



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Eighty-second session

Summary record of the 1887th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 17 June 2022, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Acosta Vargas

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

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

Sixth periodic report of Namibia (CEDAW/C/NAM/6; CEDAW/C/NAM/Q/6; CEDAW/C/NAM/RQ/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Namibia joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia), introducing her country's sixth periodic report (CEDAW/C/NAM/6), said that the Government of Namibia had made great strides towards gender equality and continued to enact legislation to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls. Nevertheless, rising levels of gender-based and sexual violence, and isolated cases of harmful cultural practices and gender stereotypes, hindered the Government's efforts to fulfil its obligations under the Convention. In response, the Government was pursuing behaviour change communication strategies, which included a mass media campaign to raise awareness about gender-based violence among men and women between the ages of 18 and 55 years. Gender-based and sexual violence were addressed through targeted policies, legislative amendments and institutional arrangements that increased protection measures and budgetary allocations for prevention and response, although greater emphasis should be placed on prevention and rehabilitation with a survivor-centred, multisectoral approach.
3. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had disproportionately affected women in Namibia, particularly those in vulnerable and minority groups. The Government had implemented a stimulus and relief package and created a centre that provided information on gender equality, domestic violence and women's empowerment in relation to the pandemic. Support services for survivors of domestic violence and violence against women had been strengthened during the pandemic through a response plan for gender-based violence and violence against women that enabled women and girls to report violence to police stations or via helplines.
4. All survivors of violence had access to protection orders and psychosocial services through Gender-Based Violence Protection Units. Amendments had been proposed to the Combating of Rape Act, the Labour Act and the Combating of Domestic Violence Act that would strengthen the prevention of, and response to, gender-based violence; those amendments were currently before Parliament. The National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence was implemented via a multisectoral approach that included civil society to target the root causes of gender-based violence and monitor and evaluate prevention measures. Specialist courts had been established throughout the country, and gender-based violence was addressed in schools. Campaigns to raise traditional and religious leaders' awareness of positive gender roles and harmful gender stereotypes were organized by the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, which had also implemented measures targeting men and boys to eliminate harmful gender norms and toxic masculinity.
5. Together with civil society and other stakeholders, the Ministry also organized awareness-raising campaigns on gender-based violence, violence against children and trafficking in persons. International organizations assisted in providing annual training on trafficking for immigration, law enforcement and justice officials throughout the country, and particularly near the border, and education was provided to border communities and in schools. All cases of trafficking were investigated by a division of the Namibia Police Force that dealt with high-profile crime.
6. Gender mainstreaming in all sectors had significantly improved equality and women's empowerment. More than 44 per cent of seats in the National Assembly were held by women. The National Gender Policy, which was under review, created an enabling environment for women in decision-making positions through gender sensitization, capacity-building and mentoring. The Government had established a centre for women and peace and security to enhance their contribution to mediation, peacebuilding and conflict prevention at the national, regional and international levels. The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and

Security served to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and to advocate for women's inclusion in peace and security processes.

7. Women benefited directly from the Government's efforts to achieve macroeconomic stability. Vulnerable women in rural areas had access to credit facilities for women's cooperatives, capacity-building on agribusiness and technological support, while women's economic empowerment was promoted through the income-generation activities of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare. Training was given on life-saving skills and the integrated management of neonatal and childhood illnesses, and postabortion medical care and psychosocial support were available. Children in need of alternative care could be placed in residential childcare facilities or with approved foster families. Outreach programmes provided contraception, family planning and sexual and reproductive health services in rural areas.

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8. **Ms. Chalal** said that, although the State party had implemented some of the Committee's previous recommendations, its slow progress on others was regrettable. For example, the Committee regretted the delays in adopting draft legislation that directly affected women's rights such as bills on divorce, matrimonial property and inheritance in the case of persons who died intestate, and there was a lack of gender-disaggregated data and temporary special measures. Customary practices, although prohibited under the Constitution, continued to hinder women's full enjoyment of their rights. She would welcome a clear timetable for the adoption of all pending bills. She wondered whether the State party would be undertaking a study on the impact of the Traditional Authorities Act and the Community Courts Act on women's enjoyment of their rights.

9. It would be useful to hear whether there were any plans to amend article 10 of the Constitution, which prohibited discrimination but failed to encompass all possible grounds, or plans to adopt a definition of discrimination in line with article 1 of the Convention. She also wished to know whether article 15 (2) of the Constitution, which defined children as persons under the age of 16 for the purposes of protection from economic exploitation, would be amended to define them as persons under 18. She would welcome information on any conclusions issued by the Law Reform and Development Commission and clarification of whether the Convention took precedence over national legislation, particularly with regard to family and inheritance law, along with examples of such instances.

10. She wished to know why women lodged relatively few complaints with the courts, despite the numerous measures adopted to improve their access to justice. She would welcome information on the resources available to women victims of discrimination or rights violations, particularly disadvantaged and indigenous women, women in rural areas and members of the community of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons. The delegation might provide information on the steps taken to inform women of their rights, including the translation of the Convention into local languages. The lack of implementation of the Change Project and of specific measures to provide legal aid to rural women, and their limited access to legal complaints mechanisms, were also cause for concern.

11. **A representative of Namibia** said that, although there was no law that existed solely to define discrimination, articles 8 and 10 of the Constitution covered all forms of discrimination. Cognizant that some cultural practices that were permitted under customary law might discriminate against women and girls, the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare organized workshops across the country to raise awareness among traditional authorities and community leaders about discrimination and harmful cultural practices. Although the Government recognized that the failure to implement the draft legislation was causing suffering to women and girls, it was not possible to provide a time frame for its adoption. The bills were being deliberated by Parliament in the final stage prior to adoption. The marriage bill would eradicate discrimination against women and girls in relation to matrimonial property, and the rights of persons in customary unions in the event of the death of one of the spouses were recognized in legislation on the Government Institutions Pension Fund. All women were equal before the law and, as such, any woman, regardless of place of residence or sexuality, could file complaints of discrimination.

Compendiums of legislation were translated into local languages and disseminated throughout the country.

12. **Ms. Chalal** said that article 10 of the Constitution did not cover all forms of discrimination. She wished to know whether Namibian legislation addressed direct and indirect discrimination.

13. **A representative of Namibia** said that the list of grounds for discrimination contained in article 10 of the Constitution was not exhaustive, and complaints of any form of discrimination, both direct and indirect, could therefore be lodged with the courts.

14. **Ms. Rana** said that she wished to commend the State party for its pioneering advocacy of women's inclusion in peace and security processes. She wished to know what mechanisms were in place to monitor and implement the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, how civil society was involved in those activities and what financial and human resources had been allocated to the Plan's implementation. The Committee had been informed that the State party's policies and plans on women's rights did not always enjoy the necessary resources for their effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation and that coordination mechanisms at the national and local levels did not always function optimally. She would welcome information on the implementation of the National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence and the National Development Plan, in particular the financial, human and technical resources allocated and the involvement of civil society.

15. She wished to know the status of the response plan to gender-based violence and violence against children that had been adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic and its fate beyond the pandemic. It would be useful to have updated information on the National Human Rights Action Plan and the national plan of action for the implementation of the Committee's concluding observations for 2016–2020. She would welcome an update on the status of implementation of the National Gender Policy and the anticipated date for its renewal, and on the financial and technical resources provided to the Directorate of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. She wondered whether the Office of the Ombudsman had a specific mandate to protect and promote women's rights and the necessary authority and resources to address violations of those rights. Lastly, information on the ongoing process to recruit a new Ombudsman would be useful, particularly with regard to measures to ensure that the selection process was transparent and participatory.

16. **A representative of Namibia** said that under the National Gender Policy (2010–2020), the Government had identified six priority areas of work, called “clusters”; the stand-alone Action Plan on Women and Peace and Security for implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) for the period 2019–2024 was monitored and executed under the Governance Peace, Security and Disaster Management cluster, which was monitored by the Office of the Prime Minister. Every year, the relevant ministries responsible for each cluster shared their annual plans and quarterly reports with the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare. The work on the clusters was reviewed at a high-level annual meeting of the Prime Minister and other government ministers. All clusters involved representatives of several government bodies, civil society and development partners.

17. The first draft of the new National Gender Policy was complete and final consultations on the draft were being held with the regions. The Government had made every effort to incorporate all articles of the Convention into the National Gender Policy, which it hoped would be approved in the second quarter of the financial year.

18. The National Plan of Action on Gender-based Violence, 2019–2023, was being implemented under the Gender-based Violence and Human Rights cluster. The Government had costed the Plan of Action in order to identify available funding and existing gaps; partners, such as the European Union and the United Nations Population Fund, then channelled support through civil society organizations to plug those gaps.

19. The Government had granted the COVID-19 stimulus relief package to all Namibians. In view of the lack of sex-disaggregated data, it was impossible to be sure that women also benefited from the package. The lack of disaggregated data was a problem that cut across all sectors; the Government was trying to encourage the collection of such data, with a view to ensuring that women of all ages could benefit from government support.

20. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia) said that the collection of data had been thwarted by the life-and-death situation and confusion created by COVID-19. Furthermore, the stimulus package had been overseen by the Ministry of Finance, leaving the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare with no control over which data were collected.

21. **A representative of Namibia** said that the Interministerial Committee on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law was working with the Office of the Ombudsman and members of civil society to operate a national human rights database. Using the indicators from the database, it would be possible to monitor the country's implementation of the treaty bodies' recommendations and compliance with its obligations under the Convention and other human rights treaties. Indicators included progress made with executing the National Plan of Action on Gender-based Violence, 2019–2023. Funding for the database came from the Southern African Development Community secretariat, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

22. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia) said that the former Ombudsman had retired and his successor had already been recruited. The Ombudsman was fully independent.

23. **Ms. Rana** said that she had been hoping to hear that it would be an ombudswoman. Given that the new Ombudsman had already been appointed, however, she would like to know the extent to which the recruitment process had been in line with the recommendations of the Subcommittee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions.

24. **A representative of Namibia** said that the recruitment process had been open and public. The position had been advertised and applications had been sought from members of the public. The interviews had been webcast and broadcast on the radio; a recommendation body had then made proposals based on the outcome of the interviews.

25. **Ms. Stott Despoja**, referring to paragraph 22 of the replies to the list of issues, said that it would be useful to hear an update on the effectiveness and aims of the Integrated Review Scorecard and on whether there had been tangible improvements in workplace participation for women from all backgrounds. She wished to know whether the State party would ensure that the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act 29 of 1998 included access to employment opportunities and fair remuneration for women with disabilities, provision of reasonable accommodation at workplaces and availability of information in accessible formats.

26. It was not clear whether the measures to strengthen support services for survivors of violence mentioned in the opening statement were a temporary response to the COVID-19 pandemic or whether they were permanent improvements. It would be useful to know whether the State party would introduce temporary special measures to make education settings more accessible, in particular for women and girls with disabilities, because, while it was true that the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted education, reports of such obstacles to attendance predated 2020.

27. She wondered whether the State party would consider temporary special measures to develop and disseminate information and clinical resource material appropriate for quality sexual and reproductive health care, while affirming the sexual and reproductive rights of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons. Details of the outcome of temporary special measures on increasing the number of vulnerable women in public and political life would be welcome, in particular in relation to indigenous and San women and women with disabilities. Lastly, she wished to know whether the State party would consider enacting a comprehensive poverty-reduction plan with temporary special measures, proactive long-term strategies and targets to eliminate poverty among women, including young San women.

28. **A representative of Namibia** said that, at the height of the pandemic, the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare had trained medical practitioners and any persons delivering goods or services to domestic settings on the signs that gender-based violence might be taking place in the household, had established a referral mechanism for households where such signs were observed and had maintained a roster of social workers in each region.

29. The Ministry ran special programmes in the areas of poverty eradication, marginalized communities, such as the San, and persons with disabilities. Consequently, San communities received food parcels under a poverty-eradication initiative, but also benefited from income-generation schemes and other support programmes, such as housing assistance; the same was also true for persons with disabilities. Moreover, the Ministry was seeking to mainstream gender into all such programmes.

30. The governing party, the South West Africa People's Organization, put forward an equal number of male and female candidates for elected office. Furthermore, within that system, the party sought to give disadvantaged and marginalized persons the opportunity to participate. Since other parties did not have such equal representation, the Ministry had applied to the Electoral Commission of Namibia for it to be made a legal requirement.

31. **A representative of Namibia** said that, under the Integrated Review Scorecard system, employers must submit annual affirmative action reports. The scorecard was evaluated by a review officer, who then made a recommendation to the Employment Equity Commission in respect of the employer's compliance with the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act.

32. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that, while she appreciated the additional detail on the purpose of the Integrated Review Scorecard, she had hoped for more information on how it was assisting women, in general, and women from vulnerable groups, in particular.

33. **A representative of Namibia** said that the Office of the Ombudsman administered the National Human Rights Action Plan, which encompassed the elimination of discrimination against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons. The persons concerned were treated no differently from any other women in respect of access to sexual and reproductive health, post-abortion medical care, residential care and other services provided by the Ministry of Health and Social Services.

34. **Ms. Reddock** said that, in 2020, young women had organized a four-day protest after the murder of a 22-year-old woman, Sharon Wasserfall, following a period in which there had been high numbers of reported cases of domestic violence and rape. She would appreciate up-to-date information on the implementation of the actions promised by the Government to combat gender-based violence following those events.

35. It would be useful to have information on the status of the bills on combating rape, domestic violence, sexual exploitation and harassment. She also wondered whether the State party would consider broadening the sexual exploitation and harassment bills to include the sexual commercial sexual exploitation of children, including child pornography.

36. To transform discriminatory stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes regarding the roles, responsibilities and value of women, the Committee would like the State party to consider running a comprehensive national campaign, which could include dialogues on redefining masculinity, femininity and patriarchy. Such a campaign could be tailored to suit the needs of specific groups.

37. She wondered whether the State party planned to develop a comprehensive strategy to change the mindsets of the perpetrators of harmful cultural practices. The strategy could encompass gender-related ideologies, stereotypes and social norms and could begin with an in-depth participatory research study on communities and the contexts of the practices, including polygamy, sexual initiation and grooming. It should also target the empowerment of women and girls, especially in indigenous communities.

38. The State party may wish to consider reviewing its provision of public services to take into account the intersectional nature of discrimination, as well as the special needs of women and girls, or other groups.

39. **A representative of Namibia** said that she welcomed the proposal for a national campaign to redefine masculinity and femininity. One programme currently in place targeted men and boys with the aim of promoting positive gender norms and eliminating harmful practices and was conducted with civil society to ensure it reached as wide an audience as possible. The programme had been rolled out in the workplace, and in schools to inform boys about gender equality at a young age.

40. The Government also worked with traditional leaders to ensure that they understood the relationship between formal gender-related laws and customary laws, which were permitted as long as they were not in conflict with the Constitution. Another project involved working with traditional leaders and authorities in different regions to identify and eliminate harmful cultural practices at the community level, and to encourage good practices. Moreover, an action plan was being developed on how to implement the recommendations of a recent study on child marriage.

41. **A representative of Namibia** said that the bills on combating domestic violence and rape were before Parliament. The Committee's comments regarding the intersectional nature of discrimination would be reported to Parliament, but it should be noted that all complaints and cases of discrimination were addressed in line with article 10 of the Constitution, which covered both direct and indirect discrimination and catered to all persons. For example, the cases currently before the courts included some relating to discrimination against members of the lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.

42. **A representative of Namibia** said that, following the murder of Sharon Wasserfall, a number of bills relating to women's rights that had been referred to earlier were currently pending before Parliament. In addition, the Namibian Defence Force and law enforcement agencies had been conducting operations on the ground to maintain law and order; those had been helpful but had not been universally popular.

43. There had been strengthening of gender-based violence protection units nationwide. The units, which were always located close to hospitals, provided a one-stop service for victims, who were able to report a case, receive medical or psychosocial support, and be transferred to a shelter or other facility. Standard operating procedures for the units had been developed to outline the responsibilities of various stakeholders and simplify referral processes to ensure that victims received the support they needed. The Government collaborated with civil society to that end and provided financial support to non-governmental organizations that operated shelters.

44. A number of courts dedicated to handling cases of gender-based violence had been established. In addition, there had been an increase in prosecutor-led investigations of such cases, which had made it possible for them to be investigated in a timely manner and had increased the quality of investigations. Moreover, discussions on the establishment of a sex offender registry were ongoing but were at a very early stage.

45. Although the country lacked both human and financial resources, human resources were being maximized through increased capacity-building and training on how to deal with survivors of gender-based violence. The law enforcement sector had introduced a training manual to mainstream issues relating to gender-based violence to ensure that all officers, wherever they were posted in the country, would know how to handle such cases.

46. **Ms. Reddock** said that she hoped that an impact assessment of the above-mentioned actions would be carried out in a year's time.

47. **Ms. Gabr** said that the Government had made serious efforts to combat trafficking in persons and provide support to victims. With that in mind, she wondered why the State party appeared reticent to respond to the questions posed by the Committee on article 6 of the Convention in its list of issues ([CEDAW/C/NAM/Q/6](#)).

48. It would be useful to have additional information on the composition, mandate, and human and financial resources of the national coordination body for combating trafficking in persons. Clarification of reports of a lack of coordination among members of the body, as well as between government officials and civil servants, would be appreciated.

49. She would like to know whether there had been any progress towards the adoption of the national action plan on trafficking in persons and would appreciate information on the plan's goals and related activities, and the financial resources allocated to its implementation.

50. It was not clear whether there were separate shelters for victims of gender-based violence and victims of trafficking. Further information on the training provided to social workers would be useful. It would be helpful to learn whether there were any plans to launch a new campaign to raise awareness of trafficking in persons, to conduct a study on the forms

and patterns of trafficking and exploitation, especially of women and girls, and the risk factors in times of crisis, or to gather statistical data on such crimes.

51. Information on the implementation of the State party's bilateral law enforcement cooperation agreements with Angola and Zimbabwe would be helpful. As traffickers increasingly used online tools to advertise false jobs, she would also like to know how the State party protected vulnerable groups, especially women and girls, disadvantaged persons and those in rural areas, from such schemes.

52. She wished to know how the Government prevented crimes of trafficking for the purposes of labour and sexual exploitation and whether it cooperated with neighbouring countries to that end. How did it intend to curb the demand for such forms of trafficking and encourage women involved in prostitution to leave it and integrate into society?

53. **A representative of Namibia** said that the national anti-trafficking coordination body consisted of key stakeholders from the Government, civil society and development partners. The body was formed during the preparation of the trafficking in persons bill to coordinate input received on the draft legislation and was funded by the United States Government. At present, the body was coordinating the development of the national action plan on trafficking in persons, which would be launched in July 2022. The action plan was undergoing additional cost assessments prior to launch to ensure the availability of the financial and human resources necessary for its full implementation.

54. Prior to developing the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act, the Government had conducted a baseline study on trafficking to assess the situation and learn from the practices of other countries. The Government submitted annual reports to the United States Government; Namibia had received the highest ranking in the 2021 Trafficking in Persons report of the United States Department of State in recognition of its efforts to combat trafficking.

55. The Government had launched a campaign targeting young people to combat the online recruitment methods used by traffickers, such as fake advertisements for jobs or scholarships. The main tool was a song with lyrics about trafficking; the song had been recorded by the country's most popular female recording artist and had been played widely. There was another campaign aimed at combating online violence against children.

56. There were shelters for victims in seven regions. All of them had been upgraded and were subject to standard operating procedures that reflected relevant international standards. Victims of gender-based violence and victims of trafficking were housed separately; three shelters had been allocated for victims of trafficking specifically. Information about the location of those shelters was restricted to ensure that traffickers could not locate and harm the victims.

57. **Ms. Gabr** said that she would welcome further information on the obstacles encountered in coordinating efforts to combat trafficking in persons and on the measures taken to address the demand for prostitution and help women who were involved in prostitution.

58. **A representative of Namibia** said that the bilateral law enforcement cooperation agreements with Angola and Zimbabwe provided for early detection and support in the investigation of cases of trafficking in persons and the sharing of evidence. Such cooperation assisted Namibia in detecting persons accused of exploitation and online targeting for trafficking purposes. One such person had been detained as a result of agreements for mutual legal assistance with the South African Government. Her delegation would provide the information on prostitution that had been requested in writing.

59. **A representative of Namibia** said that the national referral mechanism on trafficking and its standard operating procedures specified the role of each stakeholder. It was essential to build stakeholders' capacity and to raise awareness among communities so that they could detect trafficking suspects. Awareness-raising campaigns had included the placement of billboards on borders and in the airports. It was also important to ensure confidentiality so that persons who reported suspects were protected.

Articles 7–9

60. **Ms. Stott Despoja** noted that UN-Women had ranked Namibia twelfth in terms of the number of women in Parliament. She commended the State party on the high proportion of women in senior leadership and decision-making roles in the education sector.

61. The constitutional amendment introducing a quota system had led to an increase in women candidates in the 2014 national elections from 25 to 46 per cent. However, women accounted for only 23 per cent of the Cabinet. She therefore wished to know what measures would be taken to increase that proportion. She would also welcome an update on progress to amend the Electoral Act to ensure the equal representation of women and men in decision-making positions. Given the significantly lower level of representation of women in regional areas, she would be interested in hearing about any plans to increase the number of successful women candidates in regional elections. As voter turnout in the 2019 parliamentary and presidential elections had been only 60.38 per cent and 60.82 per cent respectively, she wished to know whether steps were being taken to increase the voter turnout.

62. She asked how many capacity-building workshops on women in politics and decision-making the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare had held and what had been their outcome. Noting that Namibia had won the Gender Is My Agenda Campaign award in 2017 for progress in promoting equality in decision-making positions, she asked whether the State party would consider introducing measures to increase the number of San women in leadership roles in the private and public sector, including specific quotas for San women in Parliament. She wished to know how many workplaces were subject to the Integrated Review Scorecard and whether they had been compliant.

63. She would be interested in hearing about the success of the national gender policy strategy to facilitate an enabling environment for women in decision-making positions and the number of women who had benefited from the strategy. She wondered whether the ruling party's "zebra list" quota system for the National Assembly might also be applied in the National Council, since only 14.3 per cent of its members were women. She also wished to know whether political parties were being encouraged to introduce voluntary or mandatory quotas.

64. As women accounted for 33 per cent of judges and the Supreme Court consisted of an all-male bench, she asked what measures were being taken to increase the number of women in the judiciary. She wished to know whether the State party would introduce measures to increase women's representation in international leadership roles, since only 26 per cent of ambassadors and consuls general were female.

65. **Ms. Narain** said that she wished to commend the State party on its recognition of many stateless persons as Namibian citizens through naturalization. She would like to know, however, whether it planned to ratify the 1957 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Many cases of statelessness in the State party were reportedly due to lack of documentation, especially in rural areas. The Committee on the Rights of the Child had expressed concern in 2012 about the fact that parents without civic documentation, and especially refugees, faced serious challenges in registering the births of their children. She asked whether the State party would amend article 4 of its Constitution in order to ensure that Namibian citizenship was granted to children born in the State party, to children found in Namibia whose parents and place of birth were unknown, and to children whose parents were refugees. It would be useful to know how the civil registration and identification bill would tackle such issues and when it was likely to be enacted.

66. Notwithstanding the existence of an electronic national population registration system, the number of unregistered births remained high, especially in rural areas. She wished to know whether the father's signature of the birth registration form was necessary for a child to receive a birth certificate and whether children whose fathers had not signed the form suffered any disadvantages or stigma. She asked how many births had been registered in the State party without the father's signature in the past two years and what steps were being taken to ensure that every child born in Namibia, especially in rural areas, received a birth certificate.

67. The waiting period for citizenship by marriage had been extended from 2 to 10 years in response to reports of sham marriages between foreigners and Namibian citizens, particularly Namibian women, to gain entry to the State party for business deals or criminal purposes. She wondered whether there was a timeline for the enactment of the marriage bill, which would provide for the investigation of marriages suspected of not being concluded in good faith, and about the type of protection that would be afforded to women who had been tricked into entering into a sham marriage.

68. A child born abroad through surrogacy to Namibian parents was not automatically deemed to be a Namibian citizen. Although the Namibian High Court had recognized the child of a couple born through surrogacy in South Africa as a Namibian citizen by descent in 2021, an appeal against the decision had reportedly been lodged with the Supreme Court. She asked whether the Government intended to permit a child born abroad to a Namibian parent through surrogacy to acquire Namibian citizenship.

69. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia) said that she was a member of the ruling party, the South-West Africa People's Organization. She had taken steps to redress the gender imbalance in the party's Constitution by introducing the "zebra list" quota system. As the opposition refused to take similar action, the Electoral Commission of Namibia should ensure that political parties complied with the zebra list. She had recently detected positive feelings among opposition parties who appeared willing to amend their constitutions. The situation was more complicated in regional councils located in rural areas.

70. **A representative of Namibia** said that the lack of female representation in at least half of the country's 14 regional councils was a major concern. As statistics played a major role in advocacy and lobbying, the Namibian Gender and Development Index provided important data for political leaders. Vigorous action was being taken to amend the Electoral Act, particularly with a view to introducing quotas, since opposition parties had hitherto failed to amend their constitutions. Women in rural areas currently lacked confidence in their ability to become political leaders, but their attitudes could be changed through the convening of workshops and through advocacy and lobbying.

71. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she would be interested in hearing how many women from the San community were represented in Parliament.

72. **Ms. Sioka** said that there were three marginalized communities, the San, the Ovাতwe and the Ovahimba. One woman had been elected to the National Council and two men had been elected to the National Assembly. Action to promote their mainstreaming and political leadership was a major challenge.

73. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she welcomed the Basic Education Act, the fact that education was free from the pre-primary to the secondary level, the "Let's Talk" campaign on adolescent and unintended pregnancies, the revision of the teenage pregnancy policy, the Namibia Safe Schools Framework and the Girls Club in the Kavango Region.

74. As 23 per cent of female school dropout was reportedly due to pregnancy, she wished to know what measures were being taken to promote the implementation of the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy policy and whether any studies had been undertaken on its impact. She also asked whether schools were deemed to be a safe place to discuss sex, which was still a taboo subject, in a non-judgmental manner. She endorsed the recommendations put forward by the Committee regarding research on the culture of patriarchy, community engagement, role models and innovative strategies in teacher training.

75. Given the horizontal segregation in the system, she commended Namibia University of Science and Technology on the performance of females. She wished to know whether temporary special measures would be adopted to promote engineering studies for girls.

76. With regard to the San community, she would be interested in hearing about budgetary allocations in support of the Basic Education Act in order to ensure equitable access to education, high-quality pre-school education, educational curricula that responded to the needs of San children, a safe school environment with secure hostels, elimination of corporal punishment and access to tertiary education.

77. It would be useful to know how the State party ensured the access of girls with disabilities and special needs to education, including through the requisite physical accessibility and infrastructure.

78. The Committee would appreciate additional information in the State party's next periodic report concerning the participation of women in higher education and professorships.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.