



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
1 November 2019

Original: English

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

Summary record of the 1726th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 25 October 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Gbedemah

Contents

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

Sixth periodic report of Seychelles

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.

GE.19-18538 (E) 301019 011119



* 1 9 1 8 5 3 8 *

Please recycle A recycling symbol consisting of three chasing arrows forming a triangle.



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

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

Sixth periodic report of Seychelles (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.*
2. **Ms. Larue** (Seychelles), introducing the sixth periodic report of Seychelles (CEDAW/C/SYC/6), said that her delegation's participation in the constructive dialogue on her country's implementation of the Convention was a significant milestone, one which Seychelles, as a small island developing state, had reached after overcoming many obstacles.
3. Seychelles was one of the leading countries in Africa in terms of gender equality and the advancement of women and had long before achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education. However, despite significant socioeconomic development over the past five years, including the attainment of all the Millennium Development Goals, economic inequality was still a major concern. Unemployment was higher among young people than in other age groups, while high-quality job creation was hindered by skill mismatches. Female youth poverty was nine times higher than male youth poverty.
4. Gender-based violence was deeply rooted in gender inequality. Violence against women and girls continued to increase. According to the gender-based violence baseline study conducted in 2016, more than half the women sampled had experienced some form of gender-based violence during their lives; 54 per cent had experienced intimate partner violence, and 78 per cent of those had experienced some form of abuse before the age of 18. One tenth of women had been victims of rape. The study had also confirmed that not only was gender-based violence underreported, it was also the least prosecuted crime in the country.
5. In response, with support from the Commonwealth, her Ministry, the Ministry of Family Affairs, had drafted a domestic violence bill that would shortly be submitted to the National Assembly. Its scope encompassed not only women and girls but also male victims of domestic violence. It would criminalize domestic violence, provide remedies and specify minimum standards to be expected from providers of support services. Her Ministry planned to hold district-level consultations in order to raise community awareness on the content of the legislation.
6. Her Government shared the concern that the Committee had expressed over the long delays in the justice system, the limited capacity of the courts and the costs incurred by complainants. However, it proposed to maintain the existing fast-track system provided by the Family Tribunal as a means of providing protection from domestic violence in civil cases.
7. The Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Act 2014 criminalized all forms of trafficking in adults and children and prescribed a maximum sentence of 14 years' imprisonment, rising to 25 years and a fine of up to \$65,000 in cases involving children or where there were aggravating circumstances. The Act also provided for support for victims and persons at risk in the form of health care, shelter and psychological and legal support, for example, as well as witness protection.
8. In spite of concerted efforts, including the establishment of the National Coordinating Committee on Trafficking in Persons, the publication of a Standard Operating Procedure Manual, the creation of a referral mechanism for victims, and a national awareness-raising campaign, no cases of trafficking in women and girls had been brought under the Act.
9. Her country's Constitution ensured that formal discrimination against women in the public sphere was no longer prevalent. It made no provision for quotas or reserved places to advance the representation of women in the national parliament or publicly elected bodies,

and yet, as a result of extensive advocacy, women's participation at decision-making level had increased. The President made every effort to appoint women to high-level leadership posts and the country now had its first female Designated Minister, its first female Court of Appeal and Supreme Court judges and its first female Governor of the Central Bank. Fifty per cent of ministerial posts and 45 per cent of principal secretary posts were held by women, while 74 per cent of school and district administration managers were women. Women's representation in parliament had, however, gone down to 21 per cent from its previous level of 44 per cent.

10. Despite the progress made, gender equality could not be taken for granted, given the stubbornly high level of poverty among female single-parent households, an increasing incidence of sex work and gendered dimensions to illicit drug abuse and HIV/AIDS.

11. Gender mainstreaming remained a priority. The Ministry of Family Affairs, which held the gender portfolio, had created a special unit, the Gender Secretariat, in its Division of Research, Policy and Societal Development. The Secretariat was supported by two multisectoral teams drawn from the private and public sectors and civil society, namely the National Gender Management Team and the Gender-based Violence Working Group. Although the Secretariat's limited resources did not permit it to support gender mainstreaming across all sectors and levels of Government, it received support from local and international organizations for research projects. One example was the 2016 gender-based violence baseline study, which had been carried out jointly with Gender Links, a South African organization, and the Seychelles National Bureau of Statistics.

12. Another was a study carried out in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat, which had put the economic cost of violence against women and girls at \$17.3 million per year, representing 1.2 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP); the health costs alone had accounted for 0.6 per cent of GDP.

13. In recognition of the need to continually challenge negative social norms, beliefs and cultures that perpetuated and condoned gender-based violence, Seychelles had joined several international and regional movements aimed at ending violence against women and had also launched its own national campaigns, UNiTE for Peace to End Gender-Based Violence and, on the 25th of each month, "Orange Day", when people were encouraged to wear orange in solidarity with survivors of violence and to unite in ending gender-based violence. The Orange Day campaign also targeted primary and secondary schools with the aim of raising young students' awareness of the effects of violence against women and children, teaching them more about human rights generally and helping them to understand when their rights were violated.

14. Men's involvement was crucial since, despite Seychelles being a matrifocal society, many still endorsed the idea of male dominance and the acceptability of the use of violence as a "macho" form of behaviour. Thus, to mark International Men's Day, the Gender Secretariat organized youth symposiums at which secondary school boys could discuss manhood, mental wellness and gender-based violence and receive input on positive values that would eventually cause a change in behaviour. The Secretariat intensified its awareness and advocacy work over a period of 16 days of activism each year, between 25 November and 10 December.

15. Economic empowerment of women was a national economic necessity and a lever of change for improving the status of women, children and the entire community. Given the increased cost of living, the Government had tried to improve the income of public servants, most of whom were women, in part by introducing new schemes of service with a view to retaining skilled human resources, reducing poverty amongst women and improving access to decent work. In addition, measures such as the "My First Job" scheme and the Skills Development Programme helped women secondary school graduates and women with young children to obtain work, while the Unemployment Relief Scheme had helped nearly 900 members of vulnerable groups to obtain employment, most of them women.

16. The Decent Work Country Programme 2011–2015, run jointly with the International Labour Organization (ILO), also outlined several gender-responsive objectives. Its main achievements had been the ongoing review of the Employment Act of 1995 and the

launching of the National Employment Policy, the development of an HIV/AIDS workplace policy and an occupational health and safety policy, the introduction of 10 days' paternity leave and an increase in maternity leave from 14 to 16 weeks. The programme for 2019–2023 had been signed in 2018.

17. Turning to pregnant women and working mothers in the workplace, she said that the Employment Tribunal had reported no cases of dismissal due to pregnancy. Children had access to free government crèches from the age of 3 and a half, with almost universal uptake, but there were still gaps in the support for children from the age of 3 months.

18. The new draft employment policy included a commitment to eliminating discrimination in employment and promoting gender equality. Similarly, the new employment bill, based on the review of the 1995 Employment Act, proposed a clear definition of sexual harassment and workplace harassment, along with a complaints procedure in line with international standards.

19. Other examples of government measures to support women in employment and private enterprise were the creation of the Enterprise Seychelles Agency to provide services to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the establishment of the Seychelles Women's Trust Fund, set up to manage funds geared towards women's empowerment and advancement.

20. Recalling that school enrolment rates were around 100 per cent, she summarized the various programmes put in place by the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development and the National Institute of Science, Technology and Innovation, as well as the steps taken under the Teenage Pregnancy Policy to prevent pregnancy from interrupting girls' access to education, as outlined in the periodic report and the Government's written replies to the list of issues ([CEDAW/C/SYC/Q/6/Add.1](#)).

Articles 1 to 6

21. **Ms. Narain** said that the Committee commended the State party for its intention, under the National Gender Plan of Action 2019–2023, to review, amend or repeal all discriminatory laws by 2021. She would, however, like to know whether the State party intended also to amend its Constitution to incorporate the Convention definition of discrimination and to prohibit discrimination. She would also like to know how the review of legislation was to be carried out and by whom. Would civil society and academics, for example, be able to contribute and would technical assistance be sought from external consultants?

22. The State party had made commendable efforts to increase the visibility of the Convention, but the Committee had no information as to whether the Convention or the Committee's general recommendations had ever been invoked in domestic courts or administrative proceedings. Could the delegation provide examples of citations, either in relation to gender-based violence or in other cases?

23. She asked how many women justices in addition to the Chief Justice sat on the Supreme Court and on the Family Tribunal. She would like to know whether there had been any reports of gender bias on the part of judges or magistrates and by what mechanism a complaint might be brought against a judicial official on those grounds.

24. Given that the Family Tribunal was intended as a fast-track alternative to ordinary courts, she would like to know whether the Tribunal sat outside office hours, whether it sat only in Mahé, and what arrangements existed to issue urgent protection orders, for example, by telephone or fax, particularly for residents in the outer islands.

25. In the same way that, under the National Gender Plan of Action, training was being provided to the judiciary, prosecutors and law enforcement officials on special protection for witnesses, she would like to know whether training would also be provided on the Convention, substantive gender equality, gender-based violence and the elimination of stereotypes. How did the Government intend to boost women's legal literacy and ensure that victims could seek appropriate redress before the courts?

26. The State party had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention in 2011, but the Committee had thus far received no communications from Seychelles women alleging violations of the Convention. She wondered what efforts were being made to create awareness – among women in general, the legal profession and civil society organizations – of the provisions of the Convention and the Optional Protocol. She also wondered whether the provisions of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) had been fully incorporated into law and whether the State party had accepted the jurisdiction of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.

27. She asked how many complaints of discrimination had been made to the Office of the Ombudsman and with what results. She would appreciate an update on the accreditation status of the Seychelles Human Rights Commission. Was the Commission able to recommend payment of compensation to victims of violations of women's rights?

28. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that the preamble to the Constitution stated that all members of society were equal. The principle of equal protection under the law was enshrined in article 27 (1) of the Constitution and the rights and freedoms of all were considered to be of utmost importance. The Government understood the need to have a clear legal definition of discrimination and it would seek guidance on incorporating a definition that was in line with the Convention. Nonetheless, since the adoption of the Constitution in 1993, efforts had been made to combat all forms of discrimination. Her country took a holistic approach to decision-making and to the development of national strategies and legislation, which involved the private sector, academia and civil society as much as possible.

29. Unfortunately, because the country had a gross domestic product (GDP) rating, obtaining technical assistance from international organizations had proved difficult. Nevertheless, the Government would ask organizations such as the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for help in its efforts to promote women's rights in the future.

30. Approximately half of all judges were women, and the Supreme Court had six female judges. The Family Tribunal sat on the islands of Mahé and Praslin, where there was a satellite office to assist victims of domestic violence.

31. As a small island developing State, Seychelles often faced shortages of personnel to provide training on the Convention. However, awareness-raising efforts had been undertaken, which included an information video in Creole. A teacher training curriculum was being developed that would cover women's rights issues under the Convention.

32. **Ms. Pillay** (Seychelles) said that the Office of the Ombudsman and the Seychelles Human Rights Commission had originally been part of the same institution, which had been split up in the past year to facilitate compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). Since the Commission was relatively new, it had not yet been fully accredited in accordance with the Paris Principles.

33. The Government would consider accepting the optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The country was already party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.

34. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had not been cited in court proceedings.

35. **Ms. Pillay** (Seychelles) said that she currently had no information regarding any mechanism for complaints of gender bias. The Government had not accepted the jurisdiction of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, but was considering doing so. Provisions of the Maputo Protocol had been implemented insofar as they overlapped with the Convention; however, Seychelles was not a party to the Protocol.

36. **Ms. Reddock** said that she wished to know whether the State party intended to provide the Gender Secretariat with the authority and resources necessary to fulfil its

responsibilities for gender equality and gender programming, and to fulfil Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality. She would be interested to learn how many staff in the Gender Secretariat, the Population Unit and the Ministry of Family Affairs held academic qualifications in, or had received training on, gender or women's issues. She wondered how effective the National Gender Management Team had been in facilitating gender mainstreaming. It would be helpful to know what resources, if any, had been set aside for the implementation of the National Gender Plan of Action 2019–2023, and what budget allocations had been made to the Gender Secretariat and the National Gender Management Team.

37. She wished to know what progress had been made to integrate women's rights concerns into the work of the Seychelles Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Ombudsman, and whether any issues relating to women's rights or gender-based discrimination had been raised with those bodies. She asked to what extent women's and civil society organizations, including academic institutions and sexual minorities' organizations, were involved in the work on gender equality and women's empowerment in Seychelles.

38. **Ms. Toé-Bouda** said that she would be interested to know whether the State party intended to introduce temporary special measures in order to increase women's participation in the political sphere. If so, she wondered what time frame would be needed to implement such measures and what had prevented the State party from doing so before. The Committee had received information to the effect that the 2016 National Gender Policy had nevertheless established a 40 per cent quota for women in decision-making posts, and a 60 per cent quota for men.

39. **Ms. Pillay** (Seychelles) said that there was no record of complaints having been lodged with the Seychelles Human Rights Commission or the Office of the Ombudsman, but those bodies had a broad mandate and were able to consider cases relating to the rights of women and sexual minorities.

40. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that there were no plans to introduce temporary special measures at present, but the Government had not ruled out doing so in the future. Seychelles had adopted a Commonwealth model of gender mainstreaming. The Gender Secretariat was separate from the Population Unit, but both came under the authority of the Ministry of Family Affairs. While the Gender Secretariat had only one senior officer, it was in the process of recruiting a recent graduate. Many gender advocates in Seychelles did not have formal training on gender-related issues, but there were networks comprising the National Gender Management Team, the Gender-based Violence Working Group, civil society organizations, academics and the private sector to exchange information and provide assistance.

41. The budgets for the Gender Secretariat and the National Gender Management Team were never sufficient to employ the desired number of people. Some additional financial support had been received from international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Commonwealth and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The situation was not ideal but, as a small island developing State, the country was unable to allocate further resources.

42. Since the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community had formed only recently, it was not represented in the National Gender Management Team. That was expected to change in the future, however. The advocacy group Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex Seychelles was not yet part of the Citizens Engagement Platform of Seychelles.

43. **Ms. Toé-Bouda** said that she wondered whether the Government might consider introducing temporary special measures, as recommended by the Committee in its concluding observations on the combined initial and second to fifth periodic reports of Seychelles (CEDAW/C/SYC/CO/1-5). She would also appreciate an answer to her question concerning the introduction of a quota of 40 per cent for women's representation in political life under the National Gender Policy.

44. **Ms. Larue** (Seychelles) said that there was no quota system in the political sphere at present, but the idea was being discussed with the various political parties with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men.

45. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that the establishment of information management systems for social development and gender was part of the country's action plan. Personnel within the Ministry of Family Affairs worked very closely with each other and with the Gender Secretariat, and gender workshops were held to share information and statistics.

46. **Ms. Bethel** said that she wished to know whether the State party had made any progress in adopting the National Gender Plan of Action, especially in areas concerning gender stereotypes in education and the workplace. She wondered whether any television or radio programmes produced by and for women had been broadcast, and to what extent women were actively engaged in their production and evaluation. She would be interested to learn whether any steps had been taken to prohibit job advertisements that were restricted to men only, particularly in fields such as construction, security and maintenance. She asked whether there were sustained measures targeted at women, men and children to eliminate stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society.

47. It would be useful to have a time frame for the introduction of the national domestic violence bill and to know what offences under the bill would be dealt with in the criminal courts as opposed to the Family Tribunal. Would the bill provide for the offence of marital rape and, if not, why? She wondered whether couples who were not married, including same-sex couples, would be able to seek redress under the bill, especially given that alternative reports had indicated that members of sexual minorities often faced discrimination when reporting domestic violence. She wished to know whether the State party was contemplating adopting a comprehensive law on gender-based violence that would also cover sexual harassment. She would welcome information about any training programmes for judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officers on violence against women.

48. She would appreciate clarification of the findings of the 2019 study on gender-based violence, which had found that an equal proportion of women and men had experienced such violence. In particular, it would be helpful to know how gender-based violence was defined in the study. Did it include physical, emotional, sexual, psychological and economic violence? She wished to know whether the State party had used the study to devise its action plan to combat violence against women and, if so, she wondered in what ways the study had proved helpful in shedding light on the issue and deciding on the action to be taken in response. She wondered how the State party was using the findings of another study on the economic cost of violence against women to combat such violence. What plans were in place to establish a comprehensive system to assist and rehabilitate gender-based violence victims, and what was the time frame for creating the one-stop centre for domestic violence victims?

49. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she would welcome an explanation of the obstacles that hindered the prosecution of human traffickers. In view of the State party's efforts to clamp down on prostitution, she would be interested to learn what measures the Government had taken to help women in prostitution to generate income from other sources. The delegation might wish to elaborate on the case in which a person had been convicted on four counts of labour trafficking. Had the victims been trafficked for the purpose of domestic work or for other kinds of forced labour? She wondered whether any other cases were ongoing that involved trafficking for the purpose of forced domestic labour in particular. It would be helpful to have an explanation of the impediments to the identification of trafficking victims, given that the problem of trafficking persisted in spite of the solid legal framework, standard operating procedure and national referral mechanism in place.

50. **Ms. Larue** (Seychelles) said that stakeholders from various sectors had been involved in drafting the national domestic violence bill, which was why it had taken so long. The National Assembly was expected to pass the bill in late 2019 or early 2020, depending on the Assembly's schedule.

51. The design of the one-stop centre for domestic violence was in its final stages. Consultations regarding the design were being carried out with the Citizens Engagement Platform of Seychelles and the authorities of Réunion Island. Construction work would begin once the plans were approved, and the work was expected to be completed by the end of 2020. The centre would be run by civil society with government monitoring and assistance. A memorandum of understanding on assistance with staff training would be signed with the Réunion Island authorities in December 2019, which would include exchange visits with similar centres on Réunion Island.

52. **Ms. Pillay** (Seychelles), drawing the Committee's attention to the case referred to in paragraph 101 of the replies to the list of issues ([CEDAW/C/SYC/Q/6/Add.1](#)), said that a number of positive practices had been developed during the court proceedings in the case, including ensuring that the victims felt heard and safe at all times, were provided with interpretation services and were granted work permits to enable them to engage in gainful employment and remain in the country throughout. The Government had borne the costs of the proceedings, during which the relevant national authorities had cooperated closely with international organizations, including the International Organization for Migration.

53. **Ms. Morel** (Seychelles) said that the Department of Employment of the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Civil Status had reintroduced the Unemployment Relief Scheme, which had helped to reduce the number of women who were reliant on social welfare assistance by facilitating their integration into the job market on a casual or permanent basis. Participants in the scheme were registered during door-to-door visits in poor districts of the country. In the second quarter of 2019, a total of 71 individuals had been registered in two districts.

54. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that the 2016 national baseline study on gender-based violence had been carried out in collaboration with other member States of the Southern African Development Community. Although the National Gender Policy had been launched in 2016, the corresponding action plan was still being prepared. It was hoped that the plan would be finalized and submitted to the Cabinet for its approval before the end of 2019.

55. Owing to constitutional constraints, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons were not mentioned explicitly in the domestic violence bill adopted by the Cabinet on 7 August 2019. Pursuant to an initiative of the Commonwealth Secretariat to map the economic cost of domestic violence in Commonwealth countries, a pilot study had been launched in Seychelles in December 2017. While some findings had been gathered, the Secretariat wanted similar studies to be conducted in other countries before devising a plan of action. To that end, studies were currently being undertaken in Lesotho and Trinidad and Tobago.

56. **The Chair** said that she had heard no response to the questions concerning the 2019 study on gender-based violence, the time frame for the submission of the domestic violence bill to the National Assembly and whether offences under the bill would be dealt with by criminal courts or the Family Tribunal.

57. **Ms. Bethel** said that she would also appreciate replies to her questions on whether the domestic violence bill covered marital rape, whether lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender couples were able to seek redress under the bill, whether the State party was contemplating the adoption of a comprehensive law on gender-based violence and what measures were being taken to eliminate gender stereotypes in education, the workplace and the home, and to prohibit job advertisements that were targeted at men only.

58. **Ms. Leinarte** asked whether there were any statistics on the number of trafficked women and girls in the State party.

59. **Ms. Narain** asked whether any of the victims in the case referred to in paragraph 101 of the replies to the list of issues had been women, what had happened to the victims after the conclusion of the case, whether they had been entitled to compensation and rehabilitation under the 2014 Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Act and what steps were being taken to address the issue of substance abuse among women in prostitution.

60. **Ms. Larue** (Seychelles) said that the domestic violence bill had been submitted to the National Assembly. The time frame for its adoption would depend on the Assembly's schedule, but it was hoped that it would be adopted and receive presidential assent in early 2020. Consultations on the bill were being held at the community level.

61. **Ms. Dine** (Seychelles) said that criminal offences under the domestic violence bill would be handled by criminal courts, while the Family Tribunal was responsible for issuing restraining orders.

62. **Ms. Morel** (Seychelles) said that the Department of Employment did not discriminate on the basis of sex in its employment programmes or in its outreach work to promote them. Under the 2020 employment bill, all employers were required to follow a standardized format for job advertisements, and, in accordance with the Employment Act, the posting of discriminatory advertisements was an offence punishable with a fine of 40,000 Seychelles rupees. Employers were under an obligation to register job vacancies with the Department, which vetted them before advertisements could be posted. The Prosecution Unit of the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Civil Status prosecuted all offences under the Employment Act as a matter of course.

63. The victims in the case referred to in paragraph 101 of the replies to the list of issues had all been men working in the construction industry. During the court proceedings, they had engaged in gainful employment with a new employer in Seychelles. The perpetrator had been ordered to pay compensation.

64. The new labour migration policy provided for the transfer of trafficking victims to a different employer by means of a formal arrangement. The legal implications of the policy were being taken into account in the drafting of the 2020 employment bill.

65. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that the domestic violence bill did cover marital rape. Substance abuse tended to affect young persons more than high-class sex workers. The Agency for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation was working hard to tackle the issue by implementing methadone programmes and offering counselling, and efforts were under way to open a drug rehabilitation centre.

66. **Ms. Pillay** (Seychelles) said that the 2014 Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Act provided for the compensation, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims. A trafficking in persons fund established under the Act was financed through donations and from the Consolidated Fund created pursuant to section 89 of the Constitution. The fund was used to compensate victims and cover the cost of services provided to them.

67. **Ms. Morel** (Seychelles) said that, in October 2018, the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Civil Status had imposed a moratorium on the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers. On 21 October 2019, Seychelles had signed a bilateral labour agreement with Bangladesh, and the moratorium had consequently been lifted. Under the agreement, employers wishing to recruit Bangladeshi nationals had to go through specific public employment agencies. The Government intended to negotiate similar agreements with other countries.

Articles 7 to 9

68. **Ms. Toé-Bouda** said that, despite the fact that Seychelles had a matriarchal society, and that several high-level positions in the country were held by women, the overall participation of women in political and public life remained low. With that in mind, she wished to know what mechanisms or strategies were in place to ensure the full and equal participation of women in the planning, budgeting, implementation and assessment of development policies and what steps were being taken to reverse the recent decline in the number of women occupying seats in the National Assembly and high-level government posts and increase the number of women representing the State party abroad. What steps had been taken to promote the participation and activities of civil society organizations in the area of human rights in Seychelles and ensure the safety of their staff?

69. **Ms. Narain** said that she would be grateful for clarification of paragraph 52 of the State party's report ([CEDAW/C/SYC/6](#)), an update on the progress of the discussions mentioned therein, a description of the safeguards in place for girls who were declared

stateless and an indication of whether the State party would consider acceding to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

70. **Ms. Larue** (Seychelles) said that there were no quotas for women's participation in politics. There was a need to discuss the possibility of setting quotas, analyse the reasons for the marked decline in the number of women in the National Assembly and raise public awareness of the importance of women's participation in order to give women candidates nominated by political parties the best chance of being elected.

71. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that many women in Seychelles preferred to put family first, often to the detriment of their professional development. There was also perhaps a lack of support structures to enable certain categories of women to hold down jobs.

72. The Government promoted the participation of civil society organizations in all national development initiatives, including through a committee chaired by the Vice-President and composed of government officials and representatives of organizations recognized by the Citizens Engagement Platform of Seychelles.

73. **Ms. Pillay** (Seychelles) said that the Government had made a commitment during the universal periodic review process to give active consideration to acceding to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

Articles 10 to 14

74. **The Chair**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, said that, while the State party had made commendable progress in the field of education, horizontal segregation persisted, with the result that it remained difficult for women to find employment in traditionally male-dominated industries. She wished to know whether, in line with paragraph 29 (a) of the Committee's concluding observations on the combined initial and second to fifth periodic reports of Seychelles (CEDAW/C/SYC/CO/1-5), the State party had adopted measures aimed at increasing the representation of girls in traditionally male-dominated fields of study, and, if so, what the impact of those measures had been. If not, the delegation should indicate whether the State party would consider adopting temporary special measures.

75. Referring to paragraph 59 of the State party's report, in which it was asserted that engineering and construction companies were reluctant to employ women because it would entail providing extra facilities and because they considered women to be disruptive for male workers, she asked whether the Government had contemplated offering incentives to such companies and engaging with them so as to debunk the victim-blaming notion that women were sources of temptation.

76. Noting that there was still a need to mainstream gender effectively in all teacher training programmes, she asked what had been done to challenge gender stereotypes, what the outcome of those efforts had been, whether there was a way of strengthening the teaching of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the delivery of literacy classes and why, as demonstrated in table 15 of the State party's report, such classes were attended predominantly by men.

77. According to reports, it was not uncommon for girls who dropped out of traditionally male-dominated courses and subsequently enrolled in technical and vocational education training programmes to switch to traditionally female-dominated subjects such as cookery. She would welcome an explanation of what was being done to prevent or at least attenuate that trend.

78. She wished to know what efforts were being made to eliminate stereotypical dress codes, for example ones that required women to wear high heels. Details of any steps taken to increase the percentage of male teachers involved in early childhood training would also be welcome. Lastly, she asked whether any teachers had been sanctioned for administering corporal punishment, and, if so, what those sanctions had been. The delegation should describe any measures taken to promote more positive forms of discipline.

79. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that it was no longer mandatory for girl students of the Seychelles Tourism Academy to wear high heels as part of their uniform. With regard to corporal punishment, a bill amending the Children Act was being drafted with a view to repealing its use in schools. As far as the school dropout rate was concerned, boys were more likely to leave school early; girls tended to complete their education. However, pregnant girls who dropped out of school were not precluded from resuming their studies. Policies were in place to facilitate their return; however, many chose not to return immediately after the birth, preferring to wait until the baby was older. That being said, the Seychelles Institute of Distance and Open Learning and the Guy Morel Institute both offered administrative and management courses for that target group. Lastly, the National Institute of Science, Technology and Innovation had launched a programme to encourage girls to take up subjects in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

80. **Ms. Morel** (Seychelles) said that integrating women into traditionally male-dominated sectors remained a challenge. Even in government schemes, such as the “My First Job” scheme, women were generally placed in clerical or service roles, while men were assigned to posts in the industry or trade sectors. Efforts were being made to promote labour opportunities for women and men, and employers who registered on government schemes were incentivized to take on young people and train them. Participants in those schemes were placed in areas of employment in which they had expressed an interest, with the possibility of subsequently switching to other areas if they so wished.

81. Job fairs, where employers could meet potential jobseekers and students, were organized annually, sometimes focusing on specific sectors, such as the blue and green economies. The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development was launching a technical school for students aged 15 and over, which would provide courses in areas as diverse as construction, fisheries and beauty. By ensuring that the school was not intimidating, it was hoped that women students would enrol in subjects that were traditionally dominated by men.

82. **The Chair**, while welcoming the establishment of a technical school, said that she wished to emphasize the importance of introducing temporary special measures to encourage – rather than “hope” – that women and girl students would enrol in technical fields of study; otherwise, they would simply fall into line with society’s expectations and follow traditional career paths.

83. The State party might find it useful to carry out a study to determine why pregnant teenagers and young mothers were reluctant to return to school after giving birth. It was possible that obstacles to their return, such as stigma or lack of childcare, could be overcome by introducing temporary special measures or collaborating with NGOs to help reintegrate girls into the school environment.

84. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** said that, despite the State party’s commendable efforts to integrate women into the formal labour market, particularly the public sector, many challenges remained. She wished to know whether the bill amending the Employment Act, which was due to be adopted in 2020, contained provisions to ensure that the private sector respected the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. It would be interesting to know how the State party intended to eliminate the vestiges of gender stereotyping, which consigned women to pursuing traditional careers in the care sector while men occupied roles in science and engineering. In that connection, she wondered whether there were any policies to prevent and punish sexual harassment in the workplace and, if so, what types of sanctions they contained. She would like to know whether there were any regulations for preventing discrimination in recruitment, performance reviews and promotions, whether they covered private recruitment companies and what guidance was provided to authorities that received complaints of discrimination against women.

85. Lastly, with reference to paragraph 73 of the State party’s replies to the list of issues ([CEDAW/C/SYC/Q/6/Add.1](#)), which concerned Section 46A of the Employment Act and the procedure for filing complaints of workplace discrimination, it would be useful to know whether women victims of discrimination had access to legal assistance and whether the decision of the chief executive who investigated the complaint could be appealed.

86. **Ms. Morel** (Seychelles) said that Seychelles was a party to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). Although no complaints of unequal pay relating to the private sector had been received by the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Civil Status, the Government was introducing a requirement for private companies employing 25 or more persons to implement a salary structure, thus increasing pay transparency and ensuring equal pay for work of equal value. Those companies would also be required to employ a full-time human resources officer to deal with employment-related matters, such as communication or job satisfaction issues.

87. Under the bill amending the Employment Act, a new procedure for dealing with discrimination or sexual harassment in the workplace had been established. Rather than having to complain to the company's chief executive, victims would now be able to submit their complaints directly to the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Civil Status, which could then act as mediator between the worker and the employer. Should mediation fail, the case could be taken to an Employment Tribunal. The bill also contained a new definition of sexual harassment in the workplace, which had been limited to cases where an employer made a decision that affected the employment of the person concerned. Threats, including those of a sexual nature, were considered as harassment. Lastly, the Ministry monitored the conduct and activities of private employment agencies, liaising with them on a daily basis and including them in relevant workshops or meetings relating to recruitment procedures.

88. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** said that, in the light of the fact that the State party had ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, she wished to know whether a policy was in place for integrating women with disabilities into all areas of the labour market, including the private sector. She would also like to know whether the State party intended to become a party to the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) and the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

89. **Ms. Morel** (Seychelles) said that a special employment section of the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Civil Status took measures to facilitate the employment of persons from vulnerable groups, including women with disabilities. New regulations on domestic workers had been introduced in June 2019 and an analysis of the current legislation was currently being undertaken, with a view to ratifying ILO Convention No. 189 in early 2020. Although the ratification of ILO Convention No. 190 was envisaged, consultations and legal gap analysis would first be required, with the technical support of ILO.

90. **Ms. Chalal**, referring to article 12 of the Convention, on the right to health, said that, despite a number of advances in maternal and infant health, the Committee remained concerned at the country's high infant mortality rate. She wished to know whether the 2016 bill amending the Nurses and Midwives Act of 1985 had been enacted and, if so, what improvements it had produced. The high rate of attempted suicide among women was another area of concern. She wondered whether the Government had conducted any studies to identify the root causes of that problem.

91. On the issue of abortion, she asked whether the Government intended to repeal article 148 of the Penal Code, in order to decriminalize abortion in all cases and legalize abortion in cases of rape, incest, severe fetal impairment or risk to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman, in line with the Committee's jurisprudence and its previous concluding observations on the State party's combined initial and second to fifth periodic reports (CEDAW/C/SYC/CO/1-5, para. 35). In the light of the country's high teenage pregnancy rate, it would be useful to know in what circumstances the voluntary interruption of pregnancy was permitted and whether there were plans to amend the requirement of parental consent in order for under-18s to gain access to contraceptives. In that connection, she noted that the Government had recently approved a policy on sexual and reproductive health for adolescents and would welcome more information in that regard, including whether an action plan had been drawn up for its implementation.

92. She would be interested to know what services were available to treat drug abuse among women and what training was provided to hospital staff with regard to treating

heroin-dependent pregnant women and their babies. Lastly, she noted the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Seychelles and wished to know the status of the National Strategic Framework for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STIs), which had been under review when the State party had submitted its periodic report.

93. **Ms. Larue** (Seychelles) said that a number of action plans were being implemented in the area of sexual and reproductive health. One formed part of the school health programme; another constituted a component of the adolescent and youth health programme, which was being run by the Youth Health Centre. A guide on how to gain access to contraceptives had been created for sexually active 15–18-year-olds. A review of all policies and strategies relating to maternal, infant and sexual and reproductive health, carried out in conjunction with the World Health Organization, was due to be completed at the end of 2019, after which new action plans would be devised.

94. A number of measures to reduce the rising infant mortality rate had been taken at the community level, including through the “My Health, My Responsibility” policy, which sought to encourage citizens to take personal responsibility for their own health. A new programme was also shortly to be implemented by the Agency for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation to provide drug-dependent pregnant women with appropriate counselling and treatment and reduce the infant mortality rate. Lastly, the Nurses and Midwives Act was currently under review.

95. **Ms. Pillay** (Seychelles) said that the Agency for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation had several drug treatment and prevention programmes and policies, including a low-threshold methadone maintenance programme, a policy for managing opioid use during pregnancy and a school-based prevention programme. It had also formulated national standards for the prevention, treatment, harm reduction and rehabilitation of persons affected by drug and alcohol abuse.

96. The Government had committed to achieving the HIV/AIDS treatment targets set out in the document entitled “90-90-90: An ambitious treatment target to help end the AIDS epidemic”, prepared by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), by the end of 2030.

97. **Ms. Dine** (Seychelles) said that young persons could gain access to contraceptives without the need for parental consent once they were 18 years old; 15–17-year-olds who were sexually active could obtain contraceptives with their parents’ approval. However, vulnerable and at-risk young persons, such as those involved in sex work or problematic drug use, could obtain contraceptives from a doctor, who was able to prescribe them without parental consent, since the situation represented a health priority for the child.

98. **Ms. Chalal** said that she wished to know under what circumstances abortion was permitted and whether women with disabilities had full and unfettered access to reproductive and sexual health-care services and information. In that connection, the Committee had received information indicating that the legislation requiring the free and informed consent of the patient before undergoing a medical procedure was not always strictly enforced. A third party could reportedly provide their consent in cases where the patient was a woman with disabilities. She would be interested in receiving information in that regard.

99. **Ms. Pillay** (Seychelles) said that the Termination of Pregnancy Act allowed for abortions to be carried out in certain circumstances, such as when continuance of the pregnancy would place the health or life of the woman or fetus at risk; when the pregnancy was the result of rape, incest or defilement; or when the pregnant woman was unfit to have the care of a child because she was mentally challenged.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.