



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
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Summary record of the 521st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 12 July 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Abaka

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

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

Combined initial, second and third periodic report of Guinea (continued) (CEDAW/C/GIN/1-3 and Corr.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Guinea resumed their places at the Committee table.*

Article 2 (continued)

2. **Ms. Kwaku**, noting that a draft Code of Personal Status and Family Law had been submitted for adoption, wondered how much input from women and women's groups had gone into the preparation of the draft.

Article 3

3. **Ms. Gabr** said that she could not overemphasize the importance of statistics for determining the gaps between de jure and de facto equality for women. Undoubtedly some legislation required revision, but the far harder task under article 3 was to raise awareness to overcome traditional attitudes, for example, to persuade rural communities of the importance of women's literacy, contraceptive use and practices to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. Non-governmental organizations, including religious associations, could play an important role in combating illiteracy and HIV/AIDS and in influencing community attitudes. She was encouraged by the efforts described in the report on behalf of women with disabilities.

4. **Ms. Hazelle** said that she, too, applauded the Government's efforts to address the problem of integrating women with disabilities into the fabric of society and commended the candid statement of aims and problems. The programmes described appeared to focus on adults, and that led her to wonder if there were any programmes for disabled children, since the problem could be more effectively addressed at an early stage and with a holistic approach. Specifically, she would like to know whether there were programmes to teach speech- and hearing-impaired children using sign language or blind children using Braille. She wondered whether the National Directorate for the Promotion of Women in collaboration with the

Department of Education or the Department's own equity committee were involved in promoting programmes for disabled girls.

5. Since there were no specific provisions in the Constitution on persons with disabilities and since they made up 10 per cent of the population, she would like to know whether any amendments to that effect were contemplated. She would also appreciate further information on efforts to promote the participation of women with disabilities in political movements, with statistics on membership and level of involvement; on the quota system for the hiring of women with disabilities; and on any programmes for elderly women with disabilities. She was interested in learning more about the vocational training courses given by the Guinean Association of Women for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons and any government support for them. Community-based reintegration, as described in the report, was a sound approach, but programmes would be required to make the community aware that the disabled need not live off charity but could contribute, given the chance. Perhaps more information could be provided on the community-based reintegration, including community education aspects.

6. **Ms. Livingstone Raday** said that she was interested in hearing in some detail about the percentages allotted for gender development in the national budget, particularly for literacy and maternity care. The 82 per cent female illiteracy rate and the 33 per cent rate of enrolment of girls in primary school made it clear that illiteracy was a major obstacle to the advancement of women, equalled only by the serious health problems resulting from the acute shortage of health care. The report had mentioned that in middle Guinea, for example, there was only one midwife for every 74,610 inhabitants. Since it appeared that the restructuring plan carried out with the support of the International Monetary Fund had benefited few of the country's people and had actually exacerbated the unequal treatment of men and women, the Committee was keenly interested in knowing how much, in percentage terms, the Government was prepared to invest in reducing illiteracy, providing incentives to send girls to primary school and improving maternity care.

7. **Ms. Kwaku** noted that the report mentioned five legal aid centres for women's rights that had been set up in Conakry. She wished to know whether there were plans to establish other such centres in rural areas.

Article 4

8. **Ms. Myakayaka-Manzini** commended the delegation for its full written and oral reports and said that, although Guinea had not reported before, in the years that had passed since its ratification of the Convention it had obviously learned much about what implementation would entail. Despite the many problems, it was a shining example to other countries with a large Muslim population, in that it had ratified the Convention without reservations and was committed to dealing with the issues.

9. The report had nothing to say about temporary special measures, such as quotas, to accelerate increased participation by women in political decision-making. Women's presence in the decision-making process was key to progress in other areas of women's advancement and added a valuable perspective on all issues. Experience had shown that one of the most effective mechanisms for increasing women's representation in the legislature was to push for quotas on party lists. She would be interested to know whether any such quota measures were being contemplated by political parties or urged by women's pressure groups within the parties.

10. **Ms. Achmad** said that the delegation's extensive report had clearly required collaboration by a variety of government departments, and that encouraged her to believe that the same ability to coordinate could be applied to implementing the Convention. Guinea was to be congratulated on having ratified the Convention without reservations. Many constitutional guarantees had been put in place, despite the constraints of social and cultural attitudes.

11. She would appreciate clarification on some of the special measures reported in implementation of article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention. She wondered what was implied by the special measure to assure all female high school graduates entry into university, since the Convention stipulated that temporary special measures should in no way entail the maintenance of unequal or separate standards. She would appreciate more details on the recommendations reportedly implemented to encourage female students to study scientific subjects and take technical training courses. The training activities mentioned concerning maternal and infant health, family planning and sanitation should not be thought of as special temporary measures but as fundamental, ongoing programmes, which should also

provide an opportunity for changing the attitudes of men and involving them more fully in such responsibilities. She wondered whether the statement that discriminatory stereotypes had been removed from school curricula and textbooks meant that there were in fact new textbooks and curricula compulsory in all schools, including village schools. With or without new textbooks, teacher training in gender concepts would be essential.

12. Among the measures mentioned under article 4, paragraph 2, were affordable pre- and post-natal care, assistance with delivery, vaccination and family planning services provided by the Ministry of Health; she would like to know whether such services were available free of charge to the neediest women, primarily the rural poor. The report also stated that Guinean women had influenced the course of the country's history by pressing for the removal of commercial barriers; it would be interesting to learn something about the subsequent development of that movement. With regard to the mention of the important role of the mass media in developing information campaigns in the national languages and enhancing the status of women's work, she would like to know whether the media in question were publicly or privately controlled and how the Government went about working with them. She was impressed by the National Women's Day programmes and was curious to know whether non-governmental organizations were involved in their planning.

13. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said that temporary special measures constituted one of the most important instruments in the Convention, because they allowed for temporary positive discrimination or preferment of women to accelerate their advancement. Preference given to equally qualified female candidates, for university places or study grants was a good example; if admission standards were, in fact, temporarily relaxed, remedial training would be necessary in order for the measure to work. Most of the so-called special measures listed in the report, however, were not temporary special measures in the sense of article 4, paragraph 1, but simply sound government policy. What that provision of the Convention offered was an opportunity to accelerate the achievement of equality.

14. Given the tremendous handicap under which the women and girls of Guinea laboured, action under the article would require a massive flood of programmes: massive campaigns to promote women's literacy,

health, political representation and access to microcredits. Despite high illiteracy and low school enrolment, women qualified to be appointed to public office could certainly be found in Guinea. Educated women in public office would serve as catalysts for the advancement of women and as role models exemplifying the usefulness of education.

Article 5

15. **Ms. Myakayaka-Manzini** said that she wondered how violations of the laws against polygamy and female genital mutilation were addressed, if any monitoring mechanisms existed and whether there had been any prosecutions. Levirate and sororate marriage had also been outlawed as violations of the rights of women, and she asked what steps had been taken to put that law into practice.

16. **Ms. Gaspard** said that even though some women in polygamous marriages expressed satisfaction with their situation, the practice undermined the equality and dignity of women. She asked whether any information campaigns had been conducted to make the public aware that polygamy was illegal. UNIFEM studies had likewise shown that the practice of female genital mutilation had declined where there had been public awareness campaigns, and she wondered if any had been conducted or were planned for Guinea.

17. **Ms. Ferrer Gómez** said that she recognized the difficulty in changing cultural patterns, especially with scarce resources, but that it was still urgent to make the attempt. Her main concern was that violence against women was a daily occurrence, and that most such violence was committed with impunity. In order for laws to work, consciousness-raising among the people was needed. She was also concerned that education and awareness activities were not explicitly included in the work of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women and Childhood. The lack of statistics on violence against women was an area the Ministry should also address.

18. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that in dealing with violence against women, education for the judiciary, law enforcement officials and health-care providers was very important. The Committee's General Recommendation No. 19 on violence against women might be very helpful.

19. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said that the inequality between men and women in the legal age for marriage

must be remedied. She would also like to know what the Government planned to do about forced marriage and whether any education campaigns were planned to explain its negative effects on society. The efforts to encourage practitioners of female genital mutilation to learn another profession showed laudable cultural sensitivity; that approach could be taken to other social issues.

Article 6

20. **Ms. Taya** noted that the civil conflict in Guinea, rapidly followed by structural adjustment of the economy, had been particularly devastating to women. As a result, many of the impoverished women concentrated in the cities had turned to prostitution for survival. She would like to hear details of any government policy to combat prostitution, other than criminalization, which did not address the poverty which was its root cause.

21. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** asked how the Government planned to react to the danger posed by the high rate of HIV/AIDS infection among prostitutes.

Article 7

22. **Ms. Regazzoli** said that the Government of Guinea should be commended for the clarity with which it had identified the problems women faced, providing a good basis for setting policy. The next step, however, was to establish plans and programmes to combat those problems, and to share information on the results obtained. Given the high illiteracy rates, she wondered how the Government managed to conduct education and awareness programmes that were comprehensive.

23. **Ms. Gaspard** said that, although it should indeed be a source of pride that a Guinean woman had been the first woman to preside over the Security Council, the fact remained that women were still under-represented in politics and decision-making. The high level of illiteracy among women was often given as a reason, yet the relatively low literacy rates among men did not seem to prevent them from becoming involved in decision-making structures. Special measures to include women in such structures seemed necessary.

Article 9

24. **Ms. Goonesekere** said that the nationality policies discussed on pages 46 and 47 of the report

seemed to contain some discriminatory provisions which should be clarified.

25. **Ms. Shin** requested clarification of the age of majority.

Article 10

26. **Ms. Cui** said that Guinea faced, according to the report, a serious problem with regard to the education of girl children: a very high illiteracy rate, low school enrolment, and a high school drop-out rate. She asked what those in the Government working to protect women were doing in cooperation with the education authorities to eradicate illiteracy among girl children. There would seem to be an urgent need to institute some kind of priority or preferential policies, including additional resources, to increase the enrolment of girl children and reduce their drop-out rate. Such preferential treatment could include, for instance, making education free for girls or providing them with grants. Female genital mutilation was, apparently, still a serious problem in Guinea. Education to combat that practice should be introduced as early as possible in the school curriculum so that all children would reject the practice.

27. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** supported Ms. Cui's remarks with regard to need to combat the high illiteracy rate among girls and women in Guinea.

28. **Ms. Taya** expressed her concern at the large number of Guinean girls being expelled from school as a result of becoming pregnant. The level of knowledge about contraception and reproductive health seemed to be very low, possibly even lower among girls in school than those not in school. Access to family planning counselling and techniques appeared to be insufficient. She was sure that the Guinean authorities realized that a population explosion could lead to serious social tensions. A more vigorous campaign of sex education, especially in rural areas, was urgently needed, possibly including radio broadcasts in local languages.

29. **Ms. Goonesekere** said that the experience of Asian countries with regard to female illiteracy had shown that a massive allocation of resources, including for adult education of women, was needed. Social development, with education in first place, was critical for economic growth. In order not to restrict a girl's opportunities to marriage and family life, substantial investment in education for girls and women was required at all levels, not just at the primary level. She

asked how many young women had gone on to higher education. The situation with regard to the policy of expelling pregnant girls from school was not clear: some schools still seemed to continue the policy despite its official repeal, and she asked for more information on that situation.

30. **Ms. Achmad** said that the information on "family education" in section 10.1 of the report was very disturbing, as such policies curtailed girls' chances of receiving the education they needed to participate actively in the life of the country and perpetuated the exploitation of girls and women. Guinea had ratified the Convention without reservation, including article 10, and a massive campaign was needed to ensure that all girls received a standard education.

31. **Ms. Kwaku** emphasized that education was the key to development and should be free and compulsory for girls as well as boys.

Article 12

32. **Ms. Corti** urged the delegation of Guinea to study the Committee's General Recommendation No. 24 on health. Only full equality of health services for men and women could ensure the healthy growth of a nation. The mortality statistics for women and children in Guinea were alarming and seemed to reflect an inequality of services or, at least, disparities in the services used. It would appear, for instance, that men, who had higher incomes, tended to use hospitals, which were more expensive, whereas women and children, with fewer resources, went to clinics, which were cheaper but less well-equipped. She asked whether all health services charged their clients fees. Was the health budget rising or falling and what was the role of the private sector in providing health services? With regard to abortion, which was officially illegal in Guinea, she noted that illegal abortions were still performed, that the maternal mortality rate was very high and that there were severe legal consequences for anyone known to have been involved, including medical equipment suppliers and nurses. She urged that a massive campaign should be mounted against the practice of female genital mutilation, which still persisted despite legal and constitutional bans. HIV/AIDS, already a serious problem among women in Guinea, was proving worse as increasing numbers of women became infected. There too, a decisive, massive campaign was called for, with international support if

possible. In closing, she asked about health services for refugee women.

33. **Ms. Kwaku** asked for an explanation of the term “cost recovery system” referred to in section 12.2 of the report dealing with care for pregnant women.

34. **Ms. Abaka**, speaking in her personal capacity as an expert, stressed the importance of traditional medicine in Africa, especially since many women had no other source of care. Research should be encouraged into traditional medications and dosages. More health education, especially on the subject of diet and food taboos, could help to combat malnutrition and ill health.

Article 13

35. **Ms. Kwaku** asked for clarification of the term “reversibility pension” on page 91 of the report. She also asked for more information on the Gender and Development Framework Programme, referred to on page 92. With regard to the Integrated Enterprise Development Programme, which was described on page 94 of the report, she asked what percentage of the participants were women.

36. **Ms. Corti** noted that Guinean rural women were severely marginalized and had poor access to health services. The illiteracy rate among women was far higher in rural areas than in urban ones. Noting that rural women sometimes worked 17 to 18 hours per day, she asked why many more women than men were working in the rural sector, and what measures the Government was taking to redress that situation. Although changes were occurring, such as the organization of rural cooperatives, and the access to credit for rural women, much remained to be done. The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women and Childhood should concentrate its attention on improving the lot of rural women, the most exploited sector in Guinea.

37. **Ms. González** said, with reference to article 16, that many provisions of the Guinean Civil Code contravened the terms of the Convention, rendering it invalid. The Guinean Government must take steps to resolve that legal contradiction; it must eliminate both *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination. In particular, it should closely analyse the Committee’s General Recommendation No. 21, on equality in marriage and family relations, and endeavour to end open discrimination against women within the family.

38. **Ms. Achmad** said she strongly supported the views expressed by Ms. González. Furthermore, the State party should seek to disseminate information about the Convention, since many of the persons who should be responsible for its implementation, including lawyers, legislators, law professors, police, judges, and administrators, were unaware of its existence. It was also important to inform the broader community, including in particular the traditional leaders, who were often more influential than lawmakers. Moreover, in its application of General Recommendation No. 21, the State party should target specific population groups.

39. **Ms. Acar**, expressing her support for the views of Ms. González, enquired what was the meaning of the assertion, on page 114 of the report, that families could invoke religion as a reason for rejecting a marriage proposal. She would like to know, in particular, whether families were legally empowered to reject a marriage, who legally represented the family for that purpose, and whether such a provision was seen as compatible with the right of women to consent to marriage. If the family’s rejection of a suitor had the force of law, could a woman challenge such a decision before the court?

40. Polygamy was illegal in Guinea, and yet half of Guinean women were in polygamous marriages. That was too significant a phenomenon to be justified by a mere inability to implement the law. She suspected that the Government was reluctant to combat polygamy. The report suggested that women viewed polygamy as a useful division of labour in the household, and it was a well-known sociological fact that patriarchal attitudes were often encouraged by women.

41. She urged the Government to endeavour to change attitudes with a view to improving women’s daily lives, to take innovative measures to encourage the sharing of household responsibilities between wife and husband, rather than between wives, and to describe any progress made in the next report. One such measure would be an education campaign to teach the public about the adverse effects of polygamy, which increased domestic violence, both between husband and wives and between wives, had detrimental consequences for children, and were an affront to the dignity of women. Finally, she was astonished by the assertion, on page 114 of the report, that the Civil Code contained loopholes that allowed men to remarry. How was that possible in a country that outlawed polygamy? Clarifications would be welcome.

42. **Ms. Abaka** inquired whether any Guinean woman whose husband had taken a second wife had challenged the legality of that marriage before the courts.

43. **Ms. Goonesekere** said she wondered how the systems of law, customary law, and custom operated together in Guinean society. The report stated that Guinean law protected the rights of women, but the descriptions of actual legislative provisions demonstrated the contrary. According to the report, the Civil Code limited the right of a widow to remarry (p. 114), and indicated that forced marriage and child marriage existed. Guinea should review its legal systems to determine to what areas the civil law and the customary law applied, and should reform all provisions that discriminated against women. Special attention should be paid to reforming the family law, which ran counter to Guinea's strides on behalf of women in the area of public policy and education.

44. **Ms. Kwaku**, noting that the Civil Code allowed a husband to seek divorce on the grounds of a wife's adultery, but only permitted a wife to do so if the other woman was living in the family home as a concubine, asked what measures the Government was taking to remedy that situation.

45. **Ms. Livingstone Raday** urged Guinea to institute both de jure and de facto equality in the family, and noted that the social inequality of women largely stemmed from inequality in the family. Interestingly, that situation was partly authorized by the legal system and partly allowed by the non-enforcement of the legal system. The issues not fully addressed by the legal system, despite the apparent political will, included the power of male heads of household, female genital mutilation, the non-enforcement of laws prohibiting polygamy, and the lower school enrolment rate of girls. Since such realities limited the ability of women and girls to function in society, she urged the Government to use educational methods, professional training methods, and budgetary measures to remedy the situation. Legal reforms, moreover, could be undertaken without great expenditure of resources. Since the subordination of women in the family prevented them from fully contributing to the development of society, the implementation of article 16 was crucial to the future of Guinea.

46. **Ms. Aribot** (Guinea) expressed her sincere thanks for all the suggestions and questions. The

challenging and instructive dialogue taking place would guide her Government in taking up arms on behalf of Guinean women and doing battle against discrimination in Guinean society. Her delegation would answer the questions as fully as possible and would convey additional answers at a later date.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.