



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

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

Summary record of the 793rd meeting (Chamber A)

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 24 July 2007, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gaspard (Vice-Chairperson)

Contents

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of
the Convention

Combined third and fourth periodic reports of Belize

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

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention

Combined third and fourth periodic reports of Belize (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4; CEDAW/C/BLZ/Q/4 and Add.1)

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

2. **Ms. Flores** (Belize), introducing the State party's reports, noted that the percentage of female-headed households had decreased to 28.8 per cent and that female unemployment had also seen a decrease, although it was still double that of men. The National Gender Policy sought to identify inequalities and to suggest corrective actions. The critical areas identified were: health; wealth and employment generation; violence; education and skills training; power and decision-making. It was the responsibility of the National Women's Commission to ensure that the commitments in the policy were implemented.

3. The Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy focused on interventions to protect and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights and outlined strategies to improve women's access to reproductive health services.

4. The Government was trying to increase public awareness of the link between HIV/AIDS and domestic violence. The number of women who were HIV-positive was increasing rapidly and the age group reporting most domestic violence (ages 20-49) was also that most infected with HIV/AIDS. A National AIDS Commission had been established to coordinate activities, and an aggressive public awareness campaign was being implemented. A persistent challenge was the issue of poverty and women's dependency on men, which made them unable to negotiate safe sex. It had therefore become imperative to continue to address the economic empowerment of women alongside HIV/AIDS and violence. Domestic violence had been incorporated into the police training curriculum and all major police stations countrywide now had domestic violence units. Social workers and community leaders had also been trained in the

dynamics of family violence and basic intervention techniques.

5. Belize's education system depended upon active cooperation between Government and the Church, but that arrangement had posed some major challenges in relation to gender equality. For example, the practice of terminating the employment of unmarried pregnant teachers had only been addressed in the last three years. A manual on gender and self-esteem had been developed for primary schoolteachers, to enable them to contribute to changing the attitudes and expectations of boys and girls, and a Gender Integration Safe School Programme, covering such issues as gender sensitization, domestic violence, sexual harassment, self-esteem and HIV/AIDS, was being implemented countrywide.

6. In the interests of women's empowerment, the Criminal Code had been amended to provide for the offence of marital rape, to rationalize the penalties for sexual relations with a female child and to provide mandatory life imprisonment for habitual sex offenders. Common-law unions of at least five years' duration were now recognized for purposes of inheritance and property rights. Belize had also passed a Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act that gave effect to the United Nations Protocol on the subject and an anti-trafficking in persons committee had been mandated to ensure implementation of the act. Women and girls being trafficked were now regarded as victims, rather than as offenders.

7. In 2005, the Women's Department had spearheaded a review of the Domestic Violence Act and had interviewed many persons, ranging from Government officials, magistrates and police officers to victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, gathering statistical information from various ministries along the way. The new domestic violence bill 2007, shortly to be tabled in Cabinet preparatory to being presented to the House of Representatives.

8. Also, in response to the review of the Act, a multi-sectoral committee had been established to develop a new national plan of action to address gender-based violence. An integrated approach to the issue was being developed that included law enforcement, health, the judicial system, education, housing, and community advocacy.

9. The Women's Department worked with the family court, the police and Haven House, a shelter for

battered women, and provided support services for victims. Steps were being taken to upgrade the shelter's facilities, and partnerships with UNIFEM, PAHO/WHO, UNFPA, CIDA, and the Global Fund provided funding and technical support.

10. The Women's Department and other relevant bodies had lobbied on behalf of female soldiers and, in July 2005, the Cabinet had stipulated that disciplinary action taken against soldiers because they became pregnant was discriminatory and should be discontinued. The Cabinet had also agreed to amend the Labour Act and related regulations, to provide for 14 weeks maternity leave for female public officers, and to ratify the revised ILO Convention No. 183 on maternity protection, and had directed that existing legislation should be amended so as to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 9 to 12 and to raise the age of marriage (with the consent of the parents) from 14 to 16 years.

11. Much remained to be done to attain equality and equity in Belize and to provide women with full access to justice. Traditional attitudes and expectations of society continued to pose challenges. Once an abused woman left a shelter she was often unable to support herself and her children financially; it was therefore necessary to establish structures by which such women could secure housing, jobs, school placement for their children, day care, and counselling. The threatening or pressuring of victims of violence in order to force retraction of complaints as well as the arbitrary prosecution and punishment of victims continued to be major issues.

12. The Women's Department continued to advocate for the involvement of men in the promotion of gender equality and to emphasize the need for men to contribute to change. Sustainable gains for women could not be achieved when women were addressed in isolation from the rest of the society, especially from the men who were their partners.

Articles 1 to 6

13. **Ms. Shin**, while commending the Government for ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention, said that she found it regrettable that it had opted out of the inquiry procedure and would not allow the Committee to investigate grave or systematic violations. Most countries that had ratified the Optional Protocol had recognized the Committee's competence to make such

investigations; if a country was confident that no such violations were occurring, then it had no need to opt out of the procedure. She called on Belize to withdraw the declaration under which it had opted out.

14. She asked how much effort had gone recently into publicizing the Convention and the Optional Protocol, noting that it was very important that women in Belize, as well as men, should know about such instruments, so that they could claim the rights guaranteed to them in the national constitution and laws.

15. Finally, she called on Belize to support the proposal to amend article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, which at present imposed unrealistic limits on the number of days that the Committee could meet in any one year, and to submit its reports in a timely fashion, as a sign of its commitment to the Convention.

16. **Ms. Maiolo**, noting that the majority of abused women remained with their partners, asked why that was so, and whether better advice could not be given to women in abusive situations. She also asked how long the delegation thought it would be before the new Domestic Violence Act improved the situation.

17. **Ms. Neubauer** noted that much remained to be done in Belize in order to achieve true de jure and de facto equality of men and women. She asked for a clearer explanation of the mandate and tasks of the Women's Department by comparison with those vested in the National Women's Commission, and for concrete information on the human resources of the Women's Department, in particular the number of staff by comparison with the total staff of the Ministry.

18. Noting that Belize had a wide variety of gender-related policies, programmes, action plans and strategies, she asked whether there had been a proper assessment of the effectiveness of the results achieved so far and their value in promoting gender equality. She wondered whether there was any particular body with responsibility for gender equality in the national parliament, and if not, whether there were any plans to set up such a parliamentary structure.

19. **Ms. Chutikul** asked how the National Women's Commission monitored the implementation of the Convention and the effectiveness of the major laws on women's rights and of the National Gender Policy. The State party should indicate whether the Commission's

members themselves participated in monitoring or whether there was a task force or a secretariat responsible for such work. She also wished to know what indicators were used for monitoring purposes, what monitoring activities had been carried out to date, and whether adequate financial resources were allocated to those activities.

20. She requested details of the differences or similarities between the Women's Agenda 2003-2008 and the National Gender Policy. The latter appeared to have no time frame or clear targets. Noting that the National Women's Commission was responsible for implementation of the National Gender Policy, she asked which body was responsible for implementation of the Women's Agenda. She also wished to know what linkages existed between the National Women's Commission and the Women's Department and whether each body had structures at the local level serving the needs of the country's multi-ethnic and multilingual rural population.

21. She asked whether the definition of trafficking contained in the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act was the same as the definition in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. If not, the State party should indicate what the differences were. She also wished to know whether the Act provided for specific protection measures for women and children and the punishment of officials involved in trafficking. She requested more information about the anti-trafficking committee, in particular who chaired it, whether its members included representatives of different ministries and to whom it reported.

22. She wished to know whether the expansion of tourism in Belize was leading to an increase in the exploitation of prostitution, and in particular whether young girls were being coerced into that trade. The State party should also indicate which ministry was responsible for ensuring that tourist services, including entertainment establishments, were aware of the potential risk of exploitation of young girls and women and that they adhered to a code of conduct in that regard. In that regard, she encouraged the State party to consider ratifying International Labour Organization Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour if it had not already done so.

23. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that inequality between women and men was an acknowledged obstacle to development. Belize must therefore give its national machinery for the advancement of women the authority to ensure the mainstreaming of gender into all public policies. The national machinery must also be granted permanent status so that it would not be affected by political changes in the country, and its staff must receive training in gender issues. The machinery must also have the capacity for exchange with other countries with a view to integrating best practices into its work. The Government and Parliament should engage in ongoing dialogue with NGOs. In addition, given that Belize had a large rural population, the national machinery should have focal points not only in all ministries but also in local communities. She requested more information on the status of the national machinery for women and what means it had at its disposal to promote equality, especially in rural areas.

24. **Ms. Patten** expressed surprise that the Political Reform Commission had recommended in 2000 that no quota system should be established for the appointment of women to public bodies, since the State party's report indicated that the Government had made a commitment in 1998 to appoint women to at least 30 per cent of leadership positions in the public service and other statutory bodies (para. 77). She requested information about the mandate and composition of the Political Reform Commission, in particular who was responsible for appointing its members, whether there was a gender balance among them, and whether it was a permanent body. She also wished to know how the National Women's Commission regarded the issue of temporary special measures, given that it was responsible for implementing the National Gender Policy in priority areas. Noting the concerns expressed by the Political Reform Commission about the constitutionality of measures such as quota systems, she urged the State party to draw the Commission's attention to the Committee's general recommendation No. 25, which expanded on the idea that temporary special measures were not to be considered discriminatory and were to be discontinued when the objectives of equality had been achieved.

25. Noting that women were underrepresented in political and public life, and that the achievements of girls and women in education were not translated into the field of employment, she said that temporary

special measures should be introduced in the fields of education, the economy, politics and employment.

26. **Ms. Fonseca** (Belize) said that efforts were under way, spearheaded by the Women's Department and the National Women's Commission, to raise public awareness of the Optional Protocol. Specific training had been offered to women development officers and members of the National Women's Commission and the National Gender-based Violence Committee. The Gender Integration Safe School Programme had also helped raise awareness of the Optional Protocol. Efforts were also being made to raise awareness in the private sector and among community- and faith-based organizations and NGOs.

27. **Ms. Zetina** (Belize) said that the definition of trafficking in the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act was taken from the United Nations protocol on the subject. Indeed, the Act gave effect to the Protocol and established special protection measures for women and children that were drawn directly from it. The strategic plan to combat trafficking in persons focused on prevention, protection and prosecution.

28. The anti-trafficking committee was a multidisciplinary body composed of representatives of key Government ministries and agencies and various NGOs. The committee was undertaking activities to raise awareness of the problem of sexual exploitation in relation to tourism. In addition, a consultancy firm was reviewing the Government's response to the issue of trafficking, which would lead to the development of operating procedures for all entities involved in addressing trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Awareness campaigns on trafficking were conducted in both English and Spanish, since there was a possibility of women being trafficked to Belize from neighbouring Central American countries.

29. The Political Reform Commission was appointed by the Government. The Women's Issues Network was represented on the Commission and had expressed concern about the Commission's failure to back the introduction of temporary special measures. Further efforts were needed in order to ensure that the Commission's recommendation in that regard was reconsidered. Her delegation would welcome suggestions on how best to achieve the introduction of temporary special measures.

30. **Ms. Fonseca** (Belize) said that women victims of violence were not advised to return to their violent

partners. However, for various reasons, such as rejection by their families, women often felt they had no alternative but to remain in abusive relationships. Through cooperation with Haven House, a shelter for battered women, and with funding from the private sector and faith-based organizations, two transitional homes for women victims of violence had been established in the past year and another was being built.

31. The committee on gender-based violence, which comprised a number of key stakeholders, had elaborated a national plan of action to address gender-based violence. One of the main aims of the plan was to ensure the provision of appropriate support services for women victims of violence. Action was also being taken to provide such women with jobs and with the childcare necessary to enable them to work.

32. The National Women's Commission had played an integral role, together with the Women's Department and partner agencies, in advocating for the repeal of the Domestic Violence Act 1992. The Domestic Violence Bill 2007 was due to be enacted in the coming weeks.

33. With regard to gender mainstreaming, a Gender Integration Committee had been set up, with members drawn from the Government, NGOs, the private sector and community- and faith-based organizations. Gender focal points had also been appointed, and a handbook had been produced outlining their role and responsibilities. In addition, although the Women's Department had only 11 staff members, it worked closely with international partners, and received volunteers on an ongoing basis from a number of sources. Members of the Cabinet had also been provided with training on the importance of mainstreaming gender into all programmes and policies and the national budget.

34. **Ms. Zetina** (Belize) said that efforts were under way to develop a system of indicators for monitoring the implementation of the Convention and of other relevant international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Government recognized the need to improve the collection of data, in particular gender-disaggregated data.

35. The National Women's Commission was an advisory body, while the Women's Department was an implementing body. The latter worked alongside the

Community Rehabilitation Department and the Human Services Department within the Ministry of Human Development.

36. The resources allocated to the Women's Department had been increasing gradually since the early 1990s, when Belize had ratified the Convention. However, the Government recognized that more resources were needed. Efforts were being made to involve international partners in that regard.

37. The members of the National Women's Commission represented all the districts of Belize, while the Women's Department had an officer in every district. The Women's Department worked in coordination with other governmental and non-governmental agencies to carry out its mandate, but recognized the need for improvement in terms of outreach activities. Its plan of work for the current year included various programmes focusing on rural communities.

38. The Women's Agenda had been drawn up by the present Government and represented its commitment to improve the situation of women in Belize. Its implementation was monitored by the Women's Department and by the United Women's Group, the women's arm of the ruling party. The National Gender Policy had no time frame because it was a guiding document for the development of programmes and policies. However, at some point in the future, progress made under the Policy would be evaluated.

39. **Ms. Fonseca** (Belize) said that the introduction of the annual Women's Summit had encouraged women to become more involved in discussions of political issues and had also provided them with an opportunity for dialogue with women delegates from the United States of America. In addition, a recent political forum had brought together women from all the political parties, boosting camaraderie among them and resulting in the adoption of recommendations on various political issues.

40. Although women's participation in public and political life had not yet reached the desired levels, most of the current chief executive officers in Government ministries were female, and there were two women in the Supreme Court. In addition, Belize now had its first female Minister of Foreign Affairs.

41. **Ms. Coye-Felson** (Belize) said that the question of accepting the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1,

of the Convention, would be given active consideration. There were currently no plans to review the declaration on the Optional Protocol, but her delegation noted the Committee's concern in that regard. The Women's Department was currently pursuing the issue of temporary special measures. In that regard, her delegation noted the Committee's remarks on general recommendation No. 25. Lastly, her delegation was not currently in a position to provide information on ILO Convention 182.

42. **Ms. Shin** asked whether a single women's development officer in each of the six administrative districts of Belize, with populations ranging from 30,000 to 70,000, was sufficient to handle the numerous agenda issues for that district, and suggested that the institutional framework needed to be strengthened.

43. With regard to domestic violence, she noted that Belize was still relying heavily on assistance from developed countries and United Nations agencies in the area of legal reform, and asked whether that assistance was contracted on an annual or longer-term basis, in view of the need for sustained effort in implementing the programmes and policies outlined in the report. In the light of the need for regular monitoring and evaluation of efforts to combat domestic violence, she asked what structures the Government had in place to do so — such as sanctions against police officers who failed to investigate domestic-violence calls, incentives for officers who responded promptly, and channels to enable women to file complaints about tardy or non-existent police response.

44. **Ms. Begum** commended Belize for its remarkable achievement in reducing unemployment among young women over the past four years. Citing information in the report to the effect that Belize was a destination country for trafficking from neighbouring Central American countries, and that most sex workers in Belize were undocumented economic migrants from those countries who were employed in bars and hotels, she asked whether any bar or hotel owners had been prosecuted for running commercial sex businesses involving such migrants. She would welcome statistics on the number of adolescent girls forced into the clandestine sex trade in Belize, the impact of tourism on commercial sex work in the country, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among migrant women engaged in the sex trade — given the fact that Belize had the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Central America — and the

services, if any, available to victims of trafficking, assuming they were allowed, as a matter of policy, to stay in the country. Finally, she wondered whether there were any bilateral or regional agreements with other Central American or Caribbean countries to combat human trafficking.

45. **Ms. Patten** asked why victims of domestic violence were being prosecuted and to what extent would their situation be redressed by the new bill? She asked for information on new protective and support services to be provided to victims of domestic violence, and for further details, such as capacity and availability of counselling services, regarding Haven House, the one refuge for such victims that currently existed. She wondered what system of legal aid was in place to ensure that women had access to justice, whether there was gender-sensitive training for the judiciary and law-enforcement officials, what services were available for women in isolated communities and rural areas, what rehabilitation programmes were in place to treat perpetrators of domestic violence and whether the new legislation provided for civil remedies, such as protection or restraining orders requiring the perpetrator to leave the conjugal house. Lastly, she called for improvement in the collection of data on the incidence of violence against women.

46. **Ms. Fonseca** (Belize) emphasized that while there was only one Women's Development Officer in each district, that person worked closely with all the other representatives of the Ministry in that district office, as well as with the police and Family Court authorities. A Domestic Violence Committee had been put in place in each district; it met periodically to discuss and act on cases that arose. Moreover, all the officers in the district office underwent the same training, and so were capable of standing in for each other if needed. Her department had recently requested the placement of a Rural Development Officer alongside the Women's Development Officer in each district.

47. Her Ministry was aware of its heavy reliance on international assistance, but was endeavouring to ensure that programmes were funded on a continuous basis, and had met with great success in that regard over the past three years. The mode of the cooperation very much depended on the partner organization and the agreement signed with it. While regular planning and evaluation remained an area of weakness, the International Development Bank had recently

expressed an interest in providing funding in that regard.

48. With regard to avenues of recourse available to women in case of inadequate police response to domestic violence, she said that a free 24-hour telephone hot line had recently been set up to provide direct access to the Domestic Violence Unit. The Women's Department and the Women's Issues Network continued to act as channels for women's complaints regarding the police, but in the light of the high turnover of police personnel, there was still a need for continuous training of police officers.

49. The new Domestic Violence Act expanded the definition of domestic violence beyond purely physical abuse to include emotional, verbal, and financial abuse, applied also to persons involved in "visiting relationships" and provided for sanctions when a police officer failed to respond. It also strengthened the powers of the Women's Development Officers and the police, made counselling mandatory and made the Family Court, the Women's Department and the Police Department responsible for ensuring that such counselling took place, and expanded the powers of those agencies. Her Department, in cooperation with the Family Court and the Community Rehabilitation Department, was also initiating a programme of intervention against the perpetrators of domestic violence.

50. **Ms. Flores** (Belize), referring to the possible reluctance of male police officers to deal with domestic violence cases, stressed that the recent marked increase in the number of female police officers meant that more of them could accompany male officers on domestic violence calls, thereby improving the services provided in those situations.

51. **Ms. Fonseca** (Belize), replying to Ms. Patten, said that Haven House, the sole shelter for battered women in Belize, could accommodate up to five women victims of domestic violence, along with their children. A programme for providing transitional homes for victims of domestic violence had also been initiated; two such homes, each capable of accommodating up to three families, were already in place, and the Department was in the process of seeking funding for others in rural districts.

52. The main legal aid office was in Belize City, but there were legal information offices in each district as well. Members of the Bar Association were providing

pro bono legal assistance on a voluntary basis, and the Department was also working with the Attorney General's office to institute a mandatory quota for Bar Association members' contribution of time for community work. Gender-sensitive training was being provided through the Police Department, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, and the new legislation did, indeed, provide for civil remedies such as orders of protection.

53. **Ms. Zetina** (Belize) said that some hotel and bar owners had been prosecuted for trafficking in persons, but conviction rates were low. While she was unable to provide statistics on minors involved in trafficking or HIV/AIDS prevalence among migrant workers, a recent study on commercial sexual exploitation funded through the International Labour Organization, had revealed that at least 20 per cent of trafficking cases were related to tourism. For that reason, the Anti-Trafficking Committee was working closely with the tourism sector. Trafficking victims were issued temporary permits by the immigration authorities so that they could remain in the country and seek employment during their legal proceedings and were provided with a range of counselling and other services, as well as housing, employment, and educational and training opportunities. Qualified persons could apply to the Immigration Department for residency or citizenship; victims wishing to return to their home countries were also assisted by the immigration authorities to do so. Finally, she said that Belize participated extensively at the regional level in discussions on combating human trafficking in the region.

54. **Ms. Fonseca** (Belize), addressing concerns about data collection, said that computerization of the Family Court had recently been completed, enabling the creation of a database for relevant information and statistics. She also noted that, with the assistance of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the national gender-based violence registration form had been updated to include more information about ethnicity, perpetrators and the like; the list of agencies to which victims could be referred had been significantly expanded as well. While recognizing that data collection was a weakness, she stressed that Belize was continuing efforts to improve its capacities in that area.

55. **Ms. Shin** requested information about the proportion of women employed in the police force and

about any plans to increase the percentage of women police officers.

56. **Ms. Zetina** (Belize) said that 200 to 300 police officers were women, out of a total force of about 1,000, and that efforts were being made to increase that proportion.

57. **Ms. Simms** said that she was heartened by the Government's decision to expand its definition of domestic violence beyond the narrow limitations cited in the previous report. She asked for more information on rape, incest and carnal abuse, and on the reasons for the high level of teenage pregnancies in Belize, as well as data on marital rape, sexual harassment, and especially on training programmes for police officers in the area of sexual harassment. There was a need to recruit more female police officers, but also to ensure that those officers would be entering a positive environment.

58. **Ms. Simms** requested further information concerning the number of people charged with sexual harassment, the availability of legal remedies and the training provided to police officers on the subject noting that male police officers often harassed their female colleagues.

59. **Ms. Patten** wished to know how the Government was addressing the question of the prosecution and punishment of women victims of violence and whether specific programmes had been developed to train the judiciary.

60. **Ms. Chutikul** wondered whether the multi-sectoral committee that had been set up to address gender-based violence could deal with all women's issues, including trafficking and sexual harassment. She also proposed that the next periodic report should include information on the monitoring of violence.

61. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that she would appreciate information on the role of the media in combating stereotypes. With respect to the application of temporary special measures, she noted that the Political Reform Commission had recommended against the enactment of a quota system for appointment of women to public bodies on the basis that doing so might encourage other groups to demand quotas. She was surprised that the Commission had advanced that particular argument, given that women were part of every group and that virtually every group specifically discriminated against

women. She also noted that equality between men and women had not advanced in sectors such as education and employment. Recalling that article 4, paragraph 1, and general recommendation 25 applied to all sectors and that Belize had not made a reservation to that article, she strongly urged the Government to implement temporary special measures where needed.

62. **Ms. Fonseca** (Belize) agreed with Ms. Chutikul that it was worth considering the possibility of having a single committee deal with all women's issues but pointed out that, in many cases, the people who sat on the National Gender-based Committee also sat on the district committees. Further information on the monitoring system would be provided in the next periodic report; indeed, monitoring mechanisms and indicators were currently being developed.

63. **Ms. Coye-Felson** (Belize) said that their delegation appreciated the experts' comments on the application of temporary special measures and would take their recommendations into consideration.

Articles 7 and 8

64. **Ms. Neubauer** said that, although the participation of women in political and public life remained low and the Political Reform Commission had recommended against the enactment of a quota system, there were other ways of addressing the situation, for example through training programmes for potential women candidates, sensitization campaigns to promote equal participation and financial assistance to women candidates. She would be interested to know whether the findings and conclusions of the first Women's Summit had been used to develop responses to the problem of female under-representation.

65. **Ms. Simms**, noting that the Government had the right to appoint women to ministerial positions, expressed disappointment that little progress had been made in that regard. Given that the private sector tended to fund male political candidates, she proposed that the Government should consider providing State funding for women candidates. There seemed to be a general perception in the Caribbean region that women could not aspire to high political office because they had children to look after. Clearly, the issue of family support and male attitudes would also need to be addressed.

66. She took issue with the argument that no temporary special measures could be applied because

they led to a marginalization of men. Belizean boys and men were not marginalized.

67. Finally, she welcomed the recent Women's Summit and suggested that similar events should be held at the district level so that poor women could be made aware of their rights and contribute to the dialogue.

68. **Ms. Flores** (Belize) said that the Government would continue its efforts to increase women's participation in political and public life. The Prime Minister of Belize had attempted to improve the gender balance in the Senate — at present, three of the six Government-appointed senators were women. However, Belizean women appeared not to be interested in political participation.

69. **Ms. Neubauer** said that the Government should encourage political parties to establish gender equality within the parties themselves. It was also important that male politicians should give women politicians their full support.

70. **Ms. Begum**, referring to the findings cited in paragraph 16 of the responses to the list of issues and questions, namely, that women lacked access to political leadership inter alia because of family obligations, lack of skills and lack of financing, asked whether the Government had undertaken any initiatives to address those obstacles. She would also like to know whether it was taking steps to facilitate women's access to higher education and to implement a quota system in Parliament.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.