



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Seventy-third session

Summary record of the 1700th meeting*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 9 July 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Gbedemah

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

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

Eighth periodic report of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
(CEDAW/C/COD/8; CEDAW/C/COD/Q/8 and CEDAW/C/COD/Q/8/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Ms. Mushobekwa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo), introducing her country's eighth periodic report (CEDAW/C/COD/8), said that the report detailed the political, legislative, judicial and administrative measures that the Government had taken to give effect to the rights enshrined in the Convention, together with programmes, strategies and other actions implemented for the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls.
3. One of those rights referred to women's political participation. In that regard, it should be noted that the speaker of the National Assembly and two of the seven members of the Bureau of the National Assembly were women, although women accounted for only 10 per cent of elected deputies and they held just 19 out of 108 seats in the Senate. None of the 26 provinces had female governors, although two women had been elected as vice-governors. Only seven women held positions in the outgoing administration; however, the new President had promised that women would have greater representation in his government. In the judiciary, there were no women among the nine Constitutional Court judges, although 3 of the Court's 12 prosecutors were women.
4. At first glance, therefore, women's representation in decision-making bodies remained low, and did not reach the 30 per cent goal set by the United Nations and regional organizations. Yet an overall analysis of the situation revealed that many efforts had been made over the previous decade, while the recent peaceful transfer of power to an elected president made it possible for women to dream that the country would one day elect a female president. That power had been transferred without bloodshed was a victory for women, because it showed that they could attain the highest office through the ballot box, rather than through a coup d'état.
5. To address the situation of women in situations of armed conflict, the second-generation national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) had been adopted for the period 2018–2022 and was accompanied by an operational plan with a budget of \$26 million. Moreover, the African Union had adopted and transmitted the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, which encouraged the establishment of new institutions that incorporated a gender perspective. The Government, in cooperation with women's organizations and with the support of international partners, actively engaged in peacebuilding activities such as awareness-raising among armed groups and conflict resolution.
6. A new law on public health had entered into force in March 2019; it promoted reproductive health as an effective way of reducing infant and maternal mortality and provided for the free and compulsory vaccination of all residents. The Government had developed a multisectoral strategic action plan on family planning and had organized campaigns for the prevention and treatment of obstetric fistula, benefiting almost 3,000 women.
7. Since acceding to the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Government had become sensitive to the need for women and indigenous peoples to participate in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of disaster risk reduction and climate resilience laws and programmes. Through the national action plan for climate change adaption, the Government had raised communities' awareness of how to use agrometeorological data and had installed rain gauges in 100 villages in four provinces. Women's organizations were producing improved cook stoves to help preserve the forest and reduce the carbon footprint of households.

8. The aim of the national gender policy was to build a society without discrimination in which men, women, boys and girls had the same opportunities to participate in development and to enjoy the benefits of economic growth. That policy was now being updated to bring it into line with the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2063 of the African Union and efforts to tackle climate change.

9. **Ms. Gabr** said that the women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had suffered greatly in recent decades and that several problems needed to be resolved as a matter of priority. The Committee had received damning reports from United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that sexual violence and rape were used against women as a weapon of war and that in 2018 unidentified armed men had attacked villages and raped women and girls, with the violence persisting in some regions. The Committee therefore welcomed the second national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) but wished to request further information on how its activities would be funded given that the State party had acknowledged the need to mobilize substantial financial resources. In the light of minimal participation of women in the first national action plan, their lack of awareness of resolution 1325 (2000) and the small budget of the Ministry of Gender, Family and Children's Affairs, she asked how the State planned to ensure the effective participation of women in the second plan. Noting the information provided on rape cases in 2014 and 2015, she asked whether compensation had been provided for the victims.

10. Another important question for women's rights was the control of small arms and light weapons. While the State party had made progress in disarming certain groups, the Committee was concerned that, according to the midterm report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/1133), arms and materiel had been delivered to armed groups in violation of the embargo. The adoption of a new national action plan for the control and management of small arms and light weapons in March 2018 was a step forward; however it remained unclear whether the law adopted by the Senate in December 2013 had been approved by the President and whether it contained the relevant definitions. Considering that women were among those most affected by the illicit arms trade, she asked whether the Government intended to ratify the relevant international and regional conventions to tackle the problem. How did the Government plan to ensure the participation of women's organizations in the development, implementation and monitoring of arms control programmes?

11. Considering that the political and economic situation of the country had prevented the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals, she asked how the Government planned to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 5 on gender equality, and whether it had developed an action plan and allocated human and financial resources for that purpose.

Articles 1 to 6

12. **Ms. Ameline** said that she was interested to know how the State party would act upon receiving the Committee's concluding observations and whether it might be discussing them in the parliament or in an interministerial meeting. Given that consolidating the rule of law and respect for women's rights was crucial for the reconstruction of the country, she wondered whether the State party had taken any steps towards ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention. Moreover, the Committee was concerned that the rule of law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was weakened by the fact that international treaties did not seem to have a concrete impact on the domestic legal order. Therefore, she wished to know whether any processes were under way to review the implementation of treaties and to develop a new legislative agenda with a view to strengthening the rights of women.

13. The Committee welcomed the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission, but was concerned that it was not fully funded. She therefore wished to know how the Government planned to ensure the allocation of resources so that the Commission's regional offices could perform their functions.

14. Noting that article 14 of the Constitution contained a definition of discrimination, she asked how the State party addressed the concepts of direct and indirect discrimination. She asked how the State party ensured the implementation of and respect for positive law, recalling that the primacy of international law over positive law implied the primacy of the Convention over customary law. She was interested to know how the Government could strengthen the justice system so that the courts functioned as effectively as possible throughout the national territory and how it promoted the visibility of the Convention.

15. Indigenous peoples constituted a great treasure for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for Africa and for humanity. However, given that they were not immune to poverty and conflict, she wondered what policy the Government might put in place to preserve their existence and culture and ensure respect for their fundamental rights. Lastly, emphasizing that civil society was a force for peace and dialogue, she invited the Government to ensure that peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts included an institutionalized consultation process through which society might be transformed for the better.

16. **Ms. Safou Lopusa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the budget of the operational plan of the second-generation national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) would facilitate the implementation of activities throughout the country, organized through the provincial secretariats that had been established in 10 of the 11 former provinces. The Government had evaluated the actions carried out under the first action plan and recognized the need to continue that work. Although financing presented a challenge, the Government had always received support from its partners on the ground, including United Nations funds and programmes. The Government did not operate in isolation but routinely included civil society by inviting women's organizations to participate in activities and consultations and taking their views into account. Similarly, the Government cooperated with national and local stakeholders in its efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

17. **Ms. Mushobekwa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that, in respect of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Government had recognized that low-income families could not afford to send all their children to school and that some parents chose to send only their sons. To address that situation, the Government had developed a plan to increase girls' school attendance, and primary education was now free and compulsory. Girls' education was crucial both for the country's development and for women's participation in decision-making bodies, since it addressed the root problem of gender inequality. Girls were increasingly enrolling at university and going on to professions such as aviation, civil engineering and nuclear medicine, which previously had been accessible only to men. Many women had stood as candidates in the recent elections, challenging the traditional notion that women should stay at home and look after their families. In many provinces attitudes were changing, and it was increasingly acceptable for women to take an interest in politics and to stand for elected office.

18. Although women in rural areas continued to have large families, the birth rate in the large cities had fallen noticeably, reflecting a significant social change in that women were now able to decide whether or not to marry and have children. Furthermore, it was no longer usual for girls to get married at the age of 14 years; they now tended to do so once they had reached the age of 18. That change reflected an amendment to the Family Code prohibiting the celebration of marriages involving children, which had greatly reduced the rate of forced marriages.

19. **Ms. Mushobekwa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that prosecutions had been brought against military officials convicted of rape or complicity in rape. Under the law, the same punishment was imposed for rape as for murder, and perpetrators were not entitled to any amnesty. In conflict zones however, many women failed to report rape owing to a culture of shame surrounding rape and the need for medical certification and witnesses.

20. It would be for the Council of Ministers and the parliament to decide what action should be taken on the international and regional instruments for the control of small arms and light weapons that had been referred to earlier. The public funds set aside for the National Human Rights Commission was currently insufficient to enable it to

independently fulfil its functions of collecting data and investigating human rights violations, or to allow for the construction of new office buildings to ensure decent working conditions for staff.

21. Regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, while the law did not outlaw same-sex relations in private, it did not authorize same-sex marriage, and the Constitution and the Family Code permitted marriage between men and women only. No culture or province throughout the country authorized same-sex marriage and the people, who had the right to protect their culture, were not ready to accept it.

22. Turning to the indigenous pygmy communities, while some groups had been forced to leave their homes because of conflict and others faced discrimination based on their belonging to an indigenous group, progress was nevertheless being made. Efforts were made to reduce deforestation and harmful mining operations affecting pygmy communities. Mining companies investing in certain regions were expected to build free schools and clinics and to provide medicines for the indigenous pygmy and other communities living in the region. A bill on the protection of indigenous peoples' rights was pending before the National Assembly, which it was hoped would be enacted under the current Government.

23. **Ms. Safou Lopusa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the participation at the present meeting of a parliamentarian demonstrated the Government's commitment to implementing the Committee's recommendations following the dialogue. Draft national legal instruments always took into account the views of the Ministry of Gender, Family and Children's Affairs and the Ministry of Human Rights. There had been a woman head of the parliament in the past, which indicated progress. Awareness-raising was carried out among the population regarding draft laws before the parliament.

24. **Ms. Gabr** said that the vibrant NGO and civil society movement in the country would contribute to the Government's awareness-raising initiatives and promotion of women's rights. She asked whether victims of gender-based violence were awarded compensation. She would like further information on the Act on the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Their Ammunition, adopted by the Senate on 3 December 2013 and on the possibility of including definitions of small arms, light weapons and weapons of war in the Act.

25. **Ms. Ameline** said that ending violence and impunity in the country was the Committee's prime concern. The parity-based institutional integration of women in peace processes was crucial to their real participation in such processes. Women were the first victims of war but also the main drivers of peace and transformation of a country. She asked whether thorough investigations were currently being conducted into cases of rape, including into the numerous cases resulting from recent outbreaks of violence in the country. She would also like to know whether a national comprehensive interministerial strategy was in place linking the Sustainable Development Goals with women's rights and the Convention. She would like information on the hierarchy of laws, including customary law. She asked how the Government would ensure that the bill on the protection of human rights defenders, currently pending before the parliament, fully covered the role of civil society and NGOs in national reconstruction processes.

26. **Ms. Mushobekwa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that, unfortunately, the national budget remained insufficient to grant compensation to victims of gender-based violence, particularly given the priority to restore security in the country. The successful implementation of policies and programmes first required peace, which would in turn significantly reduce sexual violence. The fight against sexual violence would continue for many years, as it would take time to address over two decades of conflict and teach people that rape could not be used as a weapon of war.

27. Her delegation would communicate to the parliament the Committee's recommendations regarding the Act on the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Their Ammunition.

28. Although sexist attitudes in society persisted, many women were highly qualified and participated in political activities. The Government was considering ways to ensure parity, and amendments to the Labour Code and Family Code had contributed to women's

empowerment. While there were no women judges in the Constitutional Court or the Military Court, many woman worked as magistrates.

29. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she was concerned about the insufficient data on the impact of actions carried out within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, as rates of gender-based violence, unemployment, poverty and maternal mortality were high. She was concerned at the lack of evidence of gender-responsive budgets and results that contributed to women's equality within the framework of the country's infrastructure development programme. The coordinating role of the Ministry of Gender, Family and Children's Affairs was unclear, the proportion of the national budget allocated to it was just over 2 per cent and, other than staff salaries, no budget allocations were made for its initiatives, which compromised their reach and effectiveness.

30. She asked what systems were in place to enable the national women's machinery to deliver its mandate, including its plans and policies, with a view to complying with the Convention and general recommendation No. 6 (1988) on effective national machinery and publicity. National women's machinery should be recognized in its own right as a crucial tool for achieving gender equality and ensuring effective implementation of the Convention. She therefore asked whether the Interministerial Committee and the National Gender Equality Council mechanisms provided for in the Parity Act had been established and whether they were aligned with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. She asked whether there was any coordination among the national women's machinery and other institutions and whether any guidelines, targets or regulations were in place to provide appropriate frameworks for stakeholders and facilitate compliance with the Convention and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

31. She asked what percentage of women were aware of the new protective measures and had effective recourse to them, whether related awareness-raising campaigns were carried out at the local level and whether facilities were available in local areas to enable women to fully benefit from those measures. Regarding legislative reforms, she asked whether the assignment of women judges to public prosecutors' offices and courts in the eastern part of the country had been effective in preventing violence from recurring, what the impact of the provision of funds for the organization of mobile courts had been, and how those courts were linked to the national women's machinery.

32. **Ms. Verges** said that the purpose of temporary special measures was to accelerate equality and redress inequalities between men and women. The measures were repealed once parity was achieved and could, for example, comprise quotas. Such measures were therefore not considered discriminatory, as they addressed situations of inequality at the outset. Noting that no temporary special measures had been adopted in the State party since 2013, despite the Committee's recommendation and the underrepresentation of women in politics, she asked what measures were taken or envisaged to revise the decision of the Constitutional Court of 24 January 2014 that quotas for the representation of women in political and administrative fields were unconstitutional. She would like to know what mechanisms were in place, in the absence of quotas, to accelerate women's representation at senior levels in various domains and what measures had been taken to ensure indigenous women's representation in decision-making posts.

33. **Ms. Safou Lopusa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the Agency to Combat Violence against Women and Girls and the National Fund for the Advancement of Women and the Protection of Children did what they could to advance women's rights using the very limited budget available. The Fund employed full-time staff members and its activities included providing microcredit to women in Kinshasa, with assistance from its partners. Women in her country were becoming increasingly active in the struggle for gender equality, as exemplified by the fact that several women had become pilots. Women's knowledge and skills would be valued in politics; however, male leaders of political parties were often reluctant to field women candidates. A raft of measures had been taken under the national strategy to combat gender-based violence, including penalties designed to deter potential perpetrators of violence.

34. The Ministry of Gender, Family and Children's Affairs had worked with civil society to prepare the documentation to establish the Interministerial Committee. All ministries had gender units equipped with focal points to relay information on gender-related matters across Government. The State had ratified the Maputo Protocol and measures had been adopted to raise awareness of the Protocol, including publication in the Official Gazette and dissemination in the press, with the assistance of a committee of journalists. Ministers had travelled to inland and rural areas to raise awareness of the women's rights among the local and provincial authorities.

35. **Ms. Mushobekwa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the courts were not sufficiently funded and there were very few judges in the provinces. Addressing that issue was a key priority for her Government, which was seeking to increase the numbers of trained judges, allocate sufficient funding and provide adequate office buildings. National law had primacy over customary law in all cases. For example, provisions of the Family Code establishing the minimum age of marriage at 18 took precedence over customary laws whereby children as young as 14 were permitted to marry.

36. Inequality in the labour market continued to be widespread. Men were often given priority over equally qualified women when applying for jobs and men often enjoyed more benefits than women in similar positions. While some progress had been made, by increasing the number of girls attending school, for example, more time was needed to tackle those inequalities. The established quota of 30 per cent for female representatives in all decision-making bodies and the Government was not respected in practice; of the 58 government ministers, only 7 were women. None of the Constitutional Court judges were women despite the existence of well-qualified female judges.

37. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that the State party would do well to consider addressing the issue of funding, since without sufficient resources, the national women's machinery would be unable to provide the services required to implement women's rights laws effectively, resulting in de jure, but not de facto, equality. She wished to know whether the appointment of the Personal Representative of the Head of State on Sexual Violence and Child Recruitment had assisted in strengthening the existing systems and mechanisms to address those issues. She would appreciate an explanation of how national women's machinery was engaged in the process of appointing the Representative and how it ensured that the Representative helped protect survivors and that the services provided met global standards. She would be interested to learn about the role of the national women's machinery in the information exchange mechanisms for the extradition of offenders in the Great Lakes subregion and in the running of operational zones in conflict-affected provinces.

38. **Ms. Ameline** asked whether women served in the security forces and whether training for judges on the Convention and other international treaties was one of the Government's priorities regarding the justice system.

39. **Ms. Gabr** said that women's rights mechanisms and access to justice were essential in advancing women's rights in practice, and raising awareness among women was vital for bringing perpetrators of rights violations to justice. She understood the financial problems faced by the State party; nevertheless, it was one of the richest countries in terms of natural resources and it was important to ensure that some of the wealth was used to benefit women.

40. **Ms. Safou Lopusa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the Office of the Personal Representative of the Head of State on Sexual Violence and Child Recruitment had been set up by the previous President of the National Assembly and its work continued under the current President, Jeanine Mabunda. The Office worked closely with the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights and the Ministry of Gender, Family and Children's Affairs, as well as the President of the National Assembly, and it had submitted various reports to United Nations bodies on the efforts taken to prevent the recruitment of children into the armed forces. The national army had been removed from the list of the United Nations list of State actors that used child soldiers.

41. The Constitutional Court decision of 2014 declaring election quotas unconstitutional had been a setback. However, the President of the National Assembly had made a

commitment to reform and it was hoped that alternative temporary special measures to enhance women's representation in decision-making positions would be found soon. Women not only served in the police and the armed forces, but they had also reached the highest ranks of those institutions. The Democratic Republic of the Congo set an example for other African countries in that regard.

42. A number of strategies were in place to raise awareness of the international and regional instruments regarding women's rights. Although the practice of abortion was strictly prohibited under national law, the ratification of the Maputo Protocol meant that it was permitted in cases of rape.

43. **Ms. Mushobekwa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the national army had been removed from the list of State actors that used child soldiers. Bosco Ntaganda and Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, among others, had been convicted of war crimes, including the recruitment of child soldiers, by the International Criminal Court. The training and capacity-building of judges was indeed a priority, as there was no other way of ending impunity for crimes such as sexual violence and the recruitment of child soldiers.

44. There was a strong desire among women to empower themselves by seeking to hold public office. However, the fact that women did not have the same resources as men posed a problem, particularly when campaigning in elections.

45. The considerable wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo would be better invested in supporting women's development. It was also to be hoped that the multinational companies that sent weapons to and funded wars in the country for the purpose of engaging in the illegal exploitation of natural resources would cease their activities and leave the population in peace. While many in the international community were aware of the situation in the country, few had condemned it.

46. Female victims of sexual or domestic violence or both were often reluctant to come forward and seek justice, as they could not afford legal representation and were afraid of being condemned by their family and judged by society. In order to improve women's access to justice, the Ministry of Human Rights had been granted permission to hire lawyers to represent impoverished women who had suffered sexual or domestic violence and to bring those responsible to justice. Women in that situation who wished to obtain a divorce could also avail themselves of services of those lawyers.

47. **Ms. Rana** said that the State party's efforts to break down gender stereotypes, which she considered to be the root cause of many of the problems facing women in the country, while laudable, had proved to be insufficient, as such stereotypes seemed to persist in all sectors. Noting that the State party had conducted numerous studies on social stereotypes in partnership with United Nations agencies, she asked what steps had been taken to give effect to the recommendations that they contained. She would also appreciate more information on the specific strategies in place to eliminate stereotypes in the education sector and on the measures taken to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of women and men and to eliminate harmful traditional practices. Had the State party considered adopting specific programmes targeting men and boys?

48. While the State party was to be commended for having adopted action plans and created mechanisms to combat gender-based violence, a number of major gaps remained, particularly in the areas of domestic violence, marital rape and sexual violence. According to a 2014 government survey, over 50 per cent of women had suffered physical violence, over 50 per cent of married women had suffered domestic, physical or sexual violence and 75 per cent of women found the violence against them to be justified. Regrettably, there seemed to have been little or no improvement in the intervening years.

49. In its previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/COD/CO/6-7), the Committee had raised concerns over the lack of legal provisions prohibiting domestic violence, including marital rape, and the lack of support services for victims, recommending that the State party should ensure that domestic violence, including marital rape, was explicitly prohibited and provide for adequate sanctions. According to the State party's written replies, domestic violence continued to be the hidden aspect of violence against women, since such cases were rarely brought before the courts, which was especially true for

marital rape, which was not commonly recognized, the accepted social norm being that a man could use his wife's body whenever he needed it. Given the seriousness of the problem, she failed to understand why there was still no specific legal framework on domestic violence, which instead was dealt with under the Criminal Code provisions on assault and rape.

50. It would be helpful to receive statistics on the number of complaints of domestic violence lodged and prosecutions brought under the statutory provisions of the Criminal Code and the law on the repression of sexual violence (Act No. 06/018 of 20 July 2006). She would also like to receive statistics on the prevalence of domestic violence in the country as a follow-up to the 2014 survey. She asked whether the State party might consider revising the Criminal Code to expressly prohibit domestic violence and marital rape. The Committee had learned from alternate sources that there were no mechanisms in place to protect the survivors of domestic violence and that many women who lodged complaints of domestic violence were forced to withdraw them under the threat of reprisals from their families. She asked whether the State party might consider opening shelters and taking legal measures to protect those women.

51. **Ms. Gabr** said that it would be useful to learn more about the national committee to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling established within the Ministry of the Interior and any related awareness-raising campaigns and action plans. She would also appreciate more information on the composition of and resources allocated to the anti-trafficking agency established by the President of the Republic following a recent visit to the United States. The delegation should also inform the Committee of the most recent developments regarding the bill on combating human trafficking. It would also be helpful to hear more about the State party's efforts to identify, rehabilitate and reintegrate children exploited by armed groups.

52. Given that the law of the Democratic Republic of the Congo punished only trafficking in children, exploitation in the sex trade and the forced prostitution of adults and not prostitution in general, she would be interested to know why so many prostitutes had been arrested by and suffered acts of physical and sexual violence at the hands of law enforcement officials. What steps had been taken to identify, protect and rehabilitate female victims of human trafficking? Had the Ministry of Internal Affairs established a specific procedure for collecting data?

53. She would like to hear more about the extent of its cooperation with United Nations agencies and civil society in combating human trafficking and to know whether it had considered requesting technical assistance from the African Union in designing anti-trafficking measures given the transnational nature of the crime.

54. **Ms. Mushobekwa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the Government considered awareness-raising among local leaders, who were often the proponents of the idea of male superiority, to be the key to breaking down gender stereotypes. Local leaders needed to understand that all children were born equal and that, contrary to popular belief, just because a girl went to school and became an educated woman, did not mean that she would fail to respect her future husband.

55. It was true that domestic violence continued to be the hidden aspect of violence against women that was often ignored or downplayed. The culture of silence around domestic violence could be explained in part by the existence of a dowry system. Once a woman's husband had paid the dowry to her parents, he considered her to be his property. However, female victims of domestic violence who had contracted a civil marriage could not be forced to leave the family home. Many women in that situation were actively discouraged by their own families from reporting the abuse that they had suffered. She acknowledged that there was a need for a specific law criminalizing domestic violence. More also needed to be done to raise the awareness of victims of domestic violence of the avenues of legal recourse available to them and to change the mentality of men who considered their wives to be their property. There was currently no mechanism in place to facilitate the social reintegration of victims of domestic violence as, to date, very few men had been convicted of that offence.

56. The law of the Democratic Republic of the Congo prohibited procurement but not prostitution itself. Many women turned to prostitution, as they had no other source of income or were obliged to do so by their family. The existing legal prohibition of procurement should be extended to prostitution, especially given the number of children who were exploited for that purpose. Prostitutes who suffered acts of physical or sexual violence were often reluctant to report those responsible to the police, who tended to view such acts as an occupational hazard.

57. Although specific legislation on human trafficking had not yet been adopted, a number of strategies had been put in place to combat that phenomenon, particularly trafficking in children. In order to prevent child abduction, a ministerial order had been issued according to which a parent wishing to travel abroad alone with his or her child was obliged to obtain written permission from his or her spouse and a special authorization from the Directorate General for Migration. While the arrival of biometric passports had led to an overall reduction in the number of cases of human trafficking, citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to be exploited in other African countries.

58. **Ms. Safou Lopusa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that married women tended to tolerate and not report instances of marital rape, as the accepted social norm was that a man could use his wife's body whenever he needed it. Furthermore, very few married women would wish to defy their family and denounce their husband, as doing so would likely put an end to their marriage. The simple fact was that instances of domestic violence and marital rape remained private affairs that were resolved within the family and that the women affected were reluctant to speak out for fear of reprisals. Beyond giving advice, the State was limited in terms of the practical assistance that it could provide.

59. The national committee to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling cooperated with other government ministries in the exchange of information related to anti-trafficking activities. The anti-trafficking agency established by the President of the Republic, which had only just become operational, worked closely with the national committee. The possibility of establishing cooperation agreements with other African countries was being explored.

60. **Ms. Gabr** said that it would be useful to know how many government ministers actually sat on the national committee to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling and to receive additional information on its activities. She would also appreciate more information on the anti-trafficking agency established by the President of the Republic. That information could be provided to the Committee within 48 hours if necessary. She asked how the State party went about identifying, rehabilitating and reintegrating children exploited by armed groups and what opportunities were available to women wishing to leave prostitution.

61. **Ms. Rana** said it was evident that more needed to be done to address the culture of silence around domestic violence and entrenched social stereotypes. The low number of complaints of domestic violence made it all the more important to adopt separate legislation criminalizing that phenomenon. She asked whether the revised national strategy to combat gender-based violence included specific measures to address domestic violence, awareness-raising initiatives targeting boys and men and support services for victims. How did the State party deal with acts of sexual violence committed against women and girls in conflict-affected areas and in detention centres? Did the second-generation national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) promote the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes and negotiations at all levels, access to justice for women and women's right to information?

62. **Ms. Mushobekwa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the delegation would endeavour to transmit the information requested by Ms. Gabr within 48 hours. Cases of domestic violence would need to be prosecuted under a separate law criminalizing that phenomenon. Such a law would need to be accompanied by an awareness-raising campaign to encourage women to come forward.

Articles 7 to 9

63. **Ms. Verges** said that the Committee welcomed the legislative measures taken by the State party to guarantee women's participation in the public and political life of the country, particularly Act No. 15/013 of 1 August 2015 on the means of giving effect to women's rights and gender parity. She asked how that Act was enforced and what steps the State party envisaged taking to increase the number of women in the Chamber of Deputies, provincial and municipal governments and the Constitutional Court, where they were still underrepresented. It would also be useful to know whether the State party intended to revise the law on the organization of elections (Act No. 17/013 of 24 December 2017 amending and supplementing Act No. 06/006 of 9 March 2006) to increase women's participation in the public and political life of the country and to remedy existing gender inequalities. Lastly, she would like to receive statistical data on the number of women serving in international organizations.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.