 42 per cent of employed women had attended higher education, and women represented 39.2 per cent of researchers. For the first time, a female Belarusian cosmonaut had travelled to the international space station in 2024.

13. Female entrepreneurship was supported by a State programme for small and medium-sized enterprises and a trilateral agreement concluded in 2022 between the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Belinvestbank and the Belarusian Women’s Union. Numerous events had been organized to support women’s businesses and remove barriers to female entrepreneurship, including business training sessions and a national forum for female entrepreneurs.

14. Belarus was a world leader in developing and providing access to healthcare. All women, regardless of income, could receive all forms of medical care for free. Maternal mortality stood at around one woman per year. Since 2021, women had had access to one free attempt at in vitro fertilization. Women had the right to decide for themselves whether they wished to have children and had access to contraceptive drugs. The number of abortions per 1,000 women had almost halved over the previous 10 years.

15. As of 2024, 27,000 people had been living with HIV, 92 per cent of whom were receiving antiretroviral therapy. All persons with HIV received free medical care. Cancer screening for women and girls had been in place since 2024 as part of a programme for adult outpatient healthcare.

16. In 2022, legislative amendments had been made to strengthen both protective measures for victims of domestic violence and preventive measures against offenders. Every year, local social service centres received requests for temporary shelter for approximately 15,000 victims of domestic violence. The number of crisis centres had increased over the previous decade from 105 to 134. In the first half of 2024, there were 108 victims of domestic violence in crisis centres, including 81 women and 27 men. Since 2022, a crisis centre had been available for various vulnerable women, such as women with HIV or women released from prison.

17. Belarus currently had six Orange Safe Spaces, an initiative supported by the United Nations Population Fund, through which 8,300 vulnerable people had received assistance between April 2022 and December 2024.

18. Belarus believed that international cooperation played an important role in implementing the Convention, allowing countries to share their experiences and improve their response to current challenges in the area of women’s rights. Belarus therefore actively participated in international events focused on the analysis of national, regional and global efforts to achieve progress in the area of gender equality, such as the Non-Aligned Movement Conference on Advancing the Rights and Empowerment of Women in November 2023 and the Asian Women’s Forum in May 2024.

#### *Articles 1–6*

19. **Mr. Safarov** said that, following the publication of the Committee’s Views ([CEDAW/C/87/D/157/2020](#)) in early 2024 on the joint complaint filed by two Belarusian women detained in poor, unhygienic and degrading conditions, he would like to know what action had been taken by the State party to provide reparation to the authors. He wondered

what measures had been implemented to incorporate into the Constitution and the Criminal Code a definition of gender equality and a prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination against women in the public and private spheres.

20. He would welcome further details on the mechanisms in place to protect women against discrimination, the number of cases in which court decisions had referred to the Convention and the visibility of the Convention, particularly with regard to its translation into Belarusian and availability online.

21. He would be grateful if the State party could confirm whether the Ministry of Justice was solely responsible for administering the bar exam, appointing individuals to senior positions in the bar, initiating disciplinary proceedings against lawyers and terminating licences. It would be useful to obtain statistical data on female lawyers who had been disbarred and faced administrative arrests over the previous five years.

22. Lastly, he would like to know how the right to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal was ensured in relation to cases involving women's participation in peaceful assemblies. What grounds had been used for holding closed court sessions in such cases?

23. **A representative of Belarus** said that there was no comprehensive definition of discrimination against women in Belarusian law. In 2017 and 2019, the Government had examined the possibility of enacting a single anti-discrimination law and had found that national laws and regulations included ample provisions for the implementation of the Convention: of the some 380 laws reviewed, 12 expressly prohibited discrimination and more than 50 provided for equality between all citizens, regardless of any distinguishing characteristic. The principle of equality was enshrined in article 22 of the Constitution and in a wide range of laws. Under article 32 of the Constitution, as revised by referendum in 2022, women enjoyed equal opportunities in education and vocational training, employment and other spheres. In other words, the provisions of the Convention had been elevated to the level of constitutional law. Moreover, the Criminal Code established criminal responsibility for the violation of citizens' equality of rights on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, language, origin, and other characteristics. There were similar provisions in labour law. Any person was entitled to report violations of their rights to the competent authorities, which were required to promptly deal with applications. Most complaints were resolved at the level of the authorities rather than in court. The legal protections against discrimination were afforded to Belarusian citizens and foreign nationals and stateless persons alike.

24. **A representative of Belarus** said that gender equality and the protection against discrimination fell within the competence of a wide range of government departments, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and others. The National Council on Gender Policy was composed of members of the National Assembly and representatives of the presidential administration, the Council of Ministers, the Supreme Court, the local authorities, the academic community and voluntary associations. Specialized parliamentary committees scrutinized all legislation for discriminatory provisions. Awareness-raising was conducted at all levels of government and in the mass media to inform women about their rights.

25. **A representative of Belarus** said that bar associations provided information on available legal aid and assistance on their websites. The Belarusian National Bar Association held annual events to provide free legal advice to citizens. Access to free legal aid had been increased by law in 2021. Such assistance mainly covered labour relations and discrimination at work, but also, for example, persons deprived of parental rights, victims of trafficking in persons and women in places of detention. As Belarusian law required the presence of a lawyer in legal proceedings, women who could not afford a lawyer were provided with free legal assistance funded from local budgets.

26. **A representative of Belarus** said that, on the basis of surveys of women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 conducted by the National Council on Gender Policy, it had been shown that some 5 per cent of women had experienced discrimination on any ground and rural women some 2 per cent; sex discrimination and harassment had been reported by 1 to 2 per cent of respondents and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation by

0.1 per cent. The effectiveness of the Government's anti-discrimination measures was clear from those figures.

27. **A representative of Belarus** said that the population had access to and understood both of the country's official languages, Belarusian and Russian. The decision on the two State languages had been adopted following a referendum. Information was provided in both languages on official web portals, such as that of the Supreme Court. While Russian tended to be used more for official purposes, that did not undermine the accessibility of legal information in any way.

28. **A representative of Belarus** said that, while no statistical data on cases of discrimination handled by the courts were yet available, that did not mean that no rulings had been handed down or that no reference was made to the Convention in such cases.

29. **A representative of Belarus** said that she would recommend that the Government work on improving official statistics disaggregated by sex, including for the legal system.

30. **Mr. Safarov**, noting with appreciation that Belarus had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention, said that it was important for the State party to incorporate the Convention into domestic law, particularly the Criminal Code. Statistical data, not only on the application of the Convention, but also on gender-based discrimination in general in criminal cases would be useful. He would also be interested to receive details of how lawyers were appointed to the country's bar associations and wondered what examinations they had to pass. In addition, gender-disaggregated statistical data on the provision of independent legal aid would be appreciated.

31. **A representative of Belarus** said that information about licences to practice law would be provided in writing. Concerning statistical data on sexual offences, there had been 65 convictions for acts of sexual violence in the first half of 2024 and 139 in 2023; 59 convictions for intentional and negligent acts of bodily harm in the first half of 2024 and 88 in 2023, including certain sexual offences; and 44 convictions for indecent assault in the first half of 2024 and 65 in 2023.

32. **Ms. Rana**, expressing concern at the weak institutional framework for gender equality and the exclusion of civil society organizations in Belarus, said that she wished to know whether the State party was considering any tangible steps towards the establishment of an independent national human rights institution, in line with the Paris Principles. She wondered how, in the absence of such an institution, the State party ensured the independent promotion and protection of human rights. She would be interested to hear why civil society organizations had been excluded from the study on the feasibility of such an institution and how the State party planned to ensure their participation in future discussions on the matter.

33. It would be useful to learn how the recently developed methodological guidelines for conducting gender assessment would be used to monitor the implementation of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2021–2025. Since the action plan would expire in 2025, she wondered what the timeline was for assessing its impact and for preparing the new action plan, including the filling of any gaps in the plan for 2021–2025. She would appreciate information on any measures that would be taken to restore collaboration with civil society organizations and to ensure their meaningful participation in the assessment and development of gender equality policymaking.

34. In the light of the 2022 prohibition of working for an unregistered or dissolved organization, she wished to know what plans the State party had to reinstate dissolved civil society organizations and to ensure the protection of woman activists from gender-based violence and political persecution. She would welcome details of any mechanisms that existed to protect woman activists, human rights defenders and political opponents from gender-based violence and State repression. She hoped that the delegation would shed light on the rationale for the dissolution of civil society organizations engaged in the protection and promotion of women's rights and on how their dissolution was aligned with the State party's obligations under international human rights standards.

35. Lastly, she wondered whether the State party would consider the development and adoption of a formal national action plan on women and peace and security.

36. **Ms. Schläppi** said that she would like to know whether the Government had taken any steps to introduce temporary special measures since the report had been issued and, if so, in which areas. If it had not introduced any such measures, she wondered whether it planned to adopt any and, if not, what its reasons were. She would be grateful for information on any such measures taken to increase the low representation of women in political decision-making and leadership positions. Details of any temporary special measures taken in other areas, for instance culture, employment and education, would be useful, as would information on the results of such measures and lessons learned from them. It would be helpful to hear about any specific measures taken on behalf of vulnerable groups of women who faced intersectional discrimination. Further information on any specific measures taken to mitigate the negative impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on gender equality would also be appreciated.

37. **A representative of Belarus** said that the State had not made any specific commitments to establish a national human rights institution by a certain date, although it had agreed to consider the prospect. It had therefore held consultations, in which representatives of civil society had participated, with leading State agencies and with representatives of the United Nations human rights system, of Western States and of partners in the Commonwealth of Independent States. In the light of the well-developed system in Belarus to promote human rights, as outlined in the State party report (para. 95), establishing a national human rights institution was not a pressing need at that time, although it could not be ruled out for the future.

38. **A representative of Belarus** said that Belarus had a national mechanism on gender equality, which reported to the National Council on Gender Policy. Every five years, national action plans on gender equality were issued and the Council assessed progress on those plans twice a year, reporting to the Government annually; the current such plan was the sixth. In addition, the Government regularly considered citizens' appeals concerning violations of their rights, to which it was required by law to respond. It had introduced legal reviews of laws to eliminate discriminatory provisions and gender-responsive budgeting to government programmes and plans.

39. **A representative of Belarus** said that her Government continued to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) under its general State policy and national strategies on the advancement of women. As Belarus was not currently a party to any conflicts, it saw no need for a separate action plan or special measures to implement the resolution. Currently, it was actively involved in receiving Ukrainian refugees. Over 200,000 Ukrainian citizens, more than half of them women, had arrived in Belarus between 2022 and 2024. Some had been provided temporary protection while others had been granted refugee status or obtained a residence permit or citizenship.

40. **A representative of Belarus** said that almost 1,500 voluntary associations were active in Belarus. The largest was the Belarusian Women's Union, but there were many others that sought to help women, such as voluntary associations to promote maternal and child well-being, the Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs, which was involved in gender equality issues and provided support to vulnerable women, including women living with HIV, domestic violence victims and women released from prison, and organizations of women with disabilities.

41. A very simple and transparent process had been put in place to register voluntary associations. The Ministry of Justice, which oversaw that process, held regular training sessions to provide methodological support both to existing voluntary associations and to those who wished to set up their own organization. However, the Ministry did not interfere in those activities.

42. Under the law governing voluntary associations, associations found to have engaged in unlawful activities, such as the spread of war propaganda or terrorist or extremist activities, could be dissolved by decision of a court. The Ministry of Justice had a mechanism for issuing a warning to voluntary associations that failed to meet the requirements under the law. Failure to heed the warning had consequences pursuant to a court decision. The law did not prohibit an association that had been dissolved from reapplying for formal registration and being brought back into operation.

43. There was no concept of “human rights defender” in Belarus as such. Any citizen was free to take action in defence of human rights and legitimate interests, provided that his or her activities remained within the confines of the law. If those activities were found to be in contravention of the law, the responsible party was held to account.

44. **A representative of Belarus** said that, in 2020, there had been an attempt to carry out a revolution in her country with the aim of seizing power from the Government. Whether willingly or unwillingly, a number of non-governmental organizations had been involved in the attempted coup and their leaders had subsequently been convicted in court. In no way could the State be described as having repressed civil society; it had simply been a case of holding individuals to account for their unlawful actions.

45. In 2023, amendments to the laws on interaction between government agencies and civil society and on the formation and activities of political parties and other voluntary associations had been enacted. The purpose of the amendments was not to violate citizens’ rights or shrink the civic space. Instead, the amendments encouraged the development of more constructive civic activities aimed at supporting the fulfilment of the State’s objectives, including with respect to gender equality. Specifically, the amendments set out the obligation of voluntary associations to respect the Constitution and the laws of Belarus, to adhere to their own statutes and to refrain from any activities that ran counter to the domestic and foreign policy aims adopted by the National Assembly.

46. **A representative of Belarus** said that the Government had not introduced strict quarantine measures to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it had taken a number of steps to address the specific needs of men and women during that period, particularly those in vulnerable situations. They included, for example, special measures to support families with low incomes or with many children. A presidential decree had also been issued to offer tax breaks and other support measures to employees in sectors that had been particularly affected by the pandemic, such as tourism and transport. Women had accounted for over 85 per cent of the medical personnel who had continued to work during that period and who had also received special financial support from the State. Thanks in part to flexible working arrangements introduced during the pandemic, which had been taken up by around 40 per cent of employers in Belarus, the unemployment rate at the end of the period had stood at only 4 per cent. Furthermore, the high representation of women in public life and decision-making positions had been maintained throughout. Women held more than 40 per cent of seats in the National Assembly and more than 48 per cent in the House of Representatives.

47. **A representative of Belarus** said that, although the speaker of the upper house of the National Assembly and two Deputy Heads of the Presidential Administration were women, there were currently no female regional governors in Belarus and only one ministerial post was occupied by a woman. Belarusian women nonetheless stood out for their high levels of education and professionalism, and their presence in high-level decision-making systems would only grow stronger in the future.

48. **Ms. Rana** asked how many women’s organizations, and which other stakeholders, had been consulted by the National Council on Gender Policy during its evaluations of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality.

49. **A representative of Belarus** said that a new national action plan for gender equality was adopted every five years. The National Council on Gender Policy met twice a year to evaluate the action plans, and it also submitted an annual progress report on implementation to the Government. The members of the National Council included representatives of voluntary associations, who participated in both those evaluations and the development and implementation of projects under the action plans. The Belarusian Women’s Union was represented in not only the National Council on Gender Policy but also the National Commission on the Rights of the Child and the Public Council at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Government also had a number of other voluntary associations that participated in implementing gender equality measures, including the national branches of the Red Cross, the Pokrov charitable foundation for family, maternal and child welfare and the Matulya Centre for Families and Motherhood. Additionally, there were four major organizations of persons with disabilities that contributed to the Government’s efforts to implement specific gender equality measures for women with disabilities.

50. **Ms. Schläppi** said that, even if the Government did not see the need to take temporary special measures to increase women's participation in political decision-making, she would still be interested to hear whether the delegation believed that such measures would be necessary to strengthen women's representation in other areas of society.

51. **A representative of Belarus** said that women accounted for 70 per cent of all civil servants. Furthermore, around half of female civil servants held middle and senior management positions, which meant that they played a role in preparing the political decisions taken by the Government.

52. **A representative of Belarus** said that the Government had received a request from its citizens to provide greater support to women who raised children with disabilities. In response, it had amended the labour law to grant parents of children with disabilities the right to work on a part-time basis without forfeiting their entitlement to special State childcare benefits. A new measure had also been introduced to offer mothers of children with disabilities who were on maternity leave the opportunity to receive free vocational training in professions that were in demand on the labour market. Mothers who chose to participate in that scheme received a stipend and also retained the right to their other State benefits.

53. **A representative of Belarus** said that women refugees from Ukraine were provided with temporary support measures including access to social welfare, healthcare and education services.

54. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she wished to know whether the Government was planning to adopt a comprehensive strategy to combat gender stereotypes and prejudices, including by revising media regulations and curricula and textbooks at all levels of education, and, if so, whether it intended to engage men and boys in that process. The Committee would be interested to know whether the Government would consider adopting a comprehensive law on gender-based violence and resuming its work on the domestic violence bill, which had been shelved. She would also like to know when the Government intended to take the necessary steps to explicitly criminalize the offences of domestic violence and marital rape.

55. It would be interesting to know what measures the Government planned to take to encourage women to report cases of domestic violence and to strengthen the protection that they received during legal proceedings. The Committee would welcome statistical information on the number of restraining orders that had been issued on the basis of both a victim's complaint and a prosecutor's request over the previous two years. It would also welcome information on the number of convictions that had been obtained for crimes related to domestic violence, disaggregated by sex and the relationship between victim and perpetrator. She would like to know how many women had been murdered or had died as a result of domestic violence and whether any convictions had been handed down for such offences.

56. The Committee would welcome further information about the crisis rooms and shelters that had been set up for victims, including details on the specific rehabilitation services that they offered. It would be useful to know how their personnel were recruited, how often they received training and what topics were covered in those programmes. She wondered why men and entire families were also accommodated in crisis rooms and how the confidentiality of victims' personal data was guaranteed. She would like to know when the Government planned to introduce specialized services for women with disabilities who were victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence and what support mechanisms had been put in place for migrant women victims.

57. Lastly, she wished to know why certain non-governmental organizations providing support services to victims, including hotlines and shelters, had been closed down. Would they be allowed to start operating again? If so, would they receive support from the State party, including financial assistance?

58. **Ms. Akia** said that she would welcome further information about the prevailing trends concerning trafficking in and exploitation of prostitution of women and girls in the State party, including the latest data on those offences, disaggregated by age, sex and disability. She would like to know what specific measures had been taken to protect women and girls in vulnerable situations, including women and girls with disabilities, refugees, migrants and

women and girls in an irregular situation, against trafficking. She would also like to hear more about the standard operating procedures that had been put in place to identify, investigate, refer, prosecute and adjudicate cases where women and girls had been trafficked or exploited in prostitution. The Committee would welcome the latest data concerning investigations, prosecutions and convictions in relation to such cases. It would also be useful to know what specific action the Government was taking to strengthen prevention and improve the protection of women and girls against trafficking and exploitation of prostitution, including through screening and victim identification, protection services, shelters, access to quality justice and legal aid services, hotlines, comprehensive referral pathways and the training of personnel in the justice and law enforcement sectors – including border officials – on gendered nature of trafficking in persons.

59. **A representative of Belarus** said that eliminating gender stereotypes was one of the goals that had been set out in the National Action Plan for Gender Equality. To achieve that aim, the Government had carried out a number of information campaigns on gender culture and, according to a survey conducted in 2024 by the National Statistical Committee, gender stereotypes were no longer prevalent in Belarusian households. Most people surveyed had indicated that family decision-making responsibilities were shared equally between men and women, and the survey had revealed that men and women attached more or less the same importance to education and work.

60. Gender stereotypes nonetheless persisted in relation to the division of parenting responsibilities and, as a result, measures were being taken to enhance the participation of fathers in raising their children and carrying out related domestic tasks. A new Father's Day had been established and the Government was working with civil society on a joint project to encourage responsible fatherhood – in so-called Papa Schools – and encourage men to look after their children from the earliest ages.

61. The education and youth policy for the period 2021–2025 provided for the inclusion of a gender component at all levels of education for both boys and girls. The results of a survey conducted to assess the effectiveness of those measures would be published later in the year.

62. **A representative of Belarus** said that Belarus was engaged in positive discrimination with regard to women. For example, a popular State television programme entitled *Superwomen* featured successful Belarusian women. The programme served to illustrate that women had a life beyond the family and could thrive in areas such as business and politics.

63. **A representative of Belarus** said that the number of restraining orders applied against perpetrators of domestic violence had increased from around 18,500 in 2022 to nearly 33,000 in 2024. Often, the main purpose of restraining orders was to remove the perpetrator from the family environment, since the Government held the view that it was beneficial for the psychological rehabilitation and overall well-being of the victims to remain in their home. Furthermore, steps were taken to ensure that adult victims of domestic violence were not separated from their children. If the children were deemed to be at risk of violence, appropriate measures were taken to ensure their safety but parents were always given the chance to address their family issues without their children being removed. The Government's priority was to ensure the well-being of the children and to give them every opportunity to be raised in a family environment.

64. Every year, the national prevention campaign “A house without violence!” was carried out to raise public awareness of the preventive action against domestic violence taken by the authorities and civil society. The main aim of the campaign was to provide potential victims with information about who they could contact and what support was available to them. Other national initiatives included participation in the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, and information campaigns were also carried out at the regional level. A survey conducted in 2019 had revealed that the proportion of men with an attitude of acceptance towards domestic violence had fallen significantly since 2012.

65. **A representative of Belarus** said that the social protection system responded to around 17,000 cases of domestic violence each year. Domestic violence was not a reason to remove children from their parents, and families affected were instead provided with additional support. Victims were invited to provide information on their needs to enable the

Government to identify appropriate support. Women fleeing domestic violence could go to shelters at any time of day or night, with their children if they wished, and receive support without the need to provide documentation or evidence of their situation. There were hundreds of crisis rooms available across the country and many were equipped to accommodate children. Work was under way to ensure that crisis rooms were accessible for women with disabilities.

66. **A representative of Belarus** said that several measures had been taken to prevent and eliminate trafficking in persons and to rehabilitate victims. The main objectives of domestic policy in that regard were described in relevant legislation, including the Trafficking in Persons Act and instruments including the regulations on the procedure for identifying trafficking victims, which also outlined the victim referral procedure. Those measures had enabled the Government to maintain control of the situation, and the threat of trafficking in Belarus was therefore low.

67. In 2024, the authorities had recorded around 1,600 crimes related to trafficking in persons and identified around 1,500 suspects. Sixty-eight criminal offences had been recorded under the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. All such offences had involved sexual exploitation, and seven victims had been minors. Sixty of those offences had been committed entirely on Belarusian territory and the remainder had involved international trafficking. Six trafficking channels had been discovered, involving 197 victims, of whom 144 had been female victims including 91 girls. Some 114 victims, including 90 minors, had been referred to the rehabilitation services. A number of minors had not been referred for rehabilitation as their parents had refused to grant consent.

68. Steps were being taken to build capacities within law enforcement agencies in consultation with international organizations and voluntary associations. An international training centre providing training on migration and trafficking in persons to immigration and law enforcement officials, as well as specialists working in the Commonwealth of Independent States, had been established with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In the period 2023 to 2024, over 90 training activities had been carried out across the country in cooperation with the IOM and had been attended by a range of relevant specialists, including preschool teachers, anti-trafficking experts and psychologists supporting child victims of online sexual exploitation. The Government was working with international organizations to strengthen the national referral mechanism for victims of trafficking in persons, bring national legislation into line with international standards and provide humane support to victims. Anti-trafficking hotlines had been established, relevant training was being provided and campaigns had been carried out to raise awareness of issues related to emigration.

69. **A representative of Belarus** said that, in 2023, the law on voluntary associations had been amended, under which all voluntary associations operating in Belarus had been given an entire year to bring their charters and other relevant core documents into line with the updated law and renew their registration. However, there had been those that, for political or other reasons, had not or could not meet those requirements.

70. There was ongoing debate about how to address prostitution and the women involved. In Belarus, prostitution was an administrative offence and offenders were subject to administrative proceedings. However, in cases involving trafficking in persons or related crimes, the individuals involved were treated as trafficking victims. The Government was considering how best to address the issue and was exploring options such as adopting legislation to criminalize sex buyers. Efforts were made to identify women who had been brought to Belarus and subjected to unlawful exploitative practices, such as labour exploitation or sexual exploitation, in order to investigate potential cases of trafficking.

71. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she would like to know whether the State party had considered enacting legislation to make domestic violence an aggravated circumstance in the case of crimes such as homicide. In addition, she would appreciate information on measures taken to introduce programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence that adopted a cognitive

behavioural approach and prioritized the victim's safety. Did such programmes exist, and if so, who was responsible for their implementation?

72. **Ms. Akia** said that she would welcome further information on the links between women with disabilities and trafficking in persons. It would also be helpful if the State party could provide further data – disaggregated by age, sex and disability – regarding trafficking in persons and exploitation in the form of prostitution.

73. **A representative of Belarus** said that, while the delegation did not possess specific data concerning women with disabilities and trafficking in persons, it was unlikely that many women with disabilities in Belarus were involved in cases of trafficking.

74. **A representative of Belarus** said that legislation on domestic violence prevention had been amended to provide for the creation of a special programme aimed at perpetrators of domestic violence. Through the programme, perpetrators underwent psychological interventions to address their attitude to domestic violence and their behaviour, and local law enforcement agencies were involved in its implementation. The programme had been developed on the basis of lessons learned from similar initiatives in other countries. Pilot projects had been carried out, and steps were being taken to implement the programme more widely.

#### *Articles 7–9*

75. **Mr. Safarov** said that he would like to know why there were so few women in high-ranking roles in the country's diplomatic service, including female ambassadors. Noting that several special committees had been established within the parliament to address a range of issues, he wished to know why the State party had not established any such mechanism to address gender equality and women's rights.

76. It would be useful to receive further information on the closure of certain NGOs, including specific reasons for their closure. The State party might wish to respond to allegations received by the Committee from alternative sources regarding the repression of female journalists, women working for NGOs and female political activists.

77. Data on the number of female deputy ministers in the Government would be appreciated. It would also be helpful to receive figures on the number of women in high-ranking positions in the private sector, particularly as women were underrepresented in the technology sector.

78. **Ms. Akizuki** said that she wished to know whether the State party was currently implementing any programmes that specifically addressed stateless women and girls and, if not, whether it planned to develop any such initiatives. In addition, she would like to receive a concrete timeline for the ratification of the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. It would be interesting to hear about any measures in place to protect mothers who were migrants or refugees in transit as well as their newborn infants. Information on steps taken to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families would also be appreciated.

79. **A representative of Belarus** said that around 70 per cent of staff and a significant proportion of people in leadership and management positions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were women. The situation was always changing, and there was a period in recent history during which the deputy minister was female and four women held ambassadorial positions. Roles in the Ministry and the diplomatic service usually attracted high numbers of applicants, although very few were women. The issue was not one of gender-based discrimination, however, but of strong competition for those roles.

80. In terms of parliamentary representation, women held around 37 per cent of seats in the lower house and 40 per cent of seats in the upper house. While there were currently no female committee chairs, a number of deputy chairs were women, and women had served as chairs in the past. The Government recognized that there were challenges that needed to be overcome to achieve equal representation of women in the parliament. Women held around 70 per cent of local council seats, and around 30 per cent of councils were currently led by women. There were two women holding high-ranking governmental positions: one was a

minister, while the other held a position ranked at the same level as ministerial positions. There were plenty of opportunities for women to advance in the civil service.

81. Many allegations of repression raised with United Nations human rights treaty bodies were inaccurate and disputable. There was a tendency from international actors, particularly those from Western countries, to treat individuals apprehended during anti-government protests in countries like Belarus as political prisoners while identifying individuals taking similar action in Western countries as lawbreakers deserving of appropriate punishment. Although the post-election demonstrations in Belarus had been depicted by Western countries as peaceful protests that had been unduly repressed by the Belarusian authorities, the Government had based its own perspectives on the facts collected during investigations into those events and on decisions handed down by the courts. Despite objective evidence that individuals in the media and journalists had engaged in violence and extremist action against government officials, such evidence was not always taken into account in discussions at the international level, allowing inaccurate interpretations of the situation to prevail. It was important for the Government to work with international bodies to ensure a balanced appraisal of the situation in Belarus.

82. **A representative of Belarus** said that, following the amendment to the law on voluntary associations, many NGOs had failed to complete the necessary registration procedures. Naturally, there had been cases of the dissolution of NGOs in accordance with the law. The delegation did not possess specific details on the number of NGOs thus dissolved. Nonetheless, it was inaccurate to suggest that all NGOs affected had been dissolved for one particular reason, and the rationale behind the dissolution of each NGO could be found in the respective court documents. Citizens wishing to advocate for a particular cause were entitled to establish a new NGO or renew the activities of a previously existing NGO.

83. **A representative of Belarus** said that the Government was working hard to eliminate statelessness in Belarus. The number of stateless women in the country had decreased significantly over the past 10 years thanks to measures taken under the I Belong campaign to end statelessness. Stateless persons permanently residing in Belarus were eligible to apply for Belarusian citizenship, as were children born to at least one stateless parent. The Government was continuing to work towards accession to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and was taking concrete steps to improve domestic legislation on citizenship to that end.

84. The delegation did not have any information on alleged unlawful treatment of stateless persons. Perpetrators of unlawful acts against stateless persons were prosecuted and punished in accordance with domestic law and were held accountable for their actions. The legal protections applying to non-citizens in Belarus were sufficiently robust.

85. **A representative of Belarus** said that there were currently 19 female deputy ministers in the Government.

86. Most stateless persons in Belarus were people from countries that had belonged to the former Soviet Union. There were very few stateless persons in the country and fewer than 10 stateless children. Stateless persons might be refused citizenship if they could not prove that they had a legal source of income or if they had a history of administrative offences. Most stateless persons in Belarus were in work and therefore had a legal source of income, and the Government worked with international organizations and local authorities to address the small number of cases where that income was insufficient for the purpose of attaining citizenship.

87. **Ms. Mikko** said that she would like to know whether the State party had developed a strategy or action plan to increase the number of women in leadership positions within government ministries, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

88. **A representative of Belarus** said that she was not aware of any such plans. The key factor in recruitment to high-ranking positions was the suitability of the candidates. Women played an important role in decision-making, including regarding foreign policy, demonstrating their professionalism and hard work in the process. Women were able to develop their leadership skills by participating in initiatives such as the Youth Parliament and a youth ambassador programme to promote the Sustainable Development Goals.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*