



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
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**Responses to the list of issues and questions for
consideration of the initial report of Mauritania***

* Issued without formal editing.



List of abbreviations

BDFG:	Gorgol Women's Development Bank
CDHLCPI:	Commission on Human rights, Poverty Reduction and Integration
CENI:	Independent National Electoral Commission
CFPE:	Centre for Training Trainers in Preschool Education
EDS:	Demographic and Health Survey
EDSM:	Demographic and Health Survey in Mauritania
EPCV:	Permanent Household Survey
GFEC:	Women's Savings and Loan Groups
HAPA:	High Authority for the Press and Audiovisual Communication
MAED:	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development
ONDH:	National Human Rights Monitoring Centre
ONS:	National Statistical Office
PNDSE:	National Programme for the Development of the Educational System
PPS:	Sectoral Project, Programme
SFPR:	Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction
SNPF:	National Strategy for the Advancement of Women
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM:	United Nations Development Fund for Women

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania presents its compliments to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and informs it that it is fully prepared to launch a constructive dialogue with all Committee members with a view to ensuring the effective implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and full enjoyment thereof by Mauritanian women. Furthermore, the Mauritanian Government, having considered all the questions posed in respect of its initial report, is pleased to provide the responses below in the order of the questions submitted by the pre-session working group.

Please indicate any progress concerning withdrawal of the reservation of Mauritania to the Convention, within a given time frame.

In future, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania will specify the provisions to which it has reservations. This would entail providing a more specific and detailed reservation on a few provisions of the Convention to replace its general reservation.

The report indicates that “discrimination against women as defined in the Convention is taken into account in Mauritanian law (para. 83, p. 18), but it is not clear whether a definition of discrimination against women in accordance with the Convention is included in the domestic legislation. The report also indicates that “the provisions of the Convention may be invoked before national courts, and applied by them” (paras. 81 and 82, p. 17). Please clarify if a definition of discrimination in accordance with article 1 of the Convention exists in national legislation. Also indicate whether, and to what extent, the Convention has been used directly in Court cases.

Notwithstanding the absence in national legislation of a clear definition of discrimination against women in accordance with the Convention, a number of laws give women a legal status consistent with the requirements of the Convention. In the political sphere, Mauritanian women have the right to vote and are eligible to run for the President of the Republic (Order No. 091-027 of 7 October 1991, amended in 2006), the National Assembly (Order No. 2006-033), the Senate (Order No. 2006-028) and the municipal councils (Order No. 2006-026).

Since the beginning of the transition process in 2005, and following the National Dialogue Days, major reforms have been carried out, which, at the political level, have resulted in an overhaul of the electoral system to increase women’s political representation through the introduction of a 20 per cent quota in drawing up lists of candidates for municipal and legislative elections, a requirement under the law and the regulations governing political parties to ensure that women are eligible for election, and financial incentives for political parties that manage to land the greatest number of women in local and parliamentary institutions as a result of the 2006 and 2007 elections.

With regard to civil rights, Mauritanian women benefit from many non-discriminatory measures in the Personal Status Code (marriage, inheritance, capacity).

Lastly, concerning economic and social rights, a number of laws guarantee women non-discriminatory treatment (the Constitution, the Labour Code, the social security system, collective agreements and the general statute of the civil service).

Under article 80 of the Constitution, which establishes the monist system, the provisions of the Convention may be invoked before courts and have precedence over national law.

The provisions of the Convention may be invoked in hearings before national courts but also at the regional level (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights) and the international level (confidential procedures of the Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights).

Please provide further information about the level of authority and human and financial resources of the State Secretariat for the Status of Women, including in relation to its capacity to support implementation of the Convention.

1. Scope of activity of the State Secretariat for the Status of Women

Pursuant to Decree No 005-2005 of 23 January 2005, establishing the powers of the State Secretariat for the Status of Women and the organization of its department of central administration, the State Secretariat has a mandate to ensure the advancement of women and their full participation in decision-making and economic and social development, and also to help safeguard the family and children's rights and well-being, in accordance with Mauritania's Islamic values and in keeping with the realities of its culture and civilization and the demands of modern life. Accordingly, the State Secretariat for Women is responsible for:

- elaborating, implementing and monitoring the execution of policies relating to gender, the advancement of women, the family, the child and early childhood;
- coordinating and monitoring the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all development activities;
- helping to devise and monitor the implementation of national policies, strategies, programmes, as well as development projects likely to have an impact on women, the family and the child;
- promoting the rights of women, the family and the child;
- raising public awareness of the rights of women and of the child by publicizing the various international legal instruments ratified by Mauritania and the laws and regulations in force;
- leading and coordinating the women's movement by encouraging women to organize their own groups and to develop women's, national, Arab, African and international associations;
- proposing and leading coordination and consensus-building events concerned with women, the family and the child;
- proposing bills and draft regulations relating to women, the family and the child, and ensuring that they are disseminated and put into effect; and
- monitoring the implementation of all treaties ratified by Mauritania relating to the rights of women, the family and the child.

2. Human and financial resources available for the implementation of the Convention

2.1 Human resources

The following table shows the number of civil servants employed by the State Secretariat for the Status of Women, by category:

<i>Senior managers</i>	<i>Managers</i>	<i>Staff</i>
65	156	157

Source: Personnel Service of the State Secretariat for the Status of Women.

The State Secretariat for the Status of Women is a government structure. It includes the cabinet of the State Secretariat, an information, education and communication (IEC) unit and four directorates: the Directorate of Action for Women, the Directorate of the Family and Social Action, the Directorate of the Child and the Directorate of Cooperation and Project Planning.

The regional coordination offices come under the direct authority of the Wali in each region and under the central administration of the State Secretariat. The regional coordination offices are composed of four persons: a director, the head of the advancement for women unit, the head of the family and children's unit and the head of the cooperation and project planning unit. The staff varies from region to region. Human resources are insufficient in both number and quality.

Additionally, consensus-building and coordination structures have been set up to support the State Secretariat in implementing its policy: (i) the Early Childhood Monitoring Commission; (ii) a committee responsible for family policy; (iii) a committee to combat harmful traditional practices; (iv) a gender monitoring group.

2.1. Financial resources

The State Secretariat budget is UM 707, 506, 600 for 2007. Its last regular increase of 112 million UM was allocated in 2000. It is funded by the national budget and by external financing. The main partners are the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the African Development Bank (ADB), the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Spanish cooperation and the World Bank. The budget for the regional coordination offices, drawn mainly from the national budget, is very low; for 2007, it is UM 20 million.

Please provide more information on the 2005-2008 National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (para. 99, pp. 19-20). In particular, indicate the steps that have been taken to implement it; and how implementation is being monitored and evaluated.

1. Measures taken to implement the strategy

Proposed activities for the new National Strategy for the Advancement of Women are based on two complementary requirements. First, there is a need to consolidate the achievements of the National Strategy for the Advancement of

Women 1995-2000 and to give even greater consideration to the gender dimension as well as monitoring and evaluation. This would help to keep decision makers periodically informed of the trends in the situation of women and their living conditions.

Second, efforts must be made, on the basis of an analysis of the situation of women, major trends and incipient changes, to ensure that initiatives take account of fresh concerns. A broader approach will better highlight priorities for the new Strategy 2005-2008 and ensure greater coherence and complementarity with the Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction (FPR), which should ensure more satisfactory achievement of goals.

The plan of action is based on the six priorities, goals, activities and indicators identified. None of the priority actions in itself and none of the goals taken in isolation would be capable of improving the situation of Mauritanian women. The desired improvement, which is possible and necessary, will require coherence and coordination among all the actions taken by all the national institutions involved.

The plan of action shows this coherence and will facilitate consensus-building among all the national partners involved in implementing what will henceforth be a cross-cutting and multi-sectoral National Strategy for the Advancement of Women. This new approach should make it possible to monitor the major achievements with regard to the advancement of women and reduce duplication, a source of multiple dysfunctions in the planning and management of projects and programmes.

1. The system for monitoring and evaluating the strategy

The proposed monitoring and evaluation system has three main components: monitoring of the execution of the main projects/programmes/strategies (PPS) for the advancement of women; monitoring and analysis of trends in the main indicators of outcome and impact in the various areas of the advancement of women; and evaluation of the impact of the projects, programmes and strategies on the situation of women and children and to remedy inequalities between men and women.

The proposed system would (i) provide the State Secretariat with indicators on the monitoring and evaluation of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women that would establish a linkage with the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction; (ii) assess the ongoing relevance of the State Secretariat's priorities and development goals; (iii) undertake remedial operational action to improve the execution of the Strategy and the quality of the results; (iv) conduct an evaluation and periodic follow-up of the relevance, effectiveness, yield and impact of the projects, programmes and strategies; and (v) report on how the data in the new monitoring-evaluation system should be collected, making every effort to ensure close linkages between the National Statistical Office and the national statistical information system.

With a view to gauging trends in the indicators used, targets comparable to those in the main strategies (SFPR, PNDSE, Millennium Development Goals) were defined in order to enable the system to provide the State Secretariat, in particular, and all development actors in general, a tool that would (i) obtain ongoing information on the situation of women in all areas and in relation to all situations; (ii) detect early on any significant departure in the implementation of the programmes, projects and strategies (SNPF, SFPR, PNDSE) with regard to activities

and goals related to the advancement of women and children; (iii) monitor the validity of the initial premises of projects, programmes and strategies, in particular the Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction; (iv) foresee any imminent difficulties (“early warning” function); (v) detect as soon as possible the impact and action of and trends on results and impact indicators; and (vi) assess the impact of the various projects, programmes and strategies on the situation and living conditions of women and children.

As a baseline for all the indicators and to ensure that they are regularly updated, the strategy adopted by the monitoring-evaluation system involves fully exploiting the available sources of information, concluding protocols of understanding with the main data generators and collecting missing data through targeted surveys and the establishment of a data-collection system in the State Secretariat that relies on the various directorates and regional offices.

Three anticipated benefits of the system are: publications (reports, operating charts, expert studies ...), working tools (data-collection materials: cards, questionnaires ..., materials for obtaining, processing, filing and disseminating data ...) and colloquiums, seminars and workshops for training, awareness-raising and exchanges of views.

As for the institutional framework, the monitoring and evaluation system will be housed in the Studies and Statistics Service of the Directorate of Cooperation and Project Planning. However, it will have to act as a network among all the State Secretariat directorates and the main actors involved in each area of activity.

A four-year plan of action has been proposed for this system. This plan of action falls within the framework of the overall development goal of the Strategy for the Advancement of Women, namely, to promote and improve the sustainable living conditions of Mauritanian women. The plan of action has two specific goals. One is to ensure regular monitoring and evaluation of the status of women, the family and the child and to contribute to the planning, elaboration and implementation of development policies, strategies, programmes and projects likely to have an impact on women as mothers and economic agents.

With a view to ensuring the effectiveness, and above all, the continuity of the system, the proposed plan of action takes a gradual approach that involves (i) establishing national entities within the State Secretariat and among other actors capable of carrying out the real mission of monitoring and evaluation in all its aspects; and (ii) integrating information needs necessary for monitoring and evaluation into the regular work of the national statistical system.

The chief results expected at the end of these four years are (i) the establishment of system structures; (ii) the establishment of a well-functioning team of personnel for the system; and (iii) the generation of a considerable amount of information and regular monitoring and evaluation of the situation of women and children.

The successful establishment of the proposed monitoring and evaluation system will be contingent on (i) the mobilization of the necessary human and material resources; (ii) the regular availability of the necessary information to feed into the system indicators (SNS collection programme, additional research); (iii) the functioning of the coordination entities; (iv) the quality of the system’s products and

their integration in the State Secretariat's and partners' decision-making processes; and (v) the reorganization and revitalization of the State Secretariat.

Please describe whether, beside those in the health sector, the Government is taking any steps to adopt temporary special measures in line with Article 4, paragraph 1 of the Convention and with the Committee's general recommendation No. 25, to accelerate the de facto equality between men and women.

In 2006, the Government adopted Order No. 2006-029 of 22 August 2006 concerning the organic law on women's access to municipal and legislative office and established an electoral mechanism granting women 20 per cent representation in legislative and local bodies.

The report mentions that "certain practices and customs" are among the factors that explain "the persistence of social constraints among a large majority of women" (para. 102, p. 20). Please further elaborate on these practices and customs, and indicate any measures taken by the Government to eliminate them, and the impact of these measures.

I. Information on these practices and customs

One of the shortcomings identified in the 2002-2005 National Strategy for the Advancement of Women is the persistence of social constraints among a large majority of women (continued sociological constraints, ignorance of laws, financial dependence and lack of resources).

1. Continued sociological constraints

Mauritania is a traditional country with a rigid social structure. Although it is becoming less pronounced, a strict social hierarchy among the various ethnic groups continues to determine the place, status, activities and participation of men and women in society.

Women's needs have evolved and, while ethnic and tribal ties remain strong, women have not always benefited from traditional forms of mutual support and solidarity. However, the establishment of new safety nets, such as neighbourhood women's associations or cooperatives, has made possible greater interaction among the different social groups and classes.

Traditional societies are generally characterized by male dominance, although the degree of dominance varies depending on the ethnic group. This situation has changed significantly as a result of increased public awareness of women's role in society; however, men and women have different attitudes towards equality, based on how it affects their lives. Males generally do not value the complementarity between men and women and are more reluctant to change their behaviour. Women often do not possess the necessary self-esteem to enhance their image and bring about change.

Mauritanian society has undergone a radical social transformation over the past few decades. Major social change has come with environmental changes resulting from successive droughts that have caused the population to abandon traditional agricultural and pastoral activities in favour of a more sedentary way of life. Environmental disturbances have also led to a rapid increase in urbanization.

2. Ignorance of laws

A large portion of the female population remains ignorant of the law, owing to illiteracy and difficulty in gaining access to information.

3. Financial independence and lack of resources

According to the 2002 poverty profile prepared by the National Statistical Office, the proportion of the population living below the poverty line is 46 per cent, down from 56 per cent in 1996. Poverty is a rural phenomenon. That, according to national surveys, primarily affects the eastern regions and the Senegal River valley in particular. Women are especially vulnerable to poverty, owing to lack of education, economic opportunity, employment and assets. Although household incomes have increased overall, family incomes in female-headed households have fallen over the past few years. The incidence of poverty for all households dropped from 50 per cent in 1996 to 46.3 per cent in 2000; however, the incidence of poverty in female-headed households rose from 40.5 per cent in 1996 to 45.6 per cent in 2000. In rural female-headed households, it was even worse — the rates rose from 57.4 per cent to 64.1 per cent during the same period. While female heads of household enjoy more independence and control over their resources, they must support themselves and their family members on their own. As a result, these women and their households are more vulnerable. Households headed by women are smaller than those headed by men (4.4 members versus 5.7 members); however, they include a higher number of children 14 years of age and under (39 per cent versus 29 per cent) and fewer male adults over the age of 18 (28 per cent versus 93 per cent), which explains their vulnerability.

The situation of such women is all the more precarious because they have a lower level of education than male heads of household. Nearly half of female heads of household have no education at all (47 per cent versus 32 per cent for male heads of household) and only 5 per cent have a secondary education or higher (versus 20 per cent for male heads of household). (EDSM)

II. Measures taken by the Government to eliminate such practices and customs and the impact of those measures

The promotion and protection of women's rights in Mauritania improved radically during the 1990-2005 period, beginning with the establishment of the State Secretariat for the Status of Women (SECF) in 1992. In an effort to ensure the effective participation of women in social, economic and political activities and thereby contribute to equitable and sustainable development, SECF prepared a National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (SNPF) for the period 1995-2000. The national gender priorities identified in the Strategy include:

- the adoption of a family policy;
- the recognition of women's rights, with a view to eliminating existing inequalities;
- increased female participation in economic activities;
- greater access for women to education and health care;

- greater participation of women and women’s organizations in development organizations; and
- the strengthening of institutions involved in promoting gender equality.

SECF encountered a number of constraints in implementing the 1995-2000 National Strategy for the Advancement of Women including:

- poor comprehension of gender concepts and tools for achieving gender equality;
- insufficient human and material resources;
- the virtual absence of a system to monitor the implementation of the Strategy and assess the impact of interventions;
- the absence of an information and communication strategy;
- institutional weaknesses, particularly with respect to inter-ministerial cooperation;
- difficulties establishing an effective partnership with civil society and the private sector.

SECF has been conducting a gender study since 2003, with the support of technical and financial partners, which has enabled it to assess the changes in the situation of women in Mauritania. Many other studies have been conducted, including the 2003 National Strategy for the Advancement of Women prepared by OXFAM and the Mauritanian Centre for Policy Analysis, a 2004 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) study on gender indicators, a UNFPA national gender strategy elaborated in July 2005, the 2005 SECF action plan for the situation of women and a 2005 United Nations Development Programme analysis of the gender situation and national capacity-building in gender issues.

Overall trends in each development sector were determined using indicators from available sources such as comprehensive national surveys, data from various ministries and annual reports by United Nations agencies. These studies made it possible to assess progress and identify the major challenges and constraints that lie ahead, which, according to a study launched in 2005, will include:

- reducing poverty, which primarily affects women;
- increasing women’s economic participation by improving their access to key factors of production (land and capital), employment and economic and financial opportunities;
- eliminating disparities in access to education, training and information;
- increasing women’s access to maternal and child health-care services such as prenatal care, family planning and services to prevent sexually transmitted infections;
- strengthening the legal framework and the dissemination of laws that protect the rights of women;
- eliminating stereotypical images of women and improving women’s access to information and communication technologies;

- eliminating inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making and;
- enhancing women’s participation in political life and in decision-making.

Following extensive analysis and consultation, the Mauritanian authorities elaborated a new National Strategy for the Advancement of Women for the period 2005-2008. To further ensure gender equity, the authorities also drew up a national gender strategy for the period 2005-2010, with the support of technical and financial partners. This policy framework, which is expected to be approved by the relevant actors, constitutes a significant step forward in the fight against gender disparity.

Following the 1999 Act on the reform of the educational system (para. 170, p. 30), has a review of textbooks and school programmes been undertaken in order to eliminate gender-based stereotypes? If so, how has the idea of equality between women and men been incorporated in the new curriculum?

One of the objectives of the reform of the educational system is to reduce gender disparity. The principle of gender equality has been incorporated in school curricula and the material is couched in gender-neutral language. Curriculum content has been revised to incorporate the concept of gender equity and eliminate sexist and discriminatory statements. Innovative teaching methods have also been introduced, with a view to promoting gender equity.

Please provide detailed information on the forms and extent of violence against women in the family and in the community at large, including statistical data and information on legislative provisions, remedies, social support services and awareness-raising activities. Has the Government sought or considered seeking technical assistance from United Nations specialized entities in collecting statistical data?

I. Forms of violence against women

- sexual violence (rape, exploitation, trafficking, abuse, tourism, harassment etc.);
- female genital mutilation (excision);
- forced marriage;
- domestic violence;
- frequent divorce;
- force-feeding.

II. Legal remedies

If a domestic violence case is brought to trial and the violence is established, the plaintiff wins the case because the legislation in force prohibits such violence. Women may also appeal their cases to higher courts or on points of law. The Department of Social Affairs of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, the family services legal department at SECF and civil society organizations provide care for women victims of domestic violence and guide them through the different procedures.

III. Current statistical data

The current statistical data on violence against women is insufficient; however, a certain amount of data may be collected by entities that deal directly or indirectly with violence-related cases.

(a) Department of Family Services and Social Action at SECF

Some of the women who have sought the department's assistance in resolving family-related disputes have suffered different forms of violence, which has had an impact on their lives in the short and/or long term. The department registered 73 cases in 2006 and 7 cases in 2007 to date.

These forms of violence include:

1. Early marriage: Girls who marry early become mothers when they are still minors and must assume the responsibility of running a household and raising children. If they divorce, they become head of the household and abandon their studies. This situation has a negative impact on their health as well as that of their children;
2. Refusal of the husband to pay maintenance and child support: In such cases, wives risk hunger and malnutrition and may even resort to illegal activity in an effort to support their children;
3. Refusal of the husband to grant the wife a divorce or her marital rights, which causes psychological trauma;
4. Abduction of the children: This includes newborns and babies who are still being breastfed. Abduction may endanger both the physical health (breast engorgement, fever, diarrhoea) and the mental health of the mother and the children;
5. Domestic violence: This includes physical violence, different forms of verbal violence, such as insults, and infidelity. Physical violence can cause injuries, psychological trauma, post-traumatic stress and miscarriages, while verbal violence and suspected infidelity can lead to emotional disorders and distrust of men.

(b) Health institutions

Health institutions do not have an accurate system for recording data. However, the following statistics reflect the number of sexual violence cases referred to the hospital and health clinics in Nouakchott by the police department:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>
2000	65
2001	126
2003	32
2004	35
2005	70
2005	30
2006	66

(c) SECF

The number of domestic violence cases on record since the establishment of SECF and the family services legal department is as follows:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Cases on record</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number of domestic violence cases</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1999	57	4.3	5	8.8
2000	140	10.5	7	5
2001	126	9.4	5	4
2002	396	29.6	17	4.3
2003	293	21.9	32	10.9
2004	326	24.4	24	7.4
Total	1 338	100	90	6.7

IV. Request for technical assistance in collecting statistical data on violence

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is helping SECF combat violence against women within the framework of a project on gender and the protection of family, women's and children's rights. As part of this project, UNFPA financed a study on the situation of violence against women in Mauritanian society in 2005. The study included the collection of statistical data for Nouakchott but did not cover the rest of the country. UNFPA and SECF have prepared a national strategy against female genital mutilation; however, they are cooperating primarily with the aim of collecting data on violence in general.

The report describes measures undertaken to combat female genital mutilation and force-feeding (paras. 223-227, pp. 39-40), including public information and awareness-raising campaigns (para. 226, p. 40). It also refers to the draft Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure for minors (para. 227, p. 40). Please indicate how these measures contribute to the elimination of these practices. Has the Government sought or considered seeking technical and financial assistance from the World Health Organization (WHO)?

Legal measures have been taken to combat excision and force-feeding and the Code of Criminal Procedure for minors criminalizes excision, force-feeding and other practices that endanger children's health. To date, UNFPA is the only development partner involved in this field; however, the Government may consider seeking technical and financial assistance from WHO with a view to effectively combating these practices.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has raised concerns over the persistence of slavery in Mauritania. Please provide statistics, if available, on the number of women and girls in slavery-like situations, and indicate the existing efforts to enforce the 1981 law abolishing slavery in Mauritania, as well as awareness-raising activities to curb this practice, and describe the impact of these efforts to date.

With respect to the legacy of slavery and bonded labour mentioned in the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, it should be emphasized that the root causes of this phenomenon — in Mauritania — in no way differ from those in other African societies, including Sudano-Sahelian societies. In Mauritania, slavery has never taken the form of racial domination and has never been practised in the manner or on the scale of slavery associated with the slave trade. It persisted as a practice until the turn of the century and was abolished in 1905 by a colonial Power; the abolition was reaffirmed following independence by the Constitution of 20 May 1961. Order No. 081-234 of 9 November 1981 on the abolition of slavery was in fact a part of the amendment of fundamental legal texts following the proclamation of sharia law in 1980. This amendment is essentially aimed at demonstrating the support of the lawyer-jurists of Muslim law for the texts adopted in accordance with positive law, including the law on the abolition of slavery.

Following the adoption of this Order, the Government invited the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to send a mission to investigate the situation. This mission had concluded that slavery as an institution no longer existed in Mauritania and that the only remaining remnants of it were at the level of mentalities because of the low level of social and economic development and poverty affecting broad segments of the population.

Convinced of the need to address the underlying causes of these mentalities, the Government has embarked on a comprehensive policy to redress social inequalities and to improve the living standards of the most disadvantaged segments of society. This policy encompasses all areas, particularly those which have a direct impact on the lives of these people (education, health, justice, land management, animal husbandry, handicrafts, traditional fishing and others). The emergence of the rule of law guaranteeing equality between all citizens without distinction of any kind has brought this process to completion while intensifying the economic, social and cultural reforms already under way.

Desiring to strengthen the rule of law and to adapt national legislation to new forms of exploitation of man by man, the Government adopted in June 2003 an act on the suppression of the trafficking in persons. In accordance with this act, the phrase “trafficking in persons” means the recruitment, transport or transfer of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of deception, of abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payment or benefits to obtain the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. This act provides for penalties against the perpetrators of these crimes, including life imprisonment and forced labour.

All the policies and programmes focused on meeting the basic needs of the population and establishing various instruments for the advancement of the disadvantaged have contributed to the eradication of this legacy and consequently to social progress. An inter-ministerial committee responsible for putting in place a national strategy to address the legacy of slavery has been working for several months to build on these achievements.

Moreover, there are no Mauritanian women or girls today who are living in slavery-like conditions.

Lastly, the use of this issue for political purposes, which contrast with the realities on the ground, should be investigated.

In the light of the concerns expressed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its last concluding comments (CRC/C/15/Add.159) about the high number of children engaged in labour, girls involved in domestic service often not paid or underpaid and involuntary servitude existing in some isolated areas. Please provide information on how the Government is addressing this problem. Please indicate if the Act No. 025-2003 of 17 July 2003 on the suppression of trafficking in persons has entered into force.

Urbanization has led to the creation of a new form of domestic labour involving rural girls or poor families who work as domestic servants. Seventy per cent of them are between 12 and 14 years of age. Undernourished, poorly paid or unpaid (a quarter are unpaid), they are subjected to physical, verbal and sexual abuse at work; their employment is tantamount to genuine modern-day exploitation. Ninety per cent of them have no education at all, 56 per cent are Harratine, 28 per cent Peul, 10 per cent of Wolof descent and 5 per cent Soninke. Today, the issue of domestic labour has been addressed at the official level and several programmes have been launched (including training, literacy and the promotion of awareness among employers and employees) since the end of the 1990s by the authorities and NGOs. Act No. 025-2003 of 17 July 2003 on the suppression of trafficking in persons has entered into force, but it has never been invoked in the courts for cases involving abuse relating to the exploitation of girls for the purpose of domestic labour. It is also worth noting the efforts at codification and raising awareness signalled by the amendment of the Labour Code, which prohibits forced labour (article 5), and the organization of awareness-raising seminars conducted by women's rights NGOs with the support of the United States Embassy and the Commission on Human Rights on the work of girl domestic servants.

According to information provided in the report, women are underrepresented in decision-making positions in public and political life and in international activities. Please provide information on the participation of women, compared to men, at all levels and in all branches of the administration, the Parliament and the judiciary.

<i>Description</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Observations</i>
Women in the executive branch (high-level State office)	Ministers, Secretaries of State	20%	80%	2004-2005	Ministerial level
Women and public office (high-level administrative posts)	Secretaries General, heads of mission, councillors, directors	6.6%	93%	2000	
Women in the legislative branch (Deputies/Senators)	Women deputies (17 women/95 men)	17.9%	82%	2006	Versus 2% until 2005
Women in the municipal branch (Councillors)	Councillors/Mayors (1,120 women/3,688 men)	30.37%	69.73%	2006	Previous elections of November 2006
Women in the judiciary/law enforcement agencies	– Four women in the Bar – Four Judicial Police officers			2004-2005	Judicial Police

<i>Description</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Observations</i>
Women in other constitutional bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Two women in the Independent National Electoral Commission* – Two in the National Human Rights Monitoring Centre** – One in the National Commission for Transparency*** – One in the High Authority for the Press and Audiovisual Communication**** 			2004-2006	<p>*Commission électorale nationale indépendante</p> <p>** Observatoire national des droits de l’Homme</p> <p>*** Commission nationale pour la transparence</p> <p>**** Haute autorité de la presse et de l’audiovisuel</p>
Women in the independent media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One Editor-in-chief* – One in the High Authority for the Press and Audiovisual Communication 			2000-2006	* The daily Le Calame
Women in the private sector	Three women chief executive officers (National Confederation of executives and employers of Mauritania*)	10%**		2000-2006	<p>* Confédération nationale des patrons et employeurs de Mauritanie;</p> <p>** Of the business executives of the country</p>
Women in the informal sector				2005-2006	
Women in labour unions		30%*		2005-2006	* Of the Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Workers of Mauritania, for example. (Confédération générale des travailleurs de Mauritanie)
Women in the non-profit sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – One woman chairperson of the cyberforum – Three or four women representing civil society in various other bodies* 	More than 11.3% of NGOs are headed by women.	84%	2004-2005	* National Office for the Monitoring of Elections/National Commission for Transparency
Women in various branches of the Army and Police	More than 20 women officers/non-commissioned officers			2000-2006	Some in command posts, especially in the Police

Source: Good governance programme, German Agency for Technical Cooperation, Component No. 4 “Promotion of Women/Gender”.

Please indicate the concrete measures that are envisaged to achieve women's full and equal participation and representation at all levels of Government, including temporary special measures in line with Article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention.

The Transitional Government, which had clearly indicated during the national consultation (of October 2005) its desire to build on the achievements in the area of the law and the participation of women, adopted in July 2006 a draft order on the organic law regarding the promotion of the integration of women in decision-making. This law imposes a minimum quota of 20 per cent for women's representation in each municipal and legislative list. But this legal constraint is not sufficient on its own; there was a need for follow-up to promote the increase of women's political representation in legislative and municipal institutions. Consequently, a programme was carried out in conjunction with the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the United Nations Development Fund for Women involving various awareness-raising activities, advocacy, communication and training for the implementation of the act on the quota of 20 per cent. The programme has resulted in the number of women within parliamentary assemblies and municipal councils reaching or surpassing the 20 per cent quota imposed by electoral law (18 women for the National Assembly and 9 for the Senate). Thus, 17 women were elected to the National Assembly, 10 women to the Senate and 1,120 to the municipal councils.

The report states that the Mauritanian Nationality Code and its modifying texts "guarantee the same condition of acquisition, retention and termination of Mauritanian nationality to all citizens, without distinction, including distinctions based on gender" (para. 152). However, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has raised concern that the Nationality Code "lays down rules on access to nationality that differ depending on whether the children are born to a Mauritanian father or a Mauritanian mother, or whether they are born to a foreign father or a mother born in Mauritania" (CERD/C/65/CO/5, 10 December 2004). Please clarify the rights of women and men to pass their nationality to their children by further elaborating on the provisions of the Nationality Code.

The respective rights of men and women to pass on their nationality are set forth in Act No. 61-112 of 12 June 1961 on the Mauritanian Nationality Code.

Article 8

The following persons shall be considered Mauritanian:

1. Any child born to a Mauritanian father;
2. Any child born to a Mauritanian mother and a father without nationality, or of unknown nationality;
3. Any child born in Mauritania to a Mauritanian mother and a father of foreign nationality, without the possibility of renouncing his or her nationality in the year preceding adulthood.

Article 9 (as amended by Act No. 73-10 of 23 January 1973)

The following persons shall be considered Mauritanian:

1. Any child born in Mauritania to a father of foreign nationality who was born there himself;
2. Any child born in Mauritania to a mother of foreign nationality who was born there herself, without the possibility of renouncing his or her nationality in the year preceding adulthood.

The provisions of this article do not apply to children born in Mauritania to diplomatic or consular officials of foreign nationality.

Article 10

Any newborn child found in Mauritania whose parents are unknown shall be considered Mauritanian.

The person ceases to be considered Mauritanian, however, if the person's filiation with a foreign national is established during adulthood and if he or she possesses, in accordance with the national law of this foreign national, the nationality of the foreign national.

Article 13

The following persons may opt for Mauritanian nationality in the year preceding adulthood:

- Any child born abroad to a Mauritanian mother and a father of foreign nationality;
- Any child born in Mauritania to parents of foreign nationality if he or she has resided in Mauritania for no less than five years;
- Any child adopted by a person of Mauritanian nationality if he or she has resided in Mauritania for no less than five years.

Article 15

Any minor whose parents acquire Mauritanian nationality shall become fully Mauritanian on the same basis as the parents. This provision does not apply to a married minor or a child who is serving or has served in the armed forces of his country of origin.

Article 16 (as amended by Act No. 73.186 of 30 July 1973)

A foreign woman who marries a Mauritanian may, at her express request and after a period of five years as from the date of the marriage, acquire Mauritanian nationality.

The report states that “women enjoy almost all the rights provided for in the various laws (law on collective bargaining, Labour Code, Social Security Code) in the context of their jobs” (para. 259, p. 47). Please specify which rights women do not enjoy, and indicate how the Government intends to modify legislation, policy and practices to ensure women’s full enjoyment of their employment rights.

Mauritanian law makes no distinction between men's and women's employment rights. On the same basis as men, women have the right to work and to receive social security in accordance with the regulations in force, which are not sexist. The State encourages women to work. The State has ratified all the ILO conventions encouraging gender equality and has amended its labour law to bring it more fully into compliance with such international norms.

Table 4 (p. 37) shows that the percentage of women earning wages remains extremely low compared to men. Kindly provide data on women's and men's wages by occupation in the public and private sectors.

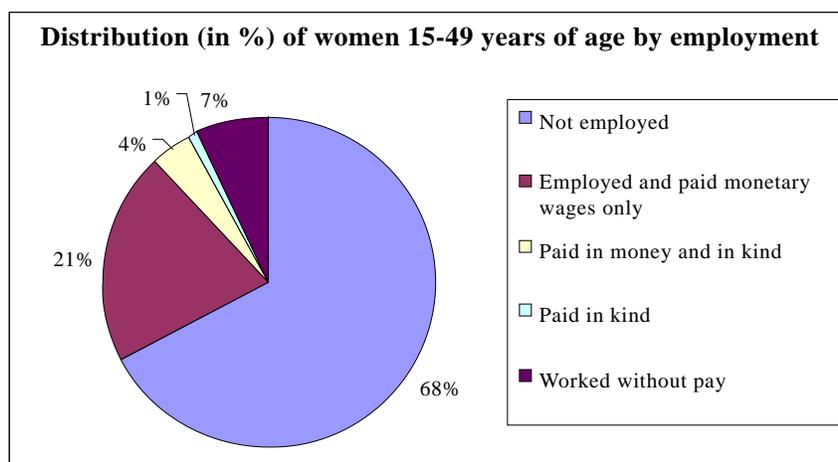
Table: Change in the overall employment rate by gender

	1988	2000
Men	68.9%	63.9%
Women	25.3%	27.7%

Source: RGHP 1988, 2000.

Taking into account methodological and conceptual shortcomings, over two thirds of Mauritanian women (60 per cent) said that they were not employed at the time of the EDS 2001 survey. Among the 32 per cent of women who were employed, 21 per cent were paid monetary wages, 4 per cent in money and in kind, 1 per cent in kind, and 7 per cent worked without being paid.

Graph 4: Payment for women's work



Source: EDS 2001

Disparities appear according to age, with women 30 to 39 years of age most frequently working for wages. Women's employment also varies as a function of marital status: women in broken relationships are employed more often than married women. Educational level does not reveal any major disparities but it can be noted that women with a secondary education more frequently work for wages than those with less education (25 per cent compared to 19 per cent); the area where they live

also has an influence: in rural areas and among poor households, women perform the most work without compensation.

The situation of women in the labour market is distinguished by the fact that some sectors or professions are less open to women (armed forces, police, engineering) than to men. Thus, women have less access to salaried jobs, which employed 12.4 per cent of women and 27.3 percent of men in 2000.

With comparable human capital (education and experience), women's salary levels remain 60 per cent lower on average than men's (MAED, 2000).

There are few women in the civil service (14.6 per cent). They hold mainly administrative (25.2 per cent) and secretarial posts (83.7 per cent). The percentage of women in managerial or decision-making posts remains limited (5.9 per cent of managers in administration). The two service sectors which are most attractive to women are education and health care, respectively, while the positions they hold are not decision-making posts.

Please provide information on the situation of women in the informal economy.

The informal sector has expanded rapidly under the influence of urbanization. Most employed Mauritanian women find work in this sector, characterized by low productivity, which can be explained by low skills and potential due to a lack of training and the low functional literacy rates. In the informal sector, women are involved in trade and handicrafts; less so in services. Women run 35.8 per cent of informal enterprises. Most women's status is that of independent (84.3 per cent). The majority of activities in the informal sector are carried out using credits granted by solidarity groups or through agencies that offer low-interest credit.

In addition to the information provided on pp. 38-46 of the report, please describe the measures put in place by the Government to improve prenatal monitoring, assisted childbirth, post-natal monitoring and birth spacing, including detailed information on the maternal and child health policy (para. 110, p. 22).

The rate of access to prenatal care is relatively high at 80.5 per cent, although rural women have more limited access (72.2 per cent) than women in towns (92.3 per cent). The rate of assisted childbirth is 59.2 per cent, which remains low.

Post-natal care is almost non-existent. Births are almost never followed by a post-natal check-up to monitor the mother and child (there is no post-natal check-up after 91 per cent of births in rural areas, 94 per cent of births in the north and 96 per cent of births in the south).

Two factors determine maternal and child health: the area where the women live and their level of education. The influence of the area is mainly due to the lack of access to health-care facilities (86 per cent coverage in urban areas and 35.9 per cent in rural areas) and the poor quality of care offered. The influence of women's educational level represents an encouraging and promising factor. The rate of nutritional deficiency among children ranges from 38 per cent for children whose mothers have no education to 21 per cent for those with mothers with secondary or higher education.

Please provide more detailed information about women's access to affordable reproductive and sexual health services and educational programmes, including their substantive content and their availability to particular groups, such as adolescents, rural and nomadic women.

Taking into account the social and economic change the country has experienced, the age of marriage and age of first childbirth are rising and the interval between pregnancies is becoming longer. These changes have allowed significant improvements in the health of young children and mothers. However, the rate of contraceptive use remains very low (5 per cent of women in 2001) although it is rising (2.7 per cent in 1992), due to lack of access to birth control products, particularly in rural areas (13 per cent in Nouakchott, compared with 0.6 per cent in rural areas).

Table: Reproductive health indicators

	<i>Nouakchott</i>	<i>Urban areas</i>	<i>Rural areas</i>	<i>National</i>
Prenatal care	83.8%	85%	49.8%	64.6%
Delivery with trained attendant	92%	81.9%	33.3%	56.9%
Use of contraceptives	13.1%	9.6%	0.6%	5.1%

Source: EDSM 2001.

The Mauritanian health-care system remains lacking with: (i) poor quality of services, (ii) lack of qualified human resources, (iii) lack of equipment and medicines in health centres, (iv) low rate of coverage in isolated rural areas and areas where the population is widely dispersed, (v) a concentration of health-care services in the major urban centres with uneven distribution among the wilayas.

Women explain the under-utilization of health care services by various obstacles: lack of health facilities or their distance away (25 per cent), lack of equipment or its poor condition (11 per cent), lack of medicines (6 per cent), cost of health care (15 per cent), cost of medicines (25 per cent), poor reception by staff (22 per cent) (EDSM 2000).

To remedy these problems, the Government has established the National Reproductive Health Programme (PNSR) for the period 2003-2007 with a strategic focus on:

1. Improving geographical accessibility (construction/rehabilitation, equipment, personnel and maintenance);
2. Training of personnel (initial and ongoing);
3. Improving cultural accessibility (advocacy, social mobilization, etc.);
4. Increased financial accessibility (set fees, mutual insurance and other forms of care);
5. Quality of care;
6. Promotion of operational research;
7. Strengthening of coordination/partnership;

8. Support to the capacity of the Programme and the wilayas in planning, monitoring and evaluation.

A set fee for obstetrical care was instituted starting in 2002 on an experimental basis in two mughatas of Nouakchott where the costs for care from pregnancy through delivery varied between 16,000 ouguiyas on average in hospitals and 87,000 ouguiyas in private clinics. The cost of pregnancy care with Caesarean delivery is 50,000 ouguiyas in national hospitals and 287,000 ouguiyas in private health facilities.

In 2004, this system was extended to three regional capitals (Kiffa, Aioun and Nema) and it will be expanded in 2007 to all wilayas.

It should also be noted that contraceptive products are distributed free of charge in family planning centres.

Please provide statistical information on teenage pregnancies, maternal mortality rates and women living with HIV/AIDS.

In Mauritania, population growth is declining, with a rate of 2.4 per cent, related to a decline in the fertility index and the increased average age of first marriage. These changes are due to the improvements in women's educational level, modifications in lifestyle and habits. The fertility rate or number of children per woman is 4.7 children, according to the RGPH and EDSM, with differences between rural and urban areas (5.1 and 4.1 respectively) and educational levels — 3.4 for women with a secondary education and 5.2 for those with no education. The primary or total sterility rate is approximately 3 per cent (EDSM 2000 and ENMF 1981).

The median age at first birth is around 20 years (20.7 years EDSM, 21.1 years EPIM 2003). This situation can create premature dependency in women, handicap their education and hinder their participation in the workforce.

The maternal mortality rate is 747 deaths per 100,000 live births and is among the highest in the subregion. Although it is dropping, it remains very high, 30 per cent higher than in Mali or Senegal and 34 times higher than in industrialized countries.

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS still remains rather low on the national level. It is however, higher among the female population (0.59 per cent among girls 15-24 compared to 0.37 per cent among boys in the same age group). As a result of the roles and rights assigned to each gender, women find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to control of their sexuality and the possibility of protecting themselves from certain sexually transmitted diseases. Embarrassment, tension between partners over the use of condoms and women's economic dependence make it difficult for them to demand safe sex.

Women's limited access to information and knowledge results in a lower level of awareness of HIV/AIDS, its means of transmission and prevention methods. Twenty-four per cent of women have never heard of the virus, compared with 14 per cent of men. Forty-six per cent of men say they are aware of mother-to-child transmission compared to 33 per cent of women. In order to strengthen the fight against the pandemic, in 2002 the Mauritanian Government established an inter-ministerial committee to combat HIV/AIDS and a new strategic framework

2003-2007 was drafted which emphasizes prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

The report mentions that women face obstacles accessing credit because of “the unsuitable nature of the financial tools developed by formal institutions, especially in rural areas, which are increasingly prey to a kind of legalized usury by which traditional lenders grant loans at high interest rates” (para. 272, p. 49). Please indicate what measures are in place to increase women’s access to formal credit.

One of the obstacles to women’s access to credit is the often inappropriate nature of the established tools as well as the lack of information for women on the possibilities for credit and the procedures applied. It is true that women benefit slightly more often than men from formal microcredit (52 per cent); nonetheless, it is through informal structures that they obtain the majority of their credit (around 70 per cent, and up to 90 per cent in rural areas).

At the institutional level and with the goal of promoting women’s economic status, the State Secretariat for the Status of Women has begun two interesting experiments: one, women’s savings and loan groups (GFEC/BDFG), developed since 1996. The second is a local approach (Nissa Banks) aimed at facilitating access for organized women’s groups to financial resources allowed them to develop income-generating activities. But the geographic coverage of this system remains limited: it covers 13 mughatas in 5 wilayas and 4 mughatas in Nouakchott. However, these women’s funds have been able to distribute 2,419 loans for a total volume of 223,960,650 UM. For its part, the CDHLCPI has also financed income-generating activities since 1998, giving priority to women, since of the 40,000 recipients, 36,000 are women.

The report refers to Mauritania’s Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction, in response to the Millennium Development Goals (paras. 20-22, p. 8). Please indicate which measures are put in place by the SFPR to address women’s poverty. Also kindly provide information on how the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been used in the preparation of the SFPR and how the Framework’s implementation will enhance implementation of the Convention.

The Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction, revised in 2003 and executed over the period 2004-2008, takes into account a gender dimension.

A specific thematic group “advancement of women and gender equality” was established with the goal of integrating a specific poverty reduction strategy for the most disadvantaged women.

This new Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction provides various measures aimed at eradicating poverty among women both in urban and rural areas as a strategy in itself.

This strategy rests on a vision for 2015 of a Mauritanian woman liberated from unjustified social and economic constraints and able to contribute effectively to the country’s development. Five areas will be stressed: (i) strengthening of women’s participation in the economy; (ii) improved access for women to basic social services; (iii) women’s rights to political and social participation; (iv) development of strategies for behaviour change; (v) and institutional strengthening of SECF.

In order to strengthen **women's participation in the economy**, five objectives have been defined: improve women's access to the means of production; combat women's unemployment and under-employment; strengthen women's productivity; improve market access and develop women's entrepreneurship.

1. To improve **women's access to basic social services**, four objectives have been defined: eradicate illiteracy among women; provide basic education for girls; improve women's health and improve the standard of living of women and their households.

2. In the area of **women's rights and social participation**, two objectives have been defined. They are aimed at strengthening women's rights (effective implementation of the Personal Status Code, drafting and adoption of laws to combat harmful practices, expansion of the legal and judicial services offered to women from disadvantaged groups, etc.) and to encourage participation of women in decision-making (increased representation of women in elected office, greater presence of women in the civil service and promotion of their access to decision-making posts, etc.).

3. With regard to **development of strategies for behaviour change**, achieving the strategy objectives is dependent on the implementation of an effective large-scale IEC programme. In this area the objective is to develop and implement a behaviour change strategy through access to knowledge and the development of appropriate behaviours for women, emergence of an environment favourable to women's development and design of a communications policy for advancement of women and gender.

4. With regard to institutional strengthening, SECF should be provided with the means for coordination and implementation and also to see that national policies and strategies take the gender dimension into account. A monitoring mechanism adapted to and linked with the national statistical information system must be established within SECF to assist with the execution of the medium-term plan. Three complementary objectives towards attaining this goal have been established. The first objective is to build capacity in SECF through (i) reinforcement of its structures and mission, and (ii) increased decentralization of SECF. The second objective is to define a system of implementation and coordination of SNPF through (i) establishment of an inter-ministerial coordination body of SNPF, (ii) strengthening existing structures for integration of gender and development of guidelines, and (iii) establishment of a monitoring/evaluation system for SNPF.

Please provide recent statistical data and information on rural women's access to health-care, social security programmes, decent living conditions, drinking water, electricity, transportation and communications.

Access to transportation: Transportation infrastructure remains poorly developed, which makes access to basic services and economic resources (credit, trade) difficult, particularly because of great distances, sparsely settled areas and low density. Sixty-four per cent of women live in such communities. Forty-eight per cent reside more than 30 kilometres from an urban centre, and 66 per cent reside more than 15 kilometres away. Women suffer particularly due to the isolation of production zones and the high cost of transportation and basic goods. During the winter months, access to food is more difficult for certain isolated areas.

Access to clean drinking water: Access to clean drinking water has been improving, according to the 2004 Demographic and Health Survey (EDS). In 2004, it reached 53.5 per cent, as compared to 50.4 per cent in 2000. But access to water remains below real needs. Nearly 9 per cent of households receive their water supply from a variety of sources (rainwater, rivers, lakes). In many areas, there are also problems with water quality (heavy salinisation, pollution).

Significant disparities remain between rural and urban areas and between different regions, owing to hydrogeological factors and the socio-economic level. The 2000 Permanent Household Survey (EPCV) shows a correlation between extreme poverty and poor access to drinking water. Among the very poor, 55 per cent lack access to drinking water, and among those who are not poor, that figure stands at 35 per cent. The poorest population groups and women in particular are the most vulnerable to shortages of water resources and more frequently use polluted water. For all these reasons, these two topics have remained priorities in the new Strategic Anti-Poverty Framework (2006-2010).

The situation of rural women gives cause for concern. Rural women are disadvantaged in access to education, training and health services due to the remoteness of facilities, their non-availability or the low quality of the services offered. They face a heavier burden of domestic tasks (provision of water and fuel) which interferes with their production activities and their participation. They are slower to acquire ownership and control of factors of production, access to services (land, credit, inputs, mechanization, training) and access to markets. This explains the low productivity and low profitability of their activities. By establishing and organizing cooperatives, women have a collective experience that is genuinely dynamic. But the scope of this movement remains limited due to lack of management capacity stemming from low literacy rates, low capital mobilization capacity, lack of technical qualifications and severe constraints on the marketing/processing of products (Source: Sectoral Study on Gender and Poverty). We do not have disaggregated data for the other areas.

The report highlights the continuing high illiteracy rates among women and girls, especially in rural areas (p. 32). Please provide further information on measures being undertaken to improve female literacy rates in rural areas, including detailed information about the results achieved in the 2004-2006 literacy campaign being implemented in Mauritania (para. 179).

Between 1988 and 2000, the overall literacy rate among the population over 10 years of age improved significantly, going from 39 per cent to 52.6 per cent. Women benefited from this improvement, with their literacy rate going from 30 per cent in 1988 to 45.3 per cent in 2000. The improvement in literacy has been almost identical for females and males, which explains why the gap between the two groups remains unchanged. Despite this progress, in 2000 women had barely achieved the literacy rate which men had in 1988. The overall positive development, furthermore, conceals significant regional disparities: the literacy rate for females is 68.4 per cent in Nouakchott, 69.5 per cent in Nouadhibou, 38.1 per cent in the region of Hodh Echargui, 28 per cent in the region of Guidimakha and 20 per cent in the region of Gorgol. These low literacy rates are due in part to limited access to education by females until relatively recently, and also to the primary school dropout rate, which is still fairly high, particularly among girls.

The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences notes that “on account of the legal principles upon which the law and legal procedure are based, and the manner in which law is implemented in the country, courts do not treat women as the equals of men in all cases. For example, the testimony of two women is necessary to equal that of one man. In addition, when awarding an indemnity to the family of a woman who has been killed, the courts grant only half the amount that they would award for a man’s death” (E/CN.4/2003/75/Add.1). Please indicate whether such discriminatory treatment finds its origins in the law itself, or whether it comes from the judicial application of the law. What measures have been taken, including training of judicial personnel, to ensure that courts treat women and men equally?

Mauritanian law is based on Islamic law and on modern law. It treats testimony by women and by men equally. Compensation granted by the courts is decided in accordance with the law and subject to satisfaction of the court beyond a reasonable doubt. No discriminatory rulings have been handed down in recent years. Furthermore, remedies are available to all defendants in general and to women in particular.

Please provide information on measures taken to bring the minimum legal age of marriage for girls into full conformity with article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and article 16, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Article 6 of the Personal Status Code specifies that any person of sound mind who is 18 years of age or older may marry. But it allows a guardian to give an incapacitated person in marriage if there is a clear benefit for the latter. Should a guardian disregard these provisions in giving a child in marriage, he shall be subject to the penalties provided for in the Penal Code.

The Personal Status Code seems to contain provisions that directly discriminate against married women, in particular as regards management of property, freedom to work, and the legality of polygamy and repudiation. Please indicate whether the review and amendment of the Personal Status Code is envisaged so as to bring it into line with the Convention.

1. Management of property

Article 58 of the Personal Status Code states that “Wives shall be free to make use of and dispose of their personal property. Husbands may not exercise oversight over the wife’s management unless the latter gives away more than one third of her property.” This guardianship exercised during a discrete period of time by the husband over the wife occurs only when the latter demonstrates extravagance. But this right of oversight is exercised subject to a court decision and after designated experts have rendered an opinion (article 174).

2. The right to work and the legality of polygamy

Article 57 states that a wife may, subject to the provisions of sharia, practice any profession outside the conjugal domicile. In addition, article 28 gives the wife the opportunity to stipulate that her husband may not marry another woman, that he may not be absent for more than a fixed period of time and that he may not prevent

her from studying, working, or engaging in other pursuits which do not run counter to the marriage contract. The husband's partial or total failure to satisfy these conditions stipulated by the wife shall lead, at the initiative of the latter, to the legal dissolution of the marriage and the husband's obligation to bestow a consolatory gift or "mut'ah", the amount of which shall be determined by a judge. In addition, article 45 of the same law allows the husband to have more than one wife if the necessary conditions have been met, the intention to ensure equality has been demonstrated and the current and future wife who stipulated monogamy has been notified.

3. Repudiation

The Personal Status Code gives women the possibility of repudiation based on the following conditions:

- If the husband gives the "Tewkil" mandate to his wife resulting in repudiation by her, she can, depending on the scope of the mandate, declare a simple, double or triple repudiation. This mandate can be revoked by the husband as long as the wife has not exercised it, unless it confers a right upon the wife.
- If the husband gives the wife the right to choose between maintaining the marriage or repudiation, a choice known as "Takhyir", she can choose maintenance or triple repudiation.

Optional Protocol

Please indicate any progress made with respect to the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania, which only became a State party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2000, initially focused on raising national awareness of the ill effects of discrimination against women in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres, and taking measures to ensure de facto equality between men and women.

Subsequently, it launched a dialogue with the Committee through the elaboration and submission of its initial report and will proceed in due course to consideration of the question of ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.