



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Thirty-ninth session

Summary record of the 796th meeting (Chamber A)

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 25 July 2007, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gaspard (Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of Ms. Šimonović, Ms. Gaspard, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

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

Combined fourth, fifth and sixth periodic reports of Guinea (continued) (CEDAW/C/GIN/4-6, CEDAW/C/GIN/Q/6, CEDAW/C/GIN/Q/6/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Guinea took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 7 to 9

2. **Ms. Aribot** (Guinea), responding to questions posed on articles 7 to 9 at the previous meeting with regard to women and decision-making, said that a tradition of women's leadership had long existed in Guinea. In 2000, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women and Childhood had conducted a diagnostic study of women's role and place in decision-making, which had received wide public attention, and it had called on the Government to respond. In the previous Government, six women had served in the cabinet, holding such portfolios as Foreign Affairs, Environment and Trade, not simply the social affairs portfolios usually reserved for women. The current Government had undergone a restructuring which had reduced the number of cabinet posts from 32 to 19; the number of women Ministers had dropped from six to three.

3. There had been a small increase in the number of women in Parliament because of efforts to raise women's awareness of the electoral process and the efforts of non-governmental organizations to secure identity cards and legal papers for women to allow them to register to vote. Currently, there was one woman provincial governor and three prefects. The Ministry was working towards the December 2007 elections with the help of international non-governmental organizations and women's coalitions within political parties to present a united front. A plan of action to increase women's participation in political life would come out of that effort.

Articles 10 to 14

4. **Ms. Shin** said that the problems facing Guinea in the health sector were well known, yet the Government budget allocation for health had been halved between 2003 and 2006, dropping from 86 million Guinean francs to 40 million. She inquired whether funding for health programmes came mainly from international sources, and whether the Government was committed to solving its problems in the health sector. With 70 per cent of the population living in rural areas, and most women in those areas illiterate, she would be interested to hear what innovative methods had been found to educate and disseminate information to that population.

5. **Ms. Simms** said that education for all girls should be a priority since World Bank studies had shown that there could be no development without gender equity. Although a certain mystique surrounded literacy, people communicated their indigenous and instinctive knowledge every day, so educational efforts should not be confined to academics. The Government should be prepared to commit resources to enable girls to have the same access as boys to schooling.

6. **Ms. Neubauer**, referring to article 11, on employment, said that she would be eager to learn more about the provisions of the Labour Code covering maternity protection and in favour of working mothers. The Committee wondered if any research, analysis and studies had been conducted on the basis of the data and statistics collected through the Project to Support Women's Economic Activities. She would also like to hear more about women's enjoyment of their legal rights regarding promotion on an equal footing with men.

7. **Ms. Patten** asked whether discriminatory practices by employers in such areas as hiring, promotion, benefits and discrimination because of marital status were monitored through a body such as a labour inspectorate, and whether such monitoring extended to the private sector. More information was needed on measures to improve women's skill levels through job training and retraining and to eliminate job segregation, as well as on the situation regarding pay gaps between men and women. In the next report, she would like to see data on occupational health and safety and sexual harassment. Finally, she asked if there were plans to amend the discriminatory provisions of the integrated Social Security System that

denied benefits to women because the man was considered head of the household.

8. **Ms. Pimentel** said that education was an instrument of women's empowerment in private and in public life, and she inquired whether school curriculums dealt with women's rights as human rights. It would be helpful to hear more about how sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention were addressed in the schools, as well. The responses to the list of issues had described a number of measures to combat HIV/AIDS, and it would be interesting to hear their results.

9. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, said that she was glad to hear that a gender department and Chair of women's studies had been established at the University of Conakry, which would remedy the lack of academic research on women in the country.

10. **Ms. Begum** said that more information was needed about rural women's access to credit and land ownership. She was interested to hear about the types of crops that women farmers produced and what was planned to facilitate their access to markets at the local and national levels. Women should receive priority in hiring for local job creation programmes.

11. **Ms. Kaba** (Guinea) said that in 2007 5 per cent of the national budget had been allocated for health but external assistance should raise that to 15 per cent, and maternal care would comprise 25 per cent of that health budget. The Government had three strategies: an integrated communication plan using the media and consciousness-raising campaigns to educate rural women in family planning; the distribution of condoms in villages throughout the country by midwives and other health-care providers whenever they distributed medicines; and the involvement of men as partners in family planning, currently practiced by only 6 per cent of couples. The Department of Education had completely revised the sex education curriculum in primary and secondary schools and in medical and nursing schools with the participation of health studies instructors at the regional level.

12. **Ms. Bamba** (Guinea) said that instruction on HIV/AIDS, family planning and sex was offered in the schools. There was also a special programme to train fathers in family health and family planning. The Government sponsored media campaigns in all national languages so that the women of the country were well

informed of the dangers of AIDS. The national budget for AIDS comprised a Government allocation of \$200,000 and an International Monetary Fund contribution of \$70,000,000. As for concrete results achieved, it was hard to evaluate the prevalence of the behaviour responsible for AIDS and also the strength of taboos. The Government sought to involve the private sector in the fight against AIDS, and international non-governmental organizations and agencies like the World Bank were providing funds and helping set up AIDS clinics. Women received free prophylactic AIDS medications on a par with men.

13. **Ms. Touré** said that, in order to help rural women out of poverty, the Government had in the past two years set aside several billion dollars in credit for women working in the informal sector, and was steering them towards fields like fisheries and the very lucrative textile dyeing industry. As part of its Millennium Development Goal commitments, the Government was, with its development partners, trying to assist the over 8,000 women living in absolute poverty in Upper Guinea. There were 48 microprojects funded by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) to help them start small businesses after receiving training in both entrepreneurship and AIDS awareness, with counterpart funds available from village banks. An Italian partner was sponsoring an awareness campaign in the zone invaded by rebel forces, and there over 1,800 women had in two consecutive years benefited from literacy courses started by women's groups to promote self-reliance.

14. Credit was generally not in the form of loans but of microcredit, requiring a 30-per-cent local investment. Each local project was developed at the village level by village women leaders, often themselves illiterate, before submission for approval to donors. The marketing of products was also a major concern and advantage was taken of all opportunities. At national and international women's days, for instance, fairs and markets were set up where products produced locally by women throughout the country could be displayed and promoted by women entrepreneurs.

15. **Ms. Traoré** (Guinea) said that the education of women was a priority for the Government in its effort to reduce gender disparities. The aim was to give girls access to schooling and keep them in school until they graduated. The illiteracy of so many parents was a factor to be dealt with, because their willingness to

send their daughters to school was crucial. The quality and relevance of education to women was emphasized. Currently, 70 per cent of girls as opposed to 86 per cent of boys were being schooled. The number of girls repeating classes had dropped drastically because of the new policy of automatic promotion. The number of women in higher education had risen from 16 per cent in 2003 to over 50 per cent in 2006.

16. The two main Government programmes were the Women's Literacy Programme (report, p. 50), under which, thus far, over 100,000 women throughout the country had been taught to read by literacy volunteers, one quarter of whom were themselves women; and a self-help programme under which 40,000 women had been made literate to prepare them for employment. In addition, the informal "second chance" schools for 9- to 15-year-old dropouts allowed them, after three years, to be integrated into the regular schools again.

17. The 2005 census had shown that all those literacy programmes had borne fruit: almost 40 per cent of urban women as against 73 per cent of urban men could now read, as could over 6 per cent of rural women as opposed to 25 per cent of rural men. Ongoing advocacy programmes had been encouraging local authorities to hire responsible women, with the result that now a woman was head of a university and another was head of the national scholarship programme.

18. **Ms. Bereté** (Guinea) said that the employment laws did not discriminate against women as to salary and hiring in Government jobs, but that women remained underrepresented owing to tradition and prejudices. Now, however, more women were advancing to technical and non-traditional management posts. The number of women in Government employment had risen in 2007 to over 26 per cent. As for the conditions of employment, women were not fired if they became pregnant and all received three months maternity leave. The employment of women was monitored by a focal point within the Women's Department as well as by non-governmental organizations. Each year, the Government reviewed the situation and renewed its awareness campaigns to encourage women to apply for executive posts.

Articles 15 and 16

19. **Ms. Shin** said she hoped that the amended Civil Code scheduled for adoption in 2008 would equalize

the marital age for both men and women at 18 years, and grant married women equal custody, property and inheritance rights. It would seem from the report that child marriages, even though not legally recognized, remained a problem. The Government should use the opportunity of the coming census to obtain data on the actual ages of marriage as well as the incidence of domestic violence. Also, gender-disaggregated data should be obtained in all fields — education, employment, health, household work and child-rearing.

20. **Ms. Patten** expressed concern that it was taking so long to adopt the draft Civil Code which, according to the delegation's own reports and responses, had been drafted and ready for over five years, but was not scheduled for adoption until December 2008. The Code's enactment was an urgent necessity and should be awarded priority given that 53 per cent of the Guinean population was meanwhile suffering from various social injustices such as child marriages, forced marriages and inheritance, property and child custody laws that discriminated against women.

21. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as a Committee member, noted that Guinean society seemed to operate under two legal systems: an archaic civil law still awaiting what would hopefully be prompt reform; and customary law. She asked how it was decided which type of law was applied and whether the future revised Civil Code would apply to the whole population.

22. **Mr. Traoré** (Guinea) said that the reform of the Civil Code was an enormous task but that, thanks to the joint efforts of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice and the contributions made by women's NGOs, considerable progress had been made to ensure that the rights of women and children were respected in the revised Code. In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, the marriage age had been raised to 18 for both boys and girls. He acknowledged that women were still suffering from discrimination in the meantime, but reiterated that the review process was necessarily a lengthy one. With regard to forced or polygamous marriages, registering such marriages carried a five- to ten-year prison sentence for officials who registered or performed such marriages.

23. Although there were two types of law in Guinea, customary laws were only invoked within families and in certain communities where women were possibly

discouraged from taking matters to court. He assured the Committee, however, that no person in Guinea would be tried on the basis of customary or religious laws in court, where civil law prevailed, as it had since 1958.

24. **Ms. Nabe** (Guinea) said that the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, who was a woman, would be fully briefed on the matters raised at that day's meeting and that she and the Minister of Justice and Human Rights would be taking steps to ensure that the revised Civil Code saw the light of day.

25. **Ms. Shin** made three suggestions to the Guinean delegation: that it examine the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women (A/61/122); that it hold an educational and informative public forum with ministries, NGOs and the media to discuss the Committee's concluding comments; and that it create simple but efficient mechanisms such as a complaints centre for handling and processing women's complaints of violence or discrimination.

26. **Ms. Patten** asked whether the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention and the adoption of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, would be submitted for the consideration of the new Government. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, though signed, also needed ratification by the Guinean Government. She asked whether temporary special measures to ensure women's full participation in employment, education and politics, in the form of quotas or preferential treatment had been considered in accordance with the Committee's recommendations.

27. **Ms. Begum** said that the trafficking in women from rural to urban areas for the sex trade and illegal labour was the result of poverty. Although she was impressed by the efforts undertaken to create employment opportunities and credit facilities for women in rural areas, more work needed to be done in the area of job creation to prevent such trafficking. She asked whether the Government had a strategy or policy to that effect.

28. **Ms. Pimentel** insisted that the Convention and the Committee's 25 general recommendations constituted an effective instrument that would help Guinea consolidate its action. The main issues that Guinea needed to address to eliminate discrimination against women, such as early marriage, forced marriage, genital mutilation and violence against

women, were covered by article 5, inasmuch as it referred to social and cultural patterns, article 12 on health and article 10 on education. Women's rights and empowerment must be achieved through concrete action in these areas.

29. **Ms. Chutikul** asked which legal instrument in Guinean law referred to trafficking as defined in the Palermo Protocol and whether the delegation felt that the country's legal framework was adequate. She also requested information on the results of the bilateral and multilateral agreements that had been signed with other countries since 2005.

30. **Ms. Simms** applauded the aspirations expressed by the Prime Minister in the last paragraph of the foreword to the responses (CEDAW/C/GIN/Q/6/Add.1) and his appointment of women to non-traditional ministerial positions in the Guinean Cabinet, such as the heads of the Ministries of Finance and Human Rights. She hoped that the women ministers would be heard and would be relentless in their pursuit of equality for Guinean women.

31. **Ms. Neubauer** pointed out that Governments were responsible for covering the operational costs of the mechanisms such as legal aid centres and rights monitoring committees that were needed to ensure gender equality and women's full enjoyment of their rights.

32. **The Chairperson** said that she looked forward to the timely presentation of the next report from Guinea, which would serve as an opportunity for that State party to respond in full to the questions raised during the course of the meeting. She assured the delegation of the Committee's ongoing support for its efforts to improve the situation of women in Guinea. The recognition of women's rights would benefit the whole country.

33. **Ms. Nabe** (Guinea) assured the Committee that she would take up the suggestion to study the in-depth study on all forms of violence against women and welcomed the suggestion to hold a public forum to discuss gender issues with men and women. Some simple mechanisms to combat discrimination were already in place, such as telephone hotlines for reporting violence against women and girls. She promised to ensure that the ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter would be included on the agenda at the next meeting of the Council of Ministers.

34. The Committee's suggestions and guidelines would be borne in mind and its concerns reflected in the next report. The delegation was committed to improving the status of women in Guinea and appreciated the technical and financial assistance offered for the forthcoming survey on trafficking in women and children in Guinea. Lastly, she assured the Committee that the issue of the pending implementation of the revised Civil Code and other legal instruments would be addressed and that she would work to ensure that adequate follow-up mechanisms would be established in the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.