



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women  
Eighty-first session**

**Summary record of the 1852nd meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 8 February 2022, at 11 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Haidar (Vice-Chair)

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(*continued*)

*Seventh periodic report of Gabon*

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\* Reissued for technical reasons on 17 February 2022.

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*Ms. Haidar (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.*

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

*Seventh periodic report of Gabon (CEDAW/C/GAB/7; CEDAW/C/GAB/Q/7; CEDAW/C/GAB/RQ/7)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Gabon joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Nlend Koho** (Gabon), speaking via video link and introducing the seventh periodic report of Gabon (CEDAW/C/GAB/7), said that, in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Government had established a solidarity fund through which it had provided free electricity and water to hundreds of thousands of citizens during the lockdown period, in addition to support to cover rent, transport and food costs. A food bank had also been established for disadvantaged families living in the areas most affected by the pandemic, namely Libreville and its outskirts, which accounted for more than half the national population. As women had been the most severely affected by the pandemic, they had been the primary beneficiaries of those programmes.
3. Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had reported an increase in violence against women, and especially vulnerable women, during the lockdown period. In response, the Government had established a digital entrepreneurship training programme to help women become more financially resilient and independent. Awareness-raising campaigns had also been conducted. A platform had been established for identifying perpetrators and for providing support for victims, including through specialized support centres run by the Ministry of Social Affairs and a free hotline, and legal clinics had been set up to help victims of gender-based violence bring and follow up on complaints against perpetrators. In the first nine months of operation, more than 2,000 cases had been registered via the hotline, and 320 cases had been referred to the support centres. A shelter for women victims and their children was currently under construction.
4. In the area of education, the Government had adopted remote-learning capacities in response to the pandemic, which had also served to reduce the high rate of dropout among girls owing to teenage pregnancy. The Government had also established a national strategy to combat gender-based violence in schools by increasing the number of security staff, introducing administrative penalties and providing care for victims and certain perpetrators. Emergency hotlines for youth problems and child abuse had been established.
5. A pilot educational programme on sexual and reproductive health for students had been conducted and was currently being expanded to all schools. Through its Strategy for the Promotion of Women's Rights and the Reduction of Inequality (Gabon Égalité), the Government provided local, multidisciplinary care to help pregnant students stay in school and conducted training for teachers on sexual and reproductive health, in addition to training on comprehensive sexual education for psychological guidance counsellors, social workers and medical staff working in schools. To prevent absenteeism and school dropout as a result of period poverty, the Government would soon be making recently procured menstrual products available in secondary schools and was conducting a study to identify students' needs in that area.
6. During the drafting of the Gabon Égalité strategy, a comprehensive assessment of the situation of women had been conducted that had identified discriminatory provisions in the national legislation. As a result, the Civil Code, the Criminal Code and the Labour Code had been amended. A law on the elimination of all forms of violence against women had also been adopted, which set out the definitions of terms, identified the responsibilities of the administrative authorities and placed an obligation on the judicial services to designate judges in the courts to handle cases of violence against women.
7. Abortion had been decriminalized under the Criminal Code in cases where the mother was in distress. The Code also provided penalties for and detailed definitions of sexual and psychological harassment, and heavier penalties for workplace harassment of up to 2 years in prison and a fine of up to 5,000 CFA francs. A definition of discrimination had been

incorporated into the Criminal Code for the first time, and penalties for discrimination had been established. Marital rape had been criminalized, and the penalties for all forms of domestic violence had been increased, including through the introduction of new aggravating circumstances to the Code, such as the presence of a child during the commission of a sexual offence.

8. With regard to amendments to the Civil Code, the birth registration period had been extended to two weeks in urban areas and one month in rural areas. The imposition of conditions on the issuance of birth certificates had been prohibited, and a legal obligation had been established requiring medical centres and hospitals to register all births. Under the amended Code, spouses now owed each other a duty of respect, protection, fidelity and support; they also bore joint responsibility for managing the household and caring for the children. The amended Code recognized the right of women to exercise the profession of their choice and to have a say in the choice of their marital home, and it set out the principle of the shared management of assets. Both spouses were entitled to have a home of their own, where justified, and a bank account of their own, but the consent of the other spouse was required before any contracts regarding family assets could be concluded. Spouses could now apply for a divorce on the basis of mutual consent by submitting a joint application to a judge, who would also rule on the legal custody of any children. The practice of repudiation had been made illegal, and spouses subjected to that practice were exempt from the duties of fidelity and living together. Clear legal provisions on judicial separation had been set out, and violence by either spouse had been expressly established as a cause for fault-based divorce.

9. To increase female representation in politics, a mentoring programme for young women had been established. To date, 100 mentors and 50 trainees, including 4 women with disabilities, were registered with the programme.

10. The Government of Gabon remained committed to promoting and protecting the rights of girls and women at the highest level, having appointed female representatives throughout the government, national institutions and the diplomatic corps. As a member of the Security Council, Gabon would continue to advocate for the role of women as key actors in peacebuilding and international security.

#### *Articles 1–6*

11. **Ms. Toé-Bouda** said that Gabon had made commendable progress in combating discrimination against women. It was regrettable, however, that civil society had been unable to submit contributions for the current review process.

12. **Ms. Tisheva** said that, as Gabonese law contained no clear definition of discrimination against women, she wished to know what steps were being taken to harmonize Gabonese law with the Convention in that regard and to ensure that gender equality laws were implemented within all government institutions. In particular, she wondered whether any mechanisms were in place to assess proposed bills and amend existing laws to ensure that they were aligned with the Convention.

13. She asked what measures had been taken to ensure that women – and in particular women who were poor or vulnerable or who faced sociocultural obstacles – were aware of their rights under the Convention and had access to justice, including free legal aid. She wondered whether additional budgetary resources had been assigned to such measures in the short term and whether such resources were decentralized. She asked what steps were being taken to establish judicial structures in isolated and rural areas and to provide tailored support for women in vulnerable groups.

14. **Ms. Nlend Koho** (Gabon) said that the Government worked closely with civil society organizations and, in future, would try to ensure that civil society played a greater role in preparing the country's periodic reports for the United Nations treaty bodies.

15. **Ms. Mboga** (Gabon), speaking via video link, said that, in 2021, the Criminal Code had been amended to prohibit discrimination on a wide range of grounds, including disability, political views, trade union activities, ethnic affiliation, race and gender. Article 291 of the Criminal Code established the acts that constituted forms of discrimination, which could

include sexual harassment and refusal to provide goods or services, and the penalties to which perpetrators of such acts were liable.

16. Persons whose incomes were below a certain level were entitled to apply to the Ministry of Justice for legal assistance. The Government had established partnerships with lawyers' offices in order to facilitate the provision of such assistance and enhance the support provided to victims. However, it was necessary to acknowledge that legal assistance mechanisms required additional funding to ensure that they functioned effectively. In order to enhance access to justice in rural areas, courts had been established in all provincial capitals. Many court buildings had been made accessible to persons with disabilities.

17. **Ms. Tisheva**, noting that standards relating to the burden of proof were different in civil law and criminal law, said that she wished to know whether the Government would consider prohibiting discrimination in civil as well as in criminal law to ensure the protection of women in all areas of life. She would be interested to learn what steps were being taken to ensure access to justice for all women in every part of the country.

18. **Ms. Nlend Koho** (Gabon) said that representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs were present in every department in the country to support victims of human rights violations and ensure their access to justice. Social workers around the country were also trained to provide victims with different forms of support.

19. **Ms. Ameline** said that she wished to know what was being done to fill the gaps in national law and implement existing laws effectively in order to overcome sociocultural barriers to the full realization of women's rights. She asked whether the Government would consider strengthening the status of the National Commission on Human Rights and enhancing coordination mechanisms in order to improve cooperation between government bodies and between the Government and its external partners. It would be interesting to know whether adequate State funding would be allocated to bodies that were currently underfunded, including the Directorate General for the Advancement of Women, whether gender-sensitive budgeting would be introduced to further promote women's rights and whether the steering committee on legislative reform established in 2019 would be given a new mandate to expedite the reform process. The delegation might indicate whether training on laws affecting women was provided to the staff of all government bodies and whether implementing decrees and circulars were used to raise awareness of new laws and ensure that they were properly implemented. She would be grateful to know whether adequate funds were allocated to civil society organizations working to raise awareness of new laws, including among religious and traditional leaders.

20. She asked what measures would be taken to disseminate the Committee's concluding observations as widely as possible and how the Government intended to strengthen the coordination between the various strategies and mechanisms implemented to protect women and promote their advancement. Lastly, she wondered whether disaggregated data on complaints of gender-based violence were available and whether mobile court hearings would be used to enhance access to justice for victims of gender-based violence in rural areas.

21. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that she wished to know whether the Government would make greater use of temporary special measures to remove obstacles to gender equality. She wondered what proportion of the beneficiaries of the youth apprenticeship contract were women and whether any other temporary special measures, such as outreach support programmes, were used to promote gender equality in all areas where women faced discrimination. The Committee would welcome information on any plans in place to introduce gender-based health care and gender-sensitive budgeting and to establish time-bound projects to promote women's representation in areas where they were underrepresented.

22. **Ms. Nlend Koho** (Gabon) said that the Government made efforts to ensure that all its strategies and programmes were adequately funded. In that connection, funding had been allocated to the implementation of the Gabon *Égalité* strategy for the promotion of women's rights and the reduction of gender equality. Although gender-sensitive budgeting was a new concept in Gabon, its introduction was being considered and steps were being taken to make government officials aware of what the term meant.

23. As part of the gender equality strategy, the decision had been taken to set up an observatory for the rights of women. In that connection, a bill providing for the establishment of the observatory had been prepared. The observatory would report to the Office of the Prime Minister, which, as the highest government body, would ensure the collection of all the data required for the observatory to carry out its work. The Government had undertaken a large-scale campaign to raise awareness of recent legal reforms and their possible impact.

24. The Government and civil society organizations worked together to ensure the implementation of laws intended to protect women with disabilities. A task force established under the Gabon Égalité government programme, which was headed by the Prime Minister, met every three months to follow up on the implementation of the different strategies for promoting women's rights. The Government would shortly be distributing a booklet on the forms of support available to widows. The Ministry of Social Affairs was planning to make grants available to persons with disabilities, including girls.

25. **Ms. Tchomtchoua Nguema Metogo** (Gabon), speaking via video link, said that an inclusive process, involving community leaders, religious leaders and the heads of civil society organizations, had been carried out to promote the implementation of the legal reforms recently undertaken by the Government.

26. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she wished to know whether, in addition to the various legal reforms mentioned by the delegation, additional measures would be taken to combat gender stereotyping and discriminatory attitudes towards women and girls. The Committee would welcome information on any measures being taken to tackle harmful traditional practices and discriminatory attitudes in all sectors of society, including in media outlets and traditional communities. She would be grateful to know what was being done to remove gender stereotypes from textbooks.

27. She would appreciate information regarding the principal components of the law on the elimination of all forms of violence against women, for instance whether it provided for research and data collection. It was important to assist women in surmounting obstacles to lodging complaints based on fear or lack of confidence in existing institutions. She would be grateful to have information on measures aimed at ensuring that existing procedures complied with international standards governing gender-based violence, in particular the Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

28. As there were reportedly no shelters or rehabilitation services in the State party, she wished to know what measures were being taken to remedy that situation. While she welcomed the amendments to the Criminal Code, she considered that certain provisions, for instance regarding adultery and abandonment of the family home, treated men and women unequally and violated constitutional rights. She would therefore like to know whether those provisions might be reviewed.

29. **Ms. Gabr** said it was regrettable that no mention had been made of trafficking in the delegation's opening statement, since the exploitation of women and children from Gabon and neighbouring countries was quite a serious problem. She wished to know why the Government had failed to adopt an action plan to combat trafficking and to establish a ministerial committee tasked with investigating the causes of trafficking and with drafting anti-trafficking legislation.

30. With regard to the protection of victims, most shelters were reportedly run by NGOs. She asked whether the Government provided support for the management of such shelters and whether it planned to offer assistance to victims through awareness-raising campaigns, training of labour inspectors, procedures for the identification of victims and the establishment of hotlines.

31. The Criminal Code criminalized sex trafficking, but the prescribed penalties were less severe than those imposed for crimes such as rape. She wished to know whether the Government was taking steps to limit the demand for prostitution and to assist prostitutes who wished to reintegrate into society.

32. **Ms. Nlend Koho** (Gabon) said that meetings were arranged with religious leaders and representatives of civil society prior to the enactment of legislation in order to consider their

comments and secure their support. For instance, an awareness-raising campaign had been conducted prior to the promulgation of Act No. 006/2021 in September 2021 on the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

33. The hotline for victims and witnesses was anonymous so that women did not need to fear reprisals. A call centre that operated round the clock, seven days a week, could arrange for meetings with specialists such as lawyers on behalf of women who lacked the requisite resources to receive formal support.

34. The Government was collaborating with other Governments in combating the crime of trafficking. A shelter for child victims of trafficking from other countries had been established in Gabon and they were returned home as soon as their families were contacted.

35. **Ms. Mboga** (Gabon) said that Act No. 38/2008 prohibiting female genital mutilation had been reviewed in 2021 and aggravating circumstances had been specified. Adultery was no longer an offence under the law but remained a ground for divorce. Act No. 006/2021 on the elimination of violence against women contained a definition of violence against women, prescribed penalties for perpetrators and provided for awareness-raising, training, prevention and victim support.

36. **Ms. Biyogou Minko** (Gabon) said that the Government accorded priority to action to combat transnational organized crime, including trafficking. After ratifying the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, in 2010, the Government had implemented a programme of action aimed at enhancing professionals' ability to combat trafficking. The Criminal Code had initially focused on child trafficking, but it had been amended in 2019 to criminalize all kinds of trafficking of human beings and very severe penalties were prescribed. The action plan was currently being amended to reflect the broader definition of trafficking.

37. **Ms. Tchomtchoua Nguema Metogo** (Gabon), referring to the impact of customary practices, said that her Government worked closely with civil society and with international organizations, such as the United Nations Population Fund, to raise awareness of the reforms of such practices and of action to eliminate stereotypes in local communities.

38. **Ms. Nlend Koho** (Gabon) said that the Ministry had invited men, including religious leaders, to present their views on its programme on the promotion of women's rights.

#### *Articles 7–9*

39. **Ms. Ameline** commended the State party for the incorporation of the principle of gender parity into the Constitution and political system, the establishment of an elected office quota for women and the appointment of a female Prime Minister. However, the electoral results failed to meet the target. For instance, women accounted, on average, for less than 20 per cent of members of parliament. She recommended the adoption of a national action plan to promote a parity-based system, particularly among the younger generation, in partnership with traditional leaders and councils of elders. She wished to know whether the State party was prepared to take resolute action, based on the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and in cooperation with political parties, to bridge the electoral gap by conducting awareness-raising campaigns and by stopping the belittlement of women and all forms of violence.

40. She would be interested in hearing how the State party proposed to finance its recently adopted national action plan on peace and security and whether it involved women members of the diplomatic corps. Lastly, she wished to know whether a proactive approach to diplomatic appointments was being taken with a view to promoting parity at all levels of decision-making.

41. **Ms. Nlend Koho** (Gabon) said that efforts were being made to encourage more women and young people to participate in political life. The Gabon *Égalité* strategy included, for example, a mentoring programme to train women for careers in politics. The legislation governing electoral quotas for women was not fully complied with by all political parties, but none of them denied women access. The challenge consisted in sparking women's interest in politics; some women tended to fear the risk of violence that political activity carried. It was therefore essential for women politicians to change such attitudes and to provide women

with the necessary encouragement. The Government had allocated funds to finance the plan concerning women, peace and security based on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and it also hoped to receive contributions from United Nations agencies.

42. **Ms. Narain** said that the Committee noted with concern that 11 per cent of children in the State party were not registered with the civil registry. It would therefore appreciate information on the strategy in place to ensure universal birth registration. The Strategic Plan for Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Nutrition for 2019–2023 provided for the progressive integration of registration services into health-care facilities. She would be grateful for an update on the implementation of that objective. The issuance of a certificate attesting to the fact that a woman had given birth was conditional on payment of the costs of childbirth. She wished to know whether, in cases where the parents could not afford to pay the costs, any action had been taken to ensure that a birth certificate would nonetheless be issued. Lastly, she wondered whether the State party would consider acceding to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*