



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

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

Summary record of the 785th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 24 May 2007, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Šimonović

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

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

Initial periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic (CEDAW/C/SYR/1, CEDAW/C/SYR/Q/1, CEDAW/C/SYR/Q/1/Add.1)

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

2. **Ms. Ghanem** (Syrian Arab Republic), introducing the State party's initial report, said that her delegation welcomed the opportunity to present national efforts to implement the Convention and engage in frank dialogue that would contribute to improving the situation of Syrian women and highlight implementation challenges. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs (SCFA) was responsible for bringing national law into line with international obligations, setting national policies and strategies and monitoring implementation. It had access to other governmental bodies and was also responsible for cooperation and coordination with non-governmental organizations; strong partnerships between such bodies and organizations would contribute significantly to the realization of gender equity.

3. Her country strove to fully respect its international commitments and had taken significant initiatives and measures pursuant to the Convention. Her Government had withdrawn its reservations concerning article 21 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and article 2, article 15, paragraph 4, article 16, paragraph 1 (g) and paragraph 2, of the Convention under discussion. Such decisions were reached with considerable effort from a wide range of players and stakeholders. Further work was required to withdraw the remaining reservations and put the Convention into effect in national law. To that end, a broad media information campaign was being waged to encourage debate on the remaining reservations.

4. A team of national experts from government organizations and non-governmental bodies had drafted her country's initial report and had attended a number of specialized workshops as part of their preparation. The report had been distributed widely, including to members of Parliament and ministers for their comments. Moreover, the Commission for Family Affairs had organized a workshop to distribute the

questions on her country's initial periodic report and formulate the reply. Since article 25 of the Syrian Civil Code gave precedence to international agreements over national laws, the Commission had prepared a training programme for Syrian courts on utilization of the Convention as a national tool.

5. Recent studies, including one by the Commission for Family Affairs, had revealed the extent of violence against women in her country. The Tenth Five-Year Plan addressed the need to eradicate violence against women and secure appropriate shelter for those in need and a national plan had been drafted by SCFA. Civil society had played a leading role in securing shelter and help for women victims of violence and a new shelter had recently been established by the National Association for Women's Progress, with funding from Japan. The role of civil society in combating violence against women was increasing. The organization Women of Syria had led the campaign against honour crimes demanding the repeal of article 548 of the Penal Code, with the support of the Grand Mufti and Minister of Religious Affairs; the Commission had duly submitted a proposal to that effect to the Ministry of Justice for review. A nationwide media campaign on gender-based violence had been launched.

6. The political will existed in her country to empower women and increase their presence in decision-making positions, as reflected in the appointment of a woman to the position of Vice-President of the Republic for Cultural Affairs. The Commission for Family Affairs had published a study on the political empowerment of Syrian women and conducted a training programme on women's leadership and political participation, in collaboration with the General Women's Union and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

7. Increased attention was being paid to women's health. In support of reproductive health, her Government had become self-reliant with regard to contraceptive procurement and approved the national population strategy prepared by the Commission. A number of awareness campaigns had been launched by it in various media on safe motherhood and the benefits of family planning and further research had been conducted on women's health and family planning in the different regions. Considering education to be central to the process of women's empowerment, the Commission had worked closely with the Ministry of Education to integrate gender-sensitive concepts in

national curricula and collaborated with UNICEF to develop guidelines on children's rights for parents and teachers.

8. The Tenth Five-Year Plan, which devoted a specific chapter to the advancement of women, had established objectives with regard to the amendment of laws, including the Personal Status Act. Honour killing and the age of custody were issues that needed to be addressed and the Commission had drafted amendments to the laws in force for review and consideration. The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (2007-2011) was being prepared in cooperation with UNIFEM, and Ministry of Finance employees were receiving training in gender awareness. The Ministry of Agriculture had drafted a map of rural poverty, in order to analyse the situation of rural women, on the basis of which the State Planning Commission had prepared the National Project to Combat Poverty and Empower Women and related programmes. At the same time, a number of workshops had been held in order to evaluate and build the institutional and technical capacity of women at the national level. The Tenth Five-Year Plan was based on the need for social equity, which could be achieved through social development with an adequate legal environment and social security. The Plan had identified specific areas of intervention. Projects at all levels were focused on the north-eastern region, which was in need of social and economic development.

9. One chapter of the Tenth Five-Year Plan was devoted to civil society. The Government worked constantly in cooperation with civil society, as was evident in work on amendments to the relevant laws. Government and civil society had formed a partnership to advance women's issues and develop new laws and cooperated in the preparation of the report to the Committee. The Syrian Women's League had broken new ground with its shadow report on Beijing+10.

10. With regard to human trafficking, a decree had been issued in 2005 requiring a draft law on the organization of private employment agencies importing domestic workers. A committee with representatives from various ministries and the Commission for Family Affairs had been established and a draft law formulated, with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which had conducted a number of workshops to build capacities and raise awareness of related issues. About 12 per cent of the population were refugees as a result of

recent events in Lebanon and Iraq, placing considerable pressure on the economy and infrastructure of her country. The humanitarian situation of those refugees was serious and their difficulties were acknowledged by the Government, which took all necessary actions to protect human rights and prevent human trafficking.

11. Efforts to improve the situation of women and eliminate discrimination were being made in a national political, social and economic context as well as a regional context. Increased conservatism in the region had slowed women's advancement and posed a challenge to secular values. International efforts should be made to ensure that women were included in peace processes. Although there was an established link between democracy and the status of women, democratic change should be allowed to develop, rather than being imposed. Capacity-building programmes to equip women for participation in political activities were needed, in addition to advocacy and empowerment; mechanisms for their participation, such as quota systems, should also be applied.

12. Her country had taken the first steps towards gender equity. Compliance with international obligations, the updating of national laws and the preparation of society to accept change were the foundations of change that would be aided further by cooperation with the Committee and lessons learned from other countries.

Articles 1 and 2

13. **Ms. Gabr** welcomed the withdrawal of certain reservations to the Convention and asked for further information about the legal procedure and plan for withdrawal of the remaining ones. Given the precedence of international over national legislation, she sought clarification with regard to amendments to laws dealing with honour crimes, sexual harassment, marriage age and labour laws. She also enquired whether the Commission for Family Affairs gave precedence to the family or to women, from the legal point of view.

14. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** congratulated the Syrian Government on the withdrawal of certain reservations. She noted that the empowerment of women was not mentioned as one of the objectives of the Commission and that its name appeared to imply that the role of

women was framed by their role in the family. She asked about the status of unmarried women or others who wished to expand their role beyond motherhood. She noted the need for legislative reforms and serious discussion of existing laws, including laws on rape, which strengthened negative stereotypes of women. She asked whether any special mechanism existed through which women could pursue their rights, such as an ombudsperson.

15. **Mr. Flinterman** welcomed the withdrawal of reservations to the Convention. He noted that the Syrian Arab Republic had entered no reservations concerning article 23, paragraph 4, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights whereas it had done so with regard to article 16, paragraph 1 (c), of the Convention, which was worded in the same way. He also asked for further clarification of the scope of the remaining reservations to article 16, paragraphs 1 (d) and 1 (f). Since the hierarchy of international agreements and domestic law had been dealt with in a civil court, rather than in the Constitution, he asked for information regarding the precedence of international agreements over constitutional norms. Furthermore, he asked whether there had been any court decision in which the Syrian judiciary had applied the provisions of other international human rights agreements, in particular in relation to the equal rights of men and women.

16. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, requested a clear time frame for the actual withdrawal of reservations and noted the importance of the withdrawal of reservations to article 2. She asked whether the possibility of ratifying the Optional Protocol had been discussed and requested information on the inclusion of a definition of discrimination in national law, in line with article 1 of the Convention. Furthermore, she sought an update on the new law on procedures for cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

17. **Ms. Ghanem** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the decision to withdraw the State party's reservations on the articles previously mentioned had already been taken, and the relevant documents were awaiting signature by the President. It was expected that the procedure for withdrawing the reservations in question would be completed before the end of 2007.

18. Debate was under way on the issue of amending national laws to bring them into line with the

Convention. However, the process was lengthy, partly because there were so many different religious and ethnic groups to consult. A draft law on honour killings was being discussed. The Government had also fulfilled its obligation under the current Five-Year Plan to draft a civil family code, and further action would be taken on it in due course.

19. She agreed that it was important to work towards withdrawal of the reservation relating to child marriage, a phenomenon which was most prevalent in the less developed areas of the country where traditional practices persisted. A campaign was under way to change the law so as to equalize the marriage age for men and women. The Government was also endeavouring to discourage early marriage by, for example, taking steps to prevent girls from dropping out of school.

20. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs was an independent body reporting directly to the Prime Minister. Its status was equivalent to that of a ministry, except that it worked in a "horizontal" fashion: it had access to all ministries and Government bodies. It viewed the family not only as a whole entity but also in terms of its individual members, and its aim was to empower those individuals while also preserving the structure and value of the family in Syrian society. In order to avoid a conservative backlash, it was easier for the Commission to present itself as a body dealing with family issues than with women's issues specifically. The Commission's mandate was to prepare national strategies and policies relating to the family. However, implementation was the responsibility of the directorates for women that had been set up in every ministry for the purpose of ensuring that women's issues were taken into consideration in all areas of national development.

21. She agreed that the law relating to marital rape, which was derived from the sharia, needed to be amended. Efforts were under way to build a consensus in favour of change but, as in other areas, progress was slow.

22. She also agreed that it was important to set up an ombudsman's office to deal with complaints of discrimination. No such office yet existed in the Syrian Arab Republic, but the idea of establishing one was under consideration. The Syrian General Women's Federation currently dealt with complaints of gender-

based discrimination and had access to lawyers who could assist women.

23. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs had requested ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention at the same time as it had requested the withdrawal of the aforementioned reservations to the Convention. However, withdrawal of the reservations had been viewed as the higher priority. In order not to jeopardize the chances of agreement on that issue, consideration of the Optional Protocol had been deferred.

24. Workshops had been held to raise awareness of the Convention among members of Parliament and religious leaders. Similar efforts would be made in due course to explain how the Optional Protocol could benefit Syrian women.

25. **Ms. Asad** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that a new draft law establishing the equality of women and men had been prepared, and it was hoped that it would be adopted once the reservations to the Convention had been withdrawn. The draft law would equalize the marriage age for women and men and contained various other provisions relating to the status of women within the family, the custody of children and the residence rights of foreign women. The Personal Status Act was to be amended to strengthen the rights of women under the marriage contract. There were also plans to update the provisions of the Penal Code relating to adultery, marital rape and trafficking in women.

26. **Ms. Ghanem** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that there was political will to withdraw the remaining reservations to the Convention, but that the process would be difficult because they related to provisions of the sharia. Vigorous discussion was under way among religious men, including the General Mufti of the Republic, as to the correct interpretation of Islam with regard to the position of women. The Constitution did not contain a definition of discrimination. However, it did contain provisions on ensuring equal opportunities for women. The Convention was binding in the Syrian Arab Republic under both the Constitution and the Civil Code.

Article 3

27. **Ms. Gaspard** said it was regrettable that the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, the major body working to promote women's rights, focused on the

family rather than on women specifically. Women had a role to play in society outside their family responsibilities, while men also had a role to play in the family. With regard to the reservations to the Convention which the Government had already decided to withdraw, she would appreciate an answer to the question previously posed as to what further procedures were necessary to finalize their withdrawal. For example, would a vote have to be taken in Parliament? If so, the State party should indicate whether that was likely to happen before the parliamentary elections due to take place in 2007. She also requested an update on progress towards withdrawal of the reservation to article 9, paragraph 2. She asked whether the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs had representatives in the different regions of the country who were responsible for advancing the rights of women on the ground. Lastly, the State party should indicate whether there was a parliamentary committee that specifically addressed the rights of women and, if so, whether the Commission had any contact with it.

28. **Ms. Neubauer** said that she understood the desire of the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs to avoid provoking opposition to its work by playing down its aim to improve the situation of women and emphasizing its focus on the family. However, she wondered what message it was thus conveying about the nature of its work and how it would achieve its aims if it did not state expressly that it was working for the advancement of women.

29. **Ms. Zou** Xiaoqiao also requested more information about how the Commission carried out its task of improving the position of women outside the context of the family. Given that the Commission's status was said to be equivalent to that of a ministry, she wished to know whether it had real powers to influence State decision-making with regard to the position of women in society or whether it was purely an advisory body. The State party should also indicate how many of the Commission's members worked full¹⁷ or part-time.

30. **Ms. Saiga** said that she would appreciate an answer to the question about court cases raised by Mr. Flinterman. Noting the establishment of the National Committee for International Humanitarian Law, she requested information about the results of its monitoring of human rights violations. She also asked what stage had been reached in the discussions on the

establishment of national human rights structures, when those structures would be set up and what their role would be: for example, would people be able to bring cases of human rights violations before them? Lastly, she requested more information about the role of the Directorate for Women's Empowerment in the State Planning Commission and whether it had links with the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs.

31. **Ms. Chutikul** asked what system was in place for monitoring the implementation of the strategies formulated by the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs. Noting that one of the obstacles to the advancement of women cited in the report was women's lack of knowledge about their rights, she asked what measures were being taken to improve women's awareness and to encourage them to make use of the Convention to realize their rights. Workshops and seminars were not enough. Another obstacle mentioned was the absence of proper mechanisms to implement the law and the failure to translate plans and policies into practice. She wished to know how the State party planned to address that problem. Lastly, she asked what differences existed between the component of the Five-Year Plan relating to women and the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women.

32. **Ms. Ghanem** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, since the Convention had been ratified by presidential decree, the reservations could be withdrawn by means of the same procedure — in other words, without parliamentary approval. She agreed that the reservation to article 9, paragraph 2, of the Convention should also be withdrawn in due course.

33. Efforts were under way to promote gender equality in all the regions of the country by switching the focus of development plans from the national to the regional level. Special attention would be given to the most underprivileged areas.

34. Discussion on a national human rights body was continuing. No such body was yet in place, but there was a clear intention to establish one. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs would doubtless establish links with any such body once it was set up. She did not yet know whether it would be possible to bring cases of human rights violations before such a body.

35. With regard to the membership of the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, the Chairperson, a position which she currently held, had the authority of

a minister, reported to the Prime Minister and attended all Cabinet meetings on issues relating to the family, women and children. The Commission had a Board of Directors consisting of a number of experts. It also had four departments focusing on strategy and policy, research, administration and finance, and media and communications. The total number of staff was 20, but some work was outsourced to national experts, and the Commission also cooperated with international experts. The Commission's function was to formulate policies and strategies by bringing together governmental and non-governmental organizations with expertise in a given area. The public was given an opportunity to comment on those policies and strategies before they were finalized. They were then submitted to the Prime Minister who presented them to the Cabinet for approval.

36. The role of women in the family was far from the only aspect of women's issues which concerned the Commission. Indeed, its first priority had been to promote the political empowerment of women. It was also involved in campaigning to prevent violence against women.

37. The Five-Year Plan covered the activities of the entire Government and mentioned the empowerment of women as a general objective. The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women was more detailed and action-oriented, referring to the empowerment of women in specific areas such as health, politics and the economy. It was based on the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (Beijing+5) and contained measurable indicators for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating progress. The Directorate for Women's Empowerment in the State Planning Commission had a similar function to the directorates for women which existed in all Government ministries. Lastly, measures had been put in place to evaluate the role of women in decision-making positions, such as women parliamentarians.

38. **Mr. Hasan** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the challenge was to reach women at the lowest level of society. Education was a major means of achieving that aim. A number of associations contributed to the efforts of the bodies responsible for family affairs, which also worked in cooperation with gender units established in all the ministries. International organizations provided support for those efforts, in particular the League of Arab States and UNIFEM. Several projects were in progress aimed at teaching women, particularly rural

women, about their rights and empowering them. The necessary institutional framework existed.

39. **Ms. Ghanem** (Syrian Arab Republic) stressed the role played by the Syrian Family Planning Association, notably through work aimed at young people under the age of 20, who accounted for some 50 per cent of the population.

Article 4

40. **Ms. Neubauer** said that she was concerned to note the absence of any reference by the State party to temporary special measures. The measures described in the report (CEDAW/C/SYR/1) under article 4 did not fall into that category, being no more than steps taken to guarantee rights. Were any such measures provided for in the current Five-Year Plan? The Government should establish a legal basis for the adoption of such measures.

41. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** wondered whether article 25 of the Constitution could offer the necessary legal basis. It would be useful to know whether the Convention rated higher or lower than the Constitution in the country's legal order; if it was higher, there would be no problem. She commended the State party not only for withdrawing some of its reservations to the Convention, but also for the way it had done so, with the involvement of all sectors of society. She asked how many refugees in the country were women and what specific programmes were in place for them.

42. **Ms. Ghanem** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that in Syrian culture agreements were often oral. There had thus been a 20 per cent quota for women established orally for candidate lists for Parliament; there was also talk about the possibility of introducing quotas for women in local elections. In some areas temporary special measures could complicate matters, as had occurred when a special budget had been sought for contraceptives, so as not to have to rely on the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). It had proved simpler to channel payment directly to UNFPA, along with a service charge, in order to ensure good quality of supply. The introduction of temporary special measures would be sought under the Tenth Five-Year Plan.

43. **Ms. Asad** (Syrian Arab Republic), replying to the question about the position of the Convention in the hierarchy of the country's laws, said that all international instruments ratified by the Syrian Arab

Republic took precedence over all domestic laws and that there was therefore no conflict with the Constitution.

44. **Mr. Hasan** (Syrian Arab Republic) concurred, stressing that the Constitution set the general tone but not the details of the country's legislation.

45. **The Chairperson** referred the State party to the Committee's general recommendation No. 25, which offered guidance for the adoption of special temporary measures.

Article 5

46. **Ms. Begum** asked whether there were any plans to enact laws on domestic violence and violence against women. She urged that measures should be taken to increase the small number of shelters available for women victims of violence. She enquired whether the Government provided counselling services and legal, social and medical support for victims and what steps it was taking to protect the rights of migrant women, particularly in cases of trafficking.

47. **Ms. Gabr** said that the elimination of stereotypes was a long process and depended on changes in mentalities, especially among decision makers. A comprehensive, integrated strategy was needed to that end, having regard in particular to the weight of customs and traditions. Television campaigns would not suffice to bring about the quantum leap required; the cooperation of Arab organizations, religious institutions and NGOs like the Sisters of the Good Shepherd was essential.

48. **Ms. Shin** wished to know what types of violence had been covered by the study conducted by the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs. The recommendations it contained in regard to prosecution did not go far enough. A strong signal was needed in the form of stiffer penalties and strict guidelines, with special training for police officers and prosecutors. She suggested that steps should be taken to disseminate widely the Arabic version of the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women (A/61/122/Add.1) and that a report should be submitted to the General Assembly in 2008 on follow-up to the study in the Syrian Arab Republic.

49. **Ms. Ghanem** (Syrian Arab Republic), in response to the question concerning the political influence exercised by the Commission for Family Affairs, said

that evidence of such influence was the number of changes that had been introduced during the three years of its existence. The Commission could count on the valuable support of friends in the media and religious groups. It benefited from its partnership with agencies of the United Nations system in addressing the needs of the large number of Iraqi and other refugees currently in the country, for which civil society organizations were also doing much by providing food and arranging for shelter. All the main types of violence had been covered by the study referred to, which was being taken into account in the Commission's ongoing efforts to prepare a national plan to address the issue, including training, establishment of shelters, counselling services and drafting of a law. A bill on child protection was currently being finalized before being submitted to the Cabinet for approval; it would be followed by a bill on violence against women. A law was indeed still required, but at least the subject was no longer a taboo. Family protection centres were being established, not only for women but also for their children, who were just as much victims of domestic violence. Interpersonal counselling had been introduced in health centres and would also be provided in shelters. Every possible means — television, schools, billboards — had to be used to combat the abuses, discrimination and unequal treatment from which women suffered and to stimulate debate on those issues.

50. **Ms. Pimentel** said that she was dismayed to learn that, despite the huge efforts undertaken, with the support of NGOs, honour killing was still tolerated by law. She urged the amendment of article 548 of the Penal Code so as to make it a criminal offence. The Government had to exercise the necessary political will to eradicate that practice, along with all other assaults on the dignity of women. It needed to adopt a holistic approach to the implementation of all articles of the Convention, as piecemeal measures could never be truly effective. She too welcomed the State party's withdrawal of reservations and called on it to engage in the substantive action required. Lastly, she requested information about the content of the information activities for which, according to the responses, an annual prize was awarded.

51. **Ms. Maiolo** asked what improvements had been brought about by the Commission's action, particularly in combating domestic violence.

52. **Ms. Dairiam** said that the Committee had heard that women victims of domestic violence in the Syrian Arab Republic were handicapped in their ability to enter a shelter or even to take a job, since that required leaving the matrimonial home, often without their husband's permission. As a consequence, the husband had the right to terminate all maintenance and they could lose all rights to matrimonial property. Such discriminatory laws should be reviewed and amended.

53. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, welcomed the progress towards the elimination of certain discriminatory provisions in the Penal Code and asked about articles 489 and 508 of the Code, which dealt with marital rape and culpability for rape in a manner that disadvantaged women. She also welcomed the plans for a new law on domestic violence against women and urged the Government to review the Committee's general recommendation 19 on the subject.

54. **Ms. Ghanem** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs had organized extensive media coverage and public discussion of women's issues and the Convention. The school curriculum had been changed to eliminate stereotypes and to present stories of dynamic women in history and Islam. Syrian women who were victims of domestic violence did not consult their husbands about changes in their residence. The age for marriage was set not by law but by practice. The Commission had organized a discussion with religious leaders on the definition and punishment of rape, including marital rape, and national guidelines were being prepared, although it was not clear that all participants in the meeting fully agreed with them.

Article 6

55. **Ms. Chutikul** noted that prostitution was illegal in Syria but that the client had no liability in the transaction. She also asked why women arrested for prostitution were sent to reform centres rather than to shelters for counselling. She welcomed the ratification by the Syrian Arab Republic of the Palermo Protocol on human trafficking and asked whether the national commission formed to combat such practices had produced any results.

56. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** urged the Government to study and address the reasons why women chose prostitution as a way of earning a living. She noted that

under Islamic rules a victim of rape needed a certain number of witnesses to bring a charge against the perpetrator and asked whether the Penal Code imposed the same requirements.

57. **Ms. Ghanem** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that a draft code on human trafficking had been prepared for submission to Parliament. She agreed that sending convicted prostitutes to reform centres was not the best solution and would explore other possibilities along the lines suggested. Noting that prostitution had been a taboo subject in her country until fairly recently, she said that a documentary film had been made with interviews of prostitutes and reference to the kinds of questions being raised by the Committee. Most prostitutes reported experiencing violence from an early age and victimization by men, who demanded that they earn money for them. Various services were available to prostitutes, in particular health check-ups and AIDS testing. On the subject of the role of the sharia, she pointed out that the Syrian Arab Republic was a secular State and Islamic law was not followed in all instances. In its efforts to improve policies and laws on domestic violence and the victimization of women, the Commission for Family Affairs held consultations with clerics and legal experts and studied the experience of other Arab countries.

Articles 7 and 8

58. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** noted that the current Five-Year Plan had set a target of 30 per cent women in decision-making bodies, which had apparently not been reached, in particular at the local level. She asked why there were such difficulties, particularly at that level. She also asked about constraints facing women's advancement in academia and diplomacy and what measures could be adopted to remove some of those barriers.

59. **Ms. Gaspard**, noting that Syrian women were required to present a certificate of primary education in order to stand for election, asked whether men faced the same requirement. The report stated that that requirement had led to fewer female candidates, which was a form of de facto discrimination that should be addressed, for example, by strengthening the educational opportunities for women and girls. The important impact of women serving on local and rural councils had been demonstrated in many places in the world. She also enquired about steps to increase the

number of female students and professors in higher education.

60. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** urged the delegation to ensure that any laws on gender equality contained provisions authorizing or establishing temporary special measures aimed at increasing the number of women in public and political life. She requested more information on the amended Associations Act, as she had heard that some women's associations were prevented from functioning. She also asked whether goals and indicators had been set for the Five-Year Plan on women.

61. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** noted that women did not seem to be well represented in political parties. In that connection, she pointed out that the Inter-Parliamentary Union had set a minimum short-term target of 30 per cent female members and leaders in parliaments. That target was useful as a first step and, if met, would help women to resist hostile laws and strengthen the image of women as full partners in society. She also urged the Government to strengthen the representation of women in the judiciary. She welcomed the campaign to lift as many reservations to the Convention as possible, if not all of them.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.