



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Fifty second session

Summary record of the 1057th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 20 July 2012, at 10 a.m.

Chair: (Ms. Pimentel)

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Combined initial, second, third and fourth periodic reports and the fifth periodic report of Bahamas

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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 initial, second, third and fourth periodic reports and the fifth periodic report of the Bahamas (CEDAW/C/BHS/4 and CEDAW/C/BHS/5; CEDAW/C/BHS/Q/4 and Add.1 and CEDAW/C/BHS/Q/5 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the members of the delegation of the Bahamas took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas), introducing the report, said that her Government was deeply committed to the Convention and its implementation, and had reaffirmed that commitment in February 2011 by withdrawing its reservation to article 16(1)(h). As a small island developing State with a relatively high per capita gross national product (GNP), the Bahamas faced a number of extreme and specific challenges. Nevertheless, despite the global economic and financial crisis, as well as the challenges posed by natural disasters, the country was on target to meet a number of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015: it had achieved the goal of universal primary education and had made considerable progress in the area of gender equality.

3. The Government planned to raise the Bahamas Bureau of Women's Affairs to the level of a Department and it would then be assigned a Director, a Deputy Director, additional human and other resources and a substantially increased budget for the fiscal year 2012-2013. With assistance from international and regional bodies, as well as public and private domestic stakeholders, the Bahamas had reached the final stages of review of its draft national gender policy, which would be submitted to Cabinet within the next few months.

4. Although the Bahamian Constitution did not include the word "sex" in its definition of discrimination, protection against discrimination was guaranteed under chapter III, article 15, on the basis of the entitlement of every individual to fundamental rights and freedoms. The February 2002 referendum had initiated consultations on constitutional provisions that discriminated against women, but the proposed amendments had been rejected by more than 60 per cent of the voters. The outcome was regarded not as a

rejection of equal rights for women, but rather as the result of allowing insufficient time for public debate. Subsequently, in December 2002, a Constitutional Commission had been appointed to conduct a comprehensive review of the Constitution and to consider possible amendments. In March 2006, the Commission had issued a preliminary report and provisional recommendations to bring the country's policies in line with the Convention, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and other international instruments ratified by the Bahamas. A Constitutional Review Commission had just been appointed by the Government to revisit the matter.

5. The Government, together with relevant civil society organizations, continued to promote awareness of the Domestic Violence (Protection Orders) Act, which provided protective mechanisms for the victims of domestic violence or disputes. Comparative statistics on protection orders should be available by 2013. The Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act had been amended to strengthen punitive measures substantially: the sentence for rape had been increased to life imprisonment, while voyeurism, sexual harassment and pornography had been criminalized. In 2009 the Bahamas had enacted the Child Protection Act, which guaranteed children's rights and contained provisions on facilities, housing and all legal proceedings involving children.

6. In addition to the continued application of the 2008 Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act, an inter-ministerial committee and a task force had been established to address the issue of trafficking in persons. A National Action Plan and Protocol were being developed to help officials with the identification and management of cases of trafficking in persons and, with the support of the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT), the Bahamas was participating as a pilot country in a public awareness campaign with a leading fast-food franchise.

7. Persons with disabilities already had equal access to health, educational and basic social services, and additional draft legislation would be submitted to Cabinet within the next six months. The Bahamas was also preparing for accession to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

8. With regard to domestic violence, the Government had adopted a multi-pronged approach,

with emphasis on response and education, to teach young women and girls that no form of violence was acceptable. A National Five Year Strategic Plan on Domestic Violence, drafted jointly by the Bureau of Women's Affairs and the Bahamas Crisis Centre, was currently being reviewed by a team of experts.

9. The Bureau of Women's Affairs had also partnered with the local chapter of the Caribbean Male Action Network (CariMAN) to host a two-day workshop on the prevention of violence against women, with a view to creating a network of men who would be advocates for change in their local communities. The Government had agreed to participate in a one-year project run by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) entitled "Strengthening State Accountability and Community Action for Ending Gender-Based Violence in the Caribbean". More recently, on 5 July 2012, her Ministry had launched a series of community meetings to educate the public on the provisions of the Domestic Violence (Protection Orders) Act, the issue of domestic violence and available interventions. Similar sessions would be held throughout the Bahamas in the coming months.

10. The Bureau of Women's Affairs, in partnership with other Government bodies and civil society, had conducted campaigns to raise awareness of gender issues. In 2012, the Bureau had capitalized on the 50th anniversary of the enfranchisement of women in the Bahamas to highlight the achievements of the Women's Suffrage Movement and of the many women involved in the pursuit of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

11. In conjunction with UN-Women and the United Nations Development Programme, the Bahamas had held a workshop focusing jointly on the Convention and HIV in April 2012. The workshop had complemented the regional Caribbean HIV/AIDS Conference of November 2011 and had inspired the Royal Bahamas Police Force to offer a course on the Domestic Violence (Protection Orders) Act for newly promoted sergeants. Gender-sensitive training for new law enforcement officers was a priority at the Police Training College. Furthermore, the National Insurance Board had contributed greatly to awareness-raising on gender issues through public service announcements which targeted vulnerable groups such as single mothers and educated them about relevant social

benefits. Radio talk shows and public forums featuring gender issues had been well received by the public.

12. Aware that gender-sensitive education at an early age was paramount in shaping attitudes on gender equality, the Ministry of Education had updated its Health and Family Life Education Curriculum at the primary school level and was doing the same at the secondary level to address, among other things, gender stereotypes in the educational system. All students were encouraged to pursue opportunities in science and technology-related fields. Young women currently outnumbered their male counterparts at the country's tertiary institution, but still tended to focus on service-oriented careers in hospitality and health-care professions. The Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI), in an effort to combat occupational segregation, had significantly increased its outreach programmes and greater numbers of women were seeking careers in non-traditional sectors such as agriculture, construction, engineering and technology.

13. Job skill readiness and mentoring workshops, funded by ministerial grants, and training in non-traditional careers increased women's marketability; the national airline's recent promotion of three women pilots to the rank of captain was proof that women could pursue career opportunities in any field.

14. The high prevalence of HIV/AIDS had a disproportionate impact on women. The Ministry of Health, through the National AIDS Programme, had implemented a series of aggressive public-awareness programmes. In 2010, the Ministry of Health, through a cooperative agreement with the United States, had implemented the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The increased access to antiretroviral treatment for pregnant HIV-infected women had led to a dramatic decline in mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and in 2010 no child had been born infected with HIV, resulting in the citing of the Bahamas as a "best practices" model.

15. Women were also disproportionately affected by non-communicable diseases. The 2005 Bahamas Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases Prevalence Survey had indicated a 9.2 per cent prevalence rate for diabetes, with females accounting for the vast majority of cases, including 25.5 per cent of women in the 65 - 74 age group and 18 per cent in the 45 - 54 age group. Women were breadwinners, caregivers and nurturers, yet were becoming increasingly disadvantaged from an

economic, cultural and social standpoint. A number of programmes promoting healthy lifestyles had been implemented, including the National Healthy Lifestyles Initiative, the Health Screening and Education Initiative and the National Prescription Drug Plan.

16. The women of the Bahamas played an integral role in social, economic, cultural, political and public life. In the most recent general elections, held on 7 May 2012, 16.5 per cent of all candidates seeking elected office had been women and 18,574 more women than men had been registered to vote. The progress made in terms of women's participation in political decision-making processes was modest and the target of 30 per cent set out in the Beijing Platform for Action had not yet been achieved.

17. In the May 2012 general elections, five women had been elected to the House of Assembly, including four currently in the Cabinet, while five women, one of them the President, had been appointed to the Bahamas Senate. Over the period 2002-2007, women had been appointed for the first time as deputy leader of a political party, national chair of a political party, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Security. Her predecessor had recently been elected the first female deputy leader of her party.

18. In an effort to enhance dialogue between political leaders and civil society, the Bahamas Crisis Centre had held a closed meeting with women parliamentarians in June 2012 to exchange views on a number of issues affecting the advancement of women. Women had also achieved considerable success at the administrative and executive levels in public service and in the judiciary. As of 2012, almost 70 per cent of all permanent secretaries and heads of Government ministries, 45 per cent of justices, and 71 per cent of principals in the public education system were women. Women also served as heads or interim heads of five of the 10 Bahamas diplomatic missions abroad: notably, the first female Permanent Representative of the Bahamas to the United Nations headed one of the few missions composed entirely of female diplomatic officers. However, there remained a notable gender gap in the private sector, particularly in the international financial and off-shore banking sector, in which men held the overwhelming majority of senior positions.

19. The word "rural" had a distinctive connotation in the Bahamas, in view of its archipelagic geography and vast variations in population density, with particularly

high density in a few urban areas. The capital, Nassau, and Freeport, the second largest city, together accounted for almost 90 per cent of the country's population. The remaining population was distributed over the other islands in the Bahamian archipelago, the Family Islands, many of which were remote, although not inaccessible. With increased migration of young people to the densely populated capital, older persons, women in particular, played a significant role in rural Family Island communities throughout the Bahamas. Many of them were farmers, and some owned small or medium-sized agricultural or handicrafts, gifts and souvenir enterprises.

20. As for rural women's access to health services, the Family Islands had 43 health centres and clinics, with an additional 35 satellite clinics, and there were plans to use information and communications technology (ICT) to improve access to medical, educational, and vocational services. The Bahamas Telemedicine Program currently covered several of the more populated Family Islands. The Bureau of Women's Affairs and local civil society organizations visited those islands regularly to promote gender affairs and equality in rural communities and to provide rural women with opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. Women in those communities had provided invaluable input for the draft national gender policy.

21. While irregular and undocumented migration to and through the Bahamas remained a substantial challenge and placed an unprecedented financial burden on the country's social services, the Constitution made no distinction of nationality or immigration status in the protection of basic rights and the provision of services. All residents of the Bahamas enjoyed free access to health care and primary and secondary education, and foreign students who could demonstrate at least six years' of consistent enrolment in the national school system were eligible for domestic tuition rates at the College of the Bahamas. The Bahamas National Insurance Board required that all workers should contribute, regardless of their nationality or resident status, thus providing a social safety net for migrants and domestic workers, and the Carmichael Road Detention Centre provided adequate medical and emergency health care services for irregular and undocumented migrant detainees.

22. Social, health and law enforcement agencies were all involved in the innovative community-based

programme, Urban Renewal Programme 2.0, to combat crime and address other social development issues. The programme would modernize the delivery of social services through a social safety net reform project and the introduction of a conditional cash transfer programme.

23. Despite notable successes in the legislative, socio-economic, human rights and political status of women in the Bahamas, there remained much more to be done. Her delegation looked forward to an open and positive dialogue and was ready to address any inconsistencies found in the periodic report.

Articles 1 and 2

24. **Ms. Awori** said that, although the State party had withdrawn its reservation to article 16(1)(h), other reservations were still in effect. The delegation should inform the Committee of the concrete measures envisaged with a view to withdrawing all reservations. She asked the delegation to indicate what steps would be made to remedy the lack of an explicit definition and prohibition of discrimination against women in the relevant legislation. Commending the efforts made to review and reform legislation, she requested up-to-date information on the progress made in enactment of the amendment to the Sexual Offences Act and the Domestic Violence Act. She was also interested to know when the State party planned to accede to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

25. **Ms. Šimonović**, also focusing on the inadmissibility of reservations to certain articles, in particular article 2(a), which was an essential element of the Convention, asked why that reservation was necessary, when the State party's Constitution guaranteed equal fundamental rights and freedoms for all. The difficulty seemed to stem from discriminatory provisions on citizenship relating to article 9 of the Convention - to which the State Party also had reservations. The report did not make it clear what obstacles there were to withdrawing those reservations.

26. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that the Constitutional Review Commission had been set up to review the recommendations made in 2006 and another referendum was planned, with a view to eliminating the discriminatory provisions so that the reservations could be withdrawn.

27. **Ms. Major** (Bahamas) said that the Government wished to withdraw the reservations to the articles

mentioned, but the population had voted against the proposals relating to articles 9(2) and 2(a) of the Convention, owing to the lack of information and the hurried nature of the referendum, which had been held close to election time. The provisional recommendations made in 2006 had included amending discriminatory language and allowing women to pass on their nationality. The Government was building on those earlier efforts and laying the ground work to educate the population on the content of the referendum.

28. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that one of the recommendations referred to the inclusion of a definition of discrimination in the Constitution, as well as the addition of sex or gender as a protected category. If that recommendation was accepted, the reservation to article 2(a) would be withdrawn. The process for accession to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was already under way, and the treaty should be signed within two to three months.

29. **Ms. Awori** requested information about the criminalization of marital rape and asked when the bill introduced in 2009 would be enacted.

30. **Ms. Schultz** said that she noted from the Constitutional Commission's 2003 report that the previous referendum had referred to the possible inclusion of sex as a ground of discrimination in article 15 of the Constitution, removal of the exemption granted in matters of personal law and the possibility of extending protection against discrimination to include additional categories. She would like to see the content of the revised version, and asked whether it would refer to extension of the definition of groups to be protected from discrimination.

31. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) reminded the Committee that the work of the newly appointed Constitutional Review Commission was still in its initial phase.

32. **Ms. Major** (Bahamas) said that the Bahamas had stated a reservation to article 2(a) because the Constitution contained no reference to gender or sex discrimination, which could be changed only through a referendum. A bill on marital rape had been tabled but then withdrawn in view of the need for broader public consultation.

33. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that the efforts of the Bahamas to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women were well documented. The

Domestic Violence (Protection Orders) Act had extended protection against domestic violence to include unmarried women and had broadened the definition of abuse to encompass physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse. It also covered stalking and sexual harassment in the workplace. The Government had already embarked on an educational campaign to ensure the widest possible dissemination of the Act's provisions. The efforts to amend the Sexual Offences Act had stalled, but Government was aware of the need to reopen the dialogue on that matter.

Article 3

34. **Ms. Zou Xiaoqiao** said that a strong national machinery with adequate resources was critical for women's empowerment. She asked about the timeline for the planned upgrade of the Bureau of Women's Affairs, and would be interested to hear when the Director would be appointed, how many staff members would be deployed and by what percentage the budget would be increased. As the Bureau was a national mechanism, she asked whether there were plans to establish local branches. She asked whether there was a time frame for adoption of the national gender policy and whether it would include a definition of discrimination in accordance with article 1 of the Convention. As the reports lacked gender-disaggregated data, she would like to know whether the gender policy included any targets or objectives to increase data collection capacity.

35. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that the Bureau of Women's Affairs had seen a 54-percent increase in its 2012 budget and those resources would be further increased with the transition to a Department. The staffing increase would be determined at a later date. The Bureau had local reach through the Ministry of Social Services, which had offices and staff in rural areas and the expansion of the Bureau would facilitate data collection. The gender policy, drafted with assistance from the United Nations Population Fund, was almost complete and would be presented to Parliament within six weeks.

36. **Ms. Campbell** (Bahamas) said that technical support for data collection could help to improve the implementation phase of the gender policy. The gender policy did include a definition of discrimination.

37. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that the work of the Bureau was complemented by the Government's contributions to various women's organizations, including the Crisis Centre and Bahamas Family Planning.

38. **Ms. Bailey** requested clarification of the lines of interaction between the Bureau, the National Women's Advisory Council and the Ministry, and also the exact role of the Council.

39. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that the Bureau was part of the Ministry and facilitated liaison with all women's organizations; the Advisory Council, as its name implied, made recommendations to the Minister based on input from the Bureau. The Minister, however, had final authority.

Article 4

40. **Ms. Neubauer** said that the State party's periodic reports had referred to the revision of laws, public education and the promotion of gender-sensitive programmes in schools as temporary special measures. However, those actions were general policies that did not qualify as temporary special measures. It was true that it took time to completely eradicate discrimination, but the State party had an obligation to take immediate steps to overcome inequality. She would like to know whether the Bureau of Women's Affairs had conducted any awareness-raising, training or discussions with stakeholders to increase the understanding of temporary special measures and whether there was any legal basis for applying them.

41. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that, as there were no barriers to the advancement of women in the Bahamas, the Government had not seen a need for extensive special measures, other than for maternity issues. Women had equal opportunities to enter politics and there were many women candidates, although few were elected. At the previous election, about 20 of the 130 candidates had been women.

42. **Ms. Campbell** (Bahamas) said that public meetings had been held over the past six months, in addition to extensive consultations and public awareness efforts regarding the rights set out in the Convention. Women in the Bahamas did not feel prevented from doing what they wanted and did not need extra assistance in the area of politics. Those who wished to run for political office were free to do so.

43. **Ms. Major** (Bahamas), responding to the question about a legal basis for temporary special measures, said that there was no basis for an exemption to the principle of equality.

44. **Ms. Neubauer** said that, according to the initial to fourth report, paragraph 131, special temporary measures were needed to change the unequal rates of labour force participation of women, lower wages and other areas of discrimination.

45. **The Chair** said that the State party might find it helpful to study general recommendation 28 in order to understand the concept of temporary special measures.

46. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that her delegation would review the definition of special measures and consider their implementation in the future.

47. **Ms. Major** (Bahamas) said that the Bahamas relied on legislation rather than affirmative action to address such issues.

48. **Ms. Šimonović** said that the provisions of the Convention had to be incorporated into the national legal system and the State party should consider how to incorporate temporary special measures into its legislation. General recommendation 28 offered many possibilities in addition to establishing quotas.

49. **Ms. Bareiro-Bobadilla** said that temporary special measures might be useful in areas such as political participation. Extensive international experience was available in that area and the Committee would continue to provide support in its future dialogues with the State party.

50. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that her delegation would consider all the recommendations made by Committee members and would respond to them in due course.

51. **The Chair**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, offered an example of a temporary measure from her own country, Brazil. In rural areas, preference was given to women rather than men when credits were granted and that policy would continue until the existing disparity had been reduced.

Article 5

52. **Ms. Acar** said that both reports had referred to men's role as breadwinners and women's role as caretakers, despite the fact that the available data

indicated that 38 per cent of households were headed by women. She requested clarification.

53. The report offered little information on measures to eliminate discriminatory stereotypes and cultural attitudes. Yet discriminatory stereotypes were often the root causes of other problems, including violence against women. She asked for more information on the obstacles linked to cultural practices and the challenges encountered in combating them.

54. The women of the Bahamas had apparently not supported the bill on marital rape. She would welcome further information on that issue and on the obstacles to change. The delegation should provide more information about the family life and counselling programmes that some churches and religious groups had established to combat stereotypes, and about cooperation between the Government and civil society organizations. She was also interested to hear about the role of mediation in changing cultural practices and reducing violence against women.

55. **Ms. Ameline** said that it was very important for the police, legal and social workers to coordinate their actions when dealing with domestic violence. It was also important to address the low level of access to justice, and the lack of shelters and psychological care for victims of violence. She asked whether protection orders were effective and whether there had been any evaluation of judges' capacity for rapid response. She also wished to hear more about efforts to prevent violence against children and whether it was possible to remove the perpetrator from the home. It was important to educate women about the traumatic effect of violence against women on children, as women sometimes accepted violence in order to stay in the home. She asked whether specially trained police staff were available for counselling and investigation, as it was important to women victims confidence in justice, in the police and in themselves.

56. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said she agreed that the report was inconsistent in its references to the role of women and men, as many households were now headed by single women who were both caregivers and breadwinners. Women parliamentarians had not had the opportunity to comment on the bill on marital rape, as the general public had voiced its concerns and the Government of the time had not proceeded with the legislation.

57. **Ms. Major** (Bahamas) said that according to the United Nations publication *The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*, table 4.A on labour force participation, unemployment and economic sector of employment, the Bahamas were ranked second in the Latin American and Caribbean region in 2010, with 67 per cent of women participating in the labour force, compared to 77 per cent of men.

58. With regard to the bill on marital rape, she explained that more education was needed so that people would better understand the issue. However, sexual abuse by a spouse was addressed by provisions of the Domestic Violence Protection Orders Act. The victim could apply for a domestic violence protection order through a police station or a faith-based organization and the order could be issued by a judge within 24 hours. An abusive husband could be removed from the home and the protection order could also cover issues such as payment of bills, use of the family car, and other arrangements.

59. The Act contained a wide variety of protections for children. In a case of child abuse in the home, anyone could apply for a protection order, and an abuser could be removed from the home within 48 hours. Children could also be placed in homes until an investigation had been carried out.

60. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that school curriculums did address stereotyping and cultural norms. With regard to domestic violence, training was provided for police officers and efforts were made to coordinate stakeholders, including the police, social workers and nurses.

61. **Ms. Sinclair** (Bahamas) said that the Bahamas recognized education as the principle vehicle for development of the individual as well as the nation. Both primary and secondary school curriculums therefore included family life and health education. The main focus was positive development of the individual and recognition of the roles played by individuals in the family, and their positive impact on the community. NGOs and other groups sent speakers to schools to discuss violence and peaceful existence in society.

62. **Ms. Ameline** asked whether the Bahamas was addressing the needs of Haitian women immigrants, who were in a particularly precarious situation.

63. **Ms. Acar** said that she would like to hear about the findings of the review of the Health and Family Life Education Curriculum in connection with to male and female stereotypes. With regard to implementation of the Domestic Violence Protection Orders Act, she was interested to hear what would happen if a woman withdrew her complaint because of family or social pressures.

64. **Ms. Sinclair** (Bahamas) said that the revision of the Health and Family Life Education Curriculum for the primary level had been completed in January 2012, to be implemented in the new school year starting in September 2012. It was based on the CARICOM regional curriculum and covered four themes: self and interpersonal relationships, sexuality and sexual health; nutrition; physical activity; and managing the environment. Students were empowered to make life-enhancing choices and did so by acquiring the knowledge, skills and positive values required for full development and active participation in society as a whole. The curriculum also addressed stereotypes.

65. The revision of the secondary-level curriculum would be completed by the end of 2012, for implementation in the following school year. It was based on the same four themes of the Caricom regional curriculum.

66. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that in the past, police officers had often been upset when, following the arrest of a domestic violence perpetrator, the victim would come to withdraw her complaint. The new legislation removed that possibility and the police could decide whether to continue to pursue the matter, while the victim could be required to explain in court why she wished to withdraw from the case. Special training was provided for police officers, government agencies and other stakeholders.

67. **Ms. Sinclair** (Bahamas) said that when an application for a protection order had been made, a copy was sent to the Commissioner of Police and to anyone else involved in the proceedings. Any breach of the order would lead to imprisonment. Social Services also attended the hearing.

68. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that the migrant population in Bahamas, including Haitian women, had access to health care, education and basic social services, but undocumented women were in a more precarious situation. It was difficult to follow up on

allegations of domestic violence if they would not come forward.

Article 6

69. **Ms. Gabr** said that she would like to receive information on coordination of the efforts of the inter-ministerial committee and the task force on trafficking in persons. She also asked for more details about the national plan, including the time frame and categories, and how the State party was addressing the situation of migrants. She was interested to know whether the justice system was aware of the issue and requested information on any measures taken to address the special health needs of the victims.

70. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that the Bahamas was taking a very proactive approach to trafficking in persons. Although no cases had yet been prosecuted, the Government had implemented measures to address any instances that might arise and was providing the necessary resources. Extensive training and public education was required, as the definition of trafficking in persons presented by the international community did not fully correspond to the understanding of that concept in the Bahamas.

71. **Ms. Dixon** (Bahamas), in response to Ms. Gabr's question, said that training had been provided for all members of both the inter-ministerial committee and the task force. As for the time frame for the national plan, the Bahamas had ratified the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and had enacted legislation on that subject in 2008. An action plan and protocols were being prepared so that members of the task force could coordinate their activities. There were comprehensive protections for children and a number of public awareness campaigns had been conducted. The Bahamas had collaborated with UN.GIFT and a leading restaurant franchise to promote public awareness of trafficking in persons. A number of faith-based organizations had been involved in promotional exercises and local media campaigns had been conducted.

72. **Ms. Major** (the Bahamas) said that the Act contained provisions to ensure a secure environment for victims and a victim protection programme. Victims involved in prostitution were not charged, and undocumented victims were provided with visas so that they could stay to testify in the court case, with the

trafficker's assets being used to cover any expenses. The Government also ensured the victim's safe arrival home.

73. The Act contained a broad definition of trafficking, but offences were often prosecuted under other legislation. For example, if a man had sex with a minor, he might be guilty of a trafficking offence, but would usually be prosecuted under the Sexual Offences Act. In future, all cases of trafficking in persons would be treated as such.

74. **Ms. Jahan** said that no prosecutions had taken place under the 2008 trafficking legislation. However, section 7 of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act of 1991 included provisions for a term of imprisonment of 8 years for trafficking in persons under the age of 18 years for prostitution. She wondered whether that provision could be extended to include women over the age of 18 years, taking into account the Palermo Protocol and the four elements of prevention, prosecution, protection and partnership. She also asked whether there was any regional mechanism for cooperation to combat trafficking.

75. The initial periodic report also mentioned legal sanctions for a person convicted of raping a prostitute, with a minimum term of 7 years and a maximum term of life imprisonment. She asked whether the penalty was the same in other cases of rape.

76. **Ms. Murillo De La Vega** was interested to hear whether the Government was considering specific legislation to combat sex tourism.

77. **Ms. Griffin** (Bahamas) said that no instances of sexual tourism had been reported.

78. **Ms. Bailey** said that the ministerial committee and the task force on trafficking were apparently two separate and mutually exclusive entities but she wondered whether there was any overlap in their composition and mandates.

79. **Ms. Major** (Bahamas), said that the penalty for rape was the same in all cases under the Sexual Offences Act.

80. **Ms. Dixon** (Bahamas), in response to the question about a regional mechanism to combat trafficking in persons, said that the Bahamas had held a number of workshops and training exercises with regional partners. In 2004, workshops had been conducted with the International Organization of

Migration and the Organization of American States at the hemispheric level. She would provide further details regarding the plan of action at the following meeting.

Articles 7 and 8

81. **Ms. Murillo De La Vega** said that she was interested to hear why so few women participated in political life. There was apparently no impediment in the legislation, but she would like to hear about any active policies to encourage their participation. The Government should seek out the obstacles to inequality and eliminate them, including by obliging political parties to establish quotas for women candidates.

82. It seemed that no efforts were being made to encourage women to participate in politics or to encourage men to share power. She asked whether there were any expert groups that could provide mentoring to increase the number of women in political life, which would make it easier for women to stay in politics. Schools should help their pupils to understand the importance of participation in civic life.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.