



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

Twenty-second session

Summary record of the 459th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 27 January 2000, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. González

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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*)

Second and third periodic reports of Burkina Faso (continued) (CEDAW/C/BFA/2-3)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Guigma, Ms. Ilboudo, Ms. Kaboré, Ms. Ouédraogo and Ms. Sanwidi (Burkina Faso) took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Kim Yung-chung** stressed the importance of education. It was regrettable that, despite some progress in eradicating illiteracy, Burkina Faso still had one of the lowest school enrolment rates in the world. She hoped that, despite the difficulties confronting the country, human and budgetary resources would be allocated to education as a matter of priority.

3. **Ms. Manalo** commended the State party on its frank report, its effective campaign against genital mutilation and its adoption of strong legislation on maternity and abortion. She nonetheless identified three obstacles to progress in combating gender-based discrimination: poverty, lack of education and existing customs, traditions, taboos and stereotypes. She joined in emphasizing the importance of education, particularly universal literacy programmes, in efforts to eradicate poverty. While welcoming the establishment of satellite schools and formal education for boys and girls, she strongly recommended that special measures should be taken to improve girls' education.

4. The State party must also strengthen its family planning services, as well as improve women's access to employment by providing better formal and informal education for girls and embodying positive discrimination in its legislation; the national machinery for women and non-governmental organizations could lobby to that end. The report contained no information on the positive and negative impact of globalization on the situation of women. In that connection, she urged the State party to strengthen the role of women in small and medium-sized enterprises through training and the provision of resources. The authorities of Burkina Faso should also take steps to promote the advancement of women through the media, and to protect women from the harmful consequences of information technology.

5. **Ms. Taya** commended the State party on its frankness in discussing the difficulties it faced. She expressed concern at the poverty among rural women in Burkina Faso and stressed the importance of better access to loans and jobs outside the agricultural sector. She enquired about the meaning of the phrase "under the conditions set by the laws in force", contained in Law AN VIII-0039 BIS/FP/PRES on land ownership, and asked how rural women fared under that law. She requested details of the repeal of the previous, more favourable, order of 4 August 1984, which had provided for the distribution of land to those with a real social need.

6. She endorsed earlier statements about the employment of women, noting that Act No. 11/92/ADP of 22 December 1992 prohibiting discrimination needed to be supplemented by special measures that ensured job opportunities for women, consistent with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention.

7. **Ms. Myakayaka-Manzini** commended the State party on its open, transparent and honest report, which not only identified obstacles to equality but also suggested remedial action. She hailed its efforts to implement special measures to increase women's participation in political life, which would help to eliminate stereotypes, educate male officials and the population at large about women's potential and abilities and ensure that women's issues were placed on the political agenda. Regarding the sensitive issue of polygamy, she enquired about legal protection for women who opposed polygamy and about the divorce rate in Burkina Faso, in that she assumed that men who were prevented from practising polygamy would file for divorce.

8. **Ms. Ilboudo** (Burkina Faso) said that a first wife could go to court to oppose a second marriage by her husband. It was not clear, however, which civil authority would be competent to handle the matter. In response to an earlier question, she said that priority was accorded to monogamy; it was therefore possible, through the courts, to revert from a polygamous to a monogamous regime, but not the opposite. Divorce statistics were not updated, but she believed that the divorce rate was low. In the event of marital difficulties, extended families often intervened to bring about a reconciliation; recourse to the courts was therefore a last resort and rarely used.

9. **Ms. Sanwidi** (Burkina Faso) said that special efforts were being made in Burkina Faso to incorporate rural women in all development projects, and donors even imposed that as a condition. Women participated in the design and execution of development projects and in decision-making bodies at the village level. It was difficult to establish indicators of the evolution of the social climate, a topic which people did not always discuss. Nonetheless, it was evident that economically active women had earned the respect and support of their husbands, not only because they were empowered but also because men realized that the additional income was beneficial to them as well. Women with children were generally unable to attend literacy courses held in the larger urban centres, which lasted several days. Efforts were being made to provide childcare facilities during a regional literacy course planned for February; however, donors were unwilling to bear the additional costs which that would entail. It was also difficult to maintain literacy in the national language, as all documents in Burkina Faso, other than a few newspapers, were published in French. The authorities were being requested to issue more identification and other administrative documents in the national language.

10. With regard to the question of guarantees on loans for women, she said that, since individuals did not hold title to land in rural areas, loans were generally granted and guaranteed on a collective basis. As a result, all members of a legally recognized group were liable if any one member failed to repay a loan.

11. Education was indeed a Government priority and plans of action were periodically implemented to promote it. Under the current three-phase plan of action for the period 2000-2009, specific targets had been set for school enrolment by girls. The total cost of the plan of action would be 235 billion CFA francs, meaning that resources would have to be mobilized. One objective of the plan of action was the allocation of 20 per cent of the national budget to education by the year 2009. The funds earmarked for education over the past decade had amounted to as much as 3 per cent of the gross domestic product; in 1997, however, that figure had declined to 1.8 per cent.

12. The Government was carrying out studies into the impact of globalization. It was taking steps to train female entrepreneurs to become more competitive in regional and international markets and rural women to acquire skills in food processing, a more lucrative

sector than agriculture. To that end, technicians were being assigned to every province. There were also agricultural focal points within all ministerial departments; indeed, she was the agricultural focal point in her own department.

13. **Ms. Kaboré** (Burkina Faso), referring to the application of legislative texts, said that the main obstacles to the application of those texts were illiteracy and most women's complete ignorance of the legal protections available to them. Formal education therefore was not sufficient in itself; women needed to be aware of the law and also willing to file complaints so that cases could be brought to court. A change of attitude was needed from all those wishing to see the advancement of women.

14. The Government's main strategy was currently information. Educated women had no difficulty finding out about their rights and invoking them, but rural and uneducated women were in a different position. They had not been abandoned, however, and help was available, at the national, regional, provincial and even village level, from the Ministry for Social Affairs and the Family. The emphasis was on providing information to both sexes, so that men as well as women were aware of their rights and responsibilities.

15. An information campaign on the Individual and Family Code had been carried out in six provinces, in which 20,000 women had been informed of their rights in such areas as marriage, divorce, succession and adoption. Legal offices had been set up in the six provinces concerned, and many women had subsequently gone to them for more information on their rights. The office's legal adviser had the power to refer cases to the judicial authorities. She was optimistic that, by the time its next report was submitted, the figures for Burkina Faso would reflect a greatly reduced incidence of exclusion, forced marriage and the levirate, which was also prohibited by law. A few cases of excision and forced marriage had already come before the courts, and there were some 200 cases of girls who had left home to avoid forced marriages and who were staying in women's centres. Clearly, mentalities were changing, although it would be long process. Women were gradually being empowered, the necessary legislation was in place and it was up to women to organize and demand their rights. Women were in fact organizing at the national level, with the help of the Minister for the Advancement of Women, non-governmental organizations and the focal points

within each ministry; she herself was the focal point for the Ministry for Social Affairs and the Family.

16. **Ms. Ouédraogo** (Burkina Faso) said that we would focus on abortion and family planning in Burkina Faso. Abortion was prohibited by law, but action was being taken to prevent unwanted pregnancies among adolescents and to provide emergency care in cases of clandestine abortion.

17. The report referred to a youth programme in the family health sector. That programme was under way and youth centres were being established which conducted activities aimed at preventing unwanted pregnancies and abortion. Health programmes organized by the Association for Family Well-Being provided health education for young people and the Burkina Faso Midwives Association was also working in that area. It had been found that, in the past, reproductive health programmes had not been very successful because their staff lacked training. Training courses had therefore been redesigned with the help of Family Care International, a non-governmental organization which had provided technical support to the National School of Public Health in revising health education programmes and integrating elements related to reproductive health. All health-care service providers were being trained in pre- and post-abortion care, while nurses and midwives were being trained in the manual intra-uterine aspiration technique, which could save lives. The same policy of enhancing staff training was being pursued with regard to family planning. No midwife or nurse could graduate without receiving training in modern methods of family planning. Even assistant midwives and health outreach workers, who had often not received any training in the past, were being taught to provide family planning services. Efforts were also being made to integrate family planning in health service delivery and studies were being made to see how family planning services could best be made available to women.

18. She expected that very different indicators and statistics would be available by the time the next report was prepared. There had already been a definite qualitative improvement in health training and nurses and midwives graduating in the current year would be able to use all their new skills in providing health services.

19. **Ms. Corti** agreed that the most pressing problem for the advancement of women was education.

However, education for women, and women's emancipation in the broadest sense, would not be achieved until women participated more fully in the political process. The number of women in the Assembly of People's Deputies was very low by comparison with women's contribution to national development.

20. Education was also essential for combating violence against women. Not only must women be taught to read and write, but civic education was needed in order to change individual attitudes and encourage greater respect for women in the family. Human rights education was also needed, which meant publishing and disseminating to the public at large information on the international treaties ratified by Burkina Faso and on the obligations and rights of its citizens by virtue of such ratification.

21. With regard to abortion, she was sure that, despite the legislation and policies described in the report, clandestine abortion had not been eliminated. If there were plans for any new legislation to protect women, she would urge the State party to grant women the right to make their own reproductive decisions; doctors should not be making those decisions. Obviously no woman would make the decision to have an abortion lightly and women should have the right to choose.

22. Reference had been made to the country's dependence on foreign economic aid. She suggested that the various women's organizations should be contacted to see how they could best make use of such assistance. Many donor countries were now taking the protection of human rights and women's rights into account when making decisions on the granting of development assistance.

23. **Ms. Guigma** (Burkina Faso) agreed that education was the key to the advancement of women in her country. It was true that women had to overcome many obstacles in order to participate in the political process, but in the past three years, women had become more aware of their position and they were struggling to make themselves heard within the different political parties. The Association of Elected Women Officials was carrying out a general awareness-raising campaign and had succeeded in pushing through amendments to certain laws. Some political parties had established a 25 per cent quota for women candidates, and women's names were being placed in the middle of electoral lists, rather than at the end, to give them a better

chance of being elected. Women accounted for 52 per cent of the population and on election day they were the first to go out and vote. The political struggle was an uphill one, but it had begun to bear fruit as political parties and the nation as a whole became more aware of women's power. Even the Head of State, in his message to the nation, had referred to the role of women in Burkina Faso. Real solutions would surely be found, but women would have to work for them.

24. **Ms. Ilboudo** (Burkina Faso) said that Burkina Faso was aware of the importance of education in civil and human rights, without which no development was possible. The Government was tackling the issue directly and planned to reintroduce civil instruction for primary schoolchildren. The relevant modules were in the development stage and would soon be distributed to schools. At the national level, the National Committee to Combat Discrimination (CONALDIS) did not limit its action to matters related to the Convention, but worked with representatives of other human rights bodies to see how the issue of human rights could be mainstreamed into government activities and to demand the implementation of those rights in all programmes at every level.

25. **Ms. Guigma** (Burkina Faso) noted that, in introducing her delegation at the previous meeting, she had omitted to introduce Mr. Michel Kafando, the Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso to the United Nations.

26. She thanked Committee members for their comments and suggestions. Although the necessary political will did exist in her country and the population, especially women, were motivated to work for the advancement of women, lack of financial resources was the greatest obstacle to attaining that objective. She appealed to the Division for the Advancement of Women to allocate funding to Burkina Faso for the implementation of women's programmes.

27. **The Chairperson** commended the delegation of Burkina Faso for its very fruitful dialogue with the Committee. The Committee appreciated what was being done in Burkina Faso to implement the Convention. She trusted that the suggestions, comments and recommendations made by the Committee would be passed on to the Government and taken into account, in order to strengthen existing and future programmes in support of women's education and health and to transform the sociocultural models

and stereotypes rooted in tradition and custom that were impeding the advancement of women and their full participation in decision-making within the family and in society at large.

The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.