



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Seventy-fourth session**

Summary record of the 1727th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 25 October 2019, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Gbedemah

Contents

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

Sixth periodic report of Seychelles (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

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

Sixth periodic report of Seychelles (continued) (CEDAW/C/SYC/6; CEDAW/C/SYC/Q/6 and CEDAW/C/SYC/Q/6/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Seychelles took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 10 to 14 (continued)

2. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that women workers were underrepresented in certain sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, mining and construction, and overrepresented in the services and sales sectors. In the light of that situation, she asked what impact such horizontal segregation had on women's income and their ability to support themselves without the need for social assistance. She wondered what percentage of citizens earning \$13,000 or more per year were women and what plans were in place to enable more women to enter that income bracket under the Sustainable Development Goal target on inclusive societies.

3. The Committee wished to know whether the number of days of paternity leave granted to men would be increased in order to ensure that men and women played a more equal part in childcare. It would also like to know whether women's eligibility for social welfare was dependent on their making contributions and, if so, how the State party saw to it that non-contributing women received adequate support. She asked what percentage of women and girls received each of the benefits listed in table 25 of the State party's report (CEDAW/C/SYC/6, para. 127), what measures were being taken to increase women's access to credit and whether strategies had been adopted to enable women benefit claimants to become economically independent. The Committee would welcome clarification of the figures shown in table 26 of the State party's report (CEDAW/C/SYC/6, para. 133), which appeared to show that, in 2016, the total number of loans granted to women working in the building sector had been higher than the total number of loans approved for that sector.

4. Given that women were overrepresented in cottage industries, she wondered whether any mechanisms were in place to enable such women to find work in medium-sized and large enterprises. It would be interesting to learn whether seed funds or start-up packages were used to promote entrepreneurship among women. She asked whether the linkage, identified by the World Bank, between women's economic empowerment and the level of gender-based violence to which they were subjected, had been borne out in Seychelles by the survey on gender-based violence conducted in 2016. If so, what steps were being taken to address that problem?

5. The Committee wished to know whether the State party intended to endorse the Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment. It would welcome information on any targets established for small and medium-sized enterprises headed by women. The delegation might state whether the State party or the Development Bank of Seychelles operated a guarantee scheme for women entrepreneurs and whether any programmes to promote women's participation in the trade and export sector had been established, especially in the context of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free-Trade Area.

6. She asked whether the State party had endorsed the United Nations Global Compact as it related to women, whether it was actively committed to promoting gender equality and implementing the Convention and whether it had established a policy on corporate social responsibility. It would be interesting to learn whether private companies were required to channel a proportion of their profits into projects benefiting women and girls and whether any measures were being taken to promote women's participation in sports and recreational activities.

7. **Ms. Song** said that she wished to know whether basic public services, including education, transport and health care, were available on outlying islands, whether all school-

age children were able to attend school on such islands and whether pregnant women were able to give birth there. She wondered whether skills training was made available to women and girls on outlying islands and whether women on such islands were involved in decision-making processes whose outcome might affect them. The Committee wished to know whether a national action plan, with clear targets and strategies, had been set up to tackle poverty among single mothers. It would also be interested to learn whether any special benefits were made available for older women, whether adequate care facilities existed for them, whether they were primarily cared for in their homes or in public facilities and whether they had access to community centres where they could socialize.

8. She asked what was being done to ensure access to education for women and girls with disabilities, whether programmes for promoting employment among women with disabilities had been established and how the State party ensured that the voices of women with disabilities were heard in decision-making processes related to their lives. The Committee would be interested to hear what measures were being taken to combat discrimination against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women and girls. It would also like to know what proportion of the members of the National Climate Change Committee and the National Vulnerability Assessment Committee were women and whether local women participated in the work of the latter body.

9. **Ms. Larue** (Seychelles) said that, in 2023, the retirement age would be raised from 63 to 65 years. Retirees received a universal State pension in addition to any employment-related pension to which they were entitled. State-funded carers provided care to older persons who required it and community centres had been established in every district so that older persons could socialize. Activities for older persons were organized by the National Sports Council and cultural groups. Older persons who had nowhere else to live could stay in one of nine residential homes, where they had access to all the necessary services. Private companies had been allocated government land on which to build day-care centres or homes where older persons could stay on a long-term or temporary basis. Women on low incomes were placed on the Unemployment Relief Scheme for six months and were then placed in formal employment. The Poverty Alleviation Department within the Ministry of Family Affairs arranged for the homes of families on low incomes to be renovated and repaired. A policy aimed at enhancing parenting skills was being developed and psychosocial support was made available to mothers on low incomes.

10. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that the Ministry of Family Affairs was reviewing the poverty alleviation strategy and aligning it to a set of multidimensional poverty indicators. The Chair of the National Vulnerability Assessment Committee, and 10 of its 21 members, were women. The basic services provided on Mahé were also available on Praslin and La Digue. Although health centres could be found on the latter two islands, women who were due to give birth to their first child were recommended to go to Mahé. There were community centres and associations for older persons in every district and plans were in place to construct a further facility – the Maison Troisième Age – that would be open to all older persons. Persons with disabilities were included in national development plans. Paternity leave had been increased from 5 to 10 days and paternity benefit could be claimed by fathers if their names were on their children’s birth certificates.

11. The Government was taking steps to promote the “blue economy”. In that regard, the Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust, which was chaired by a woman, supported women’s participation in projects aimed at bolstering that sector of the economy. Women led a total of 7 of the 13 projects of that kind that had been funded to date. The Government had not endorsed the United Nations Global Compact or the Joint Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment.

12. **Ms. Morel** (Seychelles) said that the Government had increased the national minimum wage several times since its introduction in 2007 and had introduced a 13-month salary scheme for all workers in the public and private sectors. The Department of Employment encouraged workers to engage with employers through trade unions as a means of improving their working conditions and welfare. The National Consultative Committee on Employment enabled employers, workers’ organizations and the Government’s social partners to discuss workers’ rights and conditions of employment. The Unemployment Relief Scheme was aimed at supporting the most vulnerable persons in

society, including persons with disabilities, who were encouraged to register on the employment programme that formed part of the scheme. Issues surrounding the employment of persons with disabilities were addressed by the National Council for Disabled Persons. A total of 118 women had been placed in permanent employment under the Unemployment Relief Scheme. Although 10 days was the minimum length of paternity leave established in law, the Government encouraged private sector employers to grant longer periods of leave to their employees. In so doing, it cited the example of a manufacturing company that had increased paternity leave to 4 weeks and maternity leave to 26 weeks.

13. **Ms. Song** asked whether a certain number of seats in the National Assembly were reserved for female parliamentarians with disabilities to ensure that the voices of women with disabilities were heard in that forum, and whether any cases of domestic violence against older women had been recorded.

14. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that certain groups of persons with disabilities were represented by specific associations whose purpose was to advocate on their behalf. Older women were also victims of domestic violence. The link between women's economic empowerment and the level of gender-based violence to which they were subjected had been reliably confirmed by the research conducted in cooperation with the Commonwealth Secretariat. She was unable to explain the discrepancy between the total number of loans granted to women working in the building sector and the total number of loans approved for that sector in 2016 without undertaking further consultations.

15. **Ms. Larue** (Seychelles) said that children with disabilities who were unable to attend mainstream schools could enrol in one of two special schools or, in the case of older children, a vocational training centre. The situation in all three institutions had recently been assessed and a strategic plan to address the shortcomings identified had been devised and would be implemented in 2020.

16. **Ms. Bethel** said that, while she was encouraged to hear that marital rape was criminalized under the national domestic violence bill, she hoped that, going forward, the State party would adopt a comprehensive law on gender-based violence against women that took into account the Committee's general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on that subject.

17. **Ms. Chalal** asked whether the State party intended to abolish the age limit for access to contraceptives without parental authorization, given that many girls became sexually active at a young age.

18. **Ms. Larue** (Seychelles) said that all relevant stakeholders would need to be consulted before the age limit in question could be removed.

Articles 15 and 16

19. **Ms. Akizuki** said that the State party was to be commended on the bill to amend the Civil Code, which would set the minimum age for marriage at 18 years for both boys and girls, hold spouses jointly responsible for family matters and entitle cohabitating partners to equal shares of their property if the relationship had subsisted for at least seven years. However, more than a year had passed since the bill had been published in the Official Gazette. She wished to know when the revised Civil Code would finally be adopted, given the State party's pledge to have reviewed and amended or repealed all discriminatory laws by 2021, and whether civil society had been consulted on the proposed amendments to the Civil Code.

20. The bill provided that minors could not marry unless a judge found there to be serious reasons for authorizing such a marriage. Bearing in mind the Committee's position that the minimum age for marriage should be 18 years for both men and women, she would like to learn more about the reasons why a judge might authorize a marriage involving a minor and to know how many such marriages had taken place. She would also like to know whether the proposed amendments to the Civil Code addressed the question of the inheritance rights of unmarried women and their children and whether there were plans to amend the Civil Code to recognize same-sex marriages or same-sex civil unions. Lastly,

she wished to know whether the offence of marital rape would be dealt with by the criminal or family courts.

21. **Ms. Larue** (Seychelles) said that the bill to amend the Civil Code was currently being debated by the relevant committee of the National Assembly and the corresponding white paper had been published. The date of adoption of the revised Civil Code would ultimately depend on the calendar of the legislature. It was, however, hoped that it would be adopted in 2020 as opposed to 2021.

22. While the Government recognized the rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community, prior to introducing same-sex marriage or same-sex civil unions, it needed to consult all relevant stakeholders and win public acceptance for such a reform. Once it had received the necessary input, the Government could then decide on how to proceed.

23. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that the offence of marital rape would be dealt with by the criminal courts. Civil society had indeed been consulted on the proposed amendments to the Civil Code. A judge could authorize a marriage involving a minor who was almost 18 years of age. She was unable to explain the reasons why a judge might decide to do so, as granting such authorization was at his or her sole discretion. A concerted effort was being made to review the entire body of national law and to identify and repeal all discriminatory or archaic laws by 2021.

24. **Ms. Narain** said that she would like to hear more about the circumstances under which early marriage might take place in Seychelles and to receive statistical data on the number of child marriages that had occurred in 2018.

25. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that marriage as an institution was not the norm in Seychelles, nor was early marriage. She was unable to provide the requested statistical data on early marriages at that time.

26. **Ms. Dine** (Seychelles) said that the only loan guarantee scheme was that offered by the Government, which guaranteed up to 70 per cent of the total amount of a business loan in case of non-payment so that the bank assumed only a 30 per cent risk. Furthermore, under the Small and Medium Enterprise Scheme, the Government partially offset the bank charges associated with taking out a business loan.

27. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that it would also be helpful to receive statistical data on the number of female beneficiaries of the guarantee scheme referred to by the delegation.

28. **Ms. Larue** (Seychelles) said that she wished to thank the Committee for the fruitful dialogue. The Government of Seychelles remained committed to meeting its obligations under the Convention and would take due account of the recommendations made to it in implementing its current legislation, policies, strategies and action plans and in drafting new laws and reviewing existing ones. The Committee should, however, bear in mind that Seychelles was a small island State with limited resources. The Government would therefore welcome any capacity-building assistance that UN-Women or other organizations could provide.

29. **The Chair** said that the Committee was grateful to the delegation for the insight that it had provided into the situation of women in Seychelles. She encouraged the State party to take the measures necessary to give effect to the recommendations contained in the Committee's concluding observations and to accept, as soon as possible, the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention concerning the Committee's meeting time.

The meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.