



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Summary record of the 1824th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 26 October 2021, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Haidar

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In the absence of Ms. Acosta Vargas, Ms. Haidar, Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

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

Combined eighth to tenth periodic reports of Egypt (continued) (CEDAW/C/EGY/8-10, CEDAW/C/EGY/Q/8-10 and CEDAW/C/EGY/RQ/8-10)

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

2. **The Chair** said that, at the invitation of the Committee, other members of the delegation would be speaking via video link from Cairo.

Articles 10–14 (continued)

3. **Mr. Safarov** said that, according to the Global Gender Gap Report for 2020, women in Egypt were underrepresented in the employment market in general and at the managerial level in particular. Furthermore, very few women owned companies, and men's average income was estimated to be almost four times higher than women's. The principle of equal pay for equal work was not observed. Around half of working women were employed in the informal sector and therefore had no access to the protection provided under the Labour Code. In view of that situation, he wished to know what measures were being taken to eliminate the gender pay gap, whether women's right to equal pay for equal work was established in law, and whether women had the same right to be considered for promotion as men.

4. He wondered why new legal provisions on the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace were not implemented by the police or the courts; whether women victims of sexual harassment had access to a complaints mechanism; whether campaigns to raise awareness of sexual harassment were conducted; and whether cases involving that offence were registered. The delegation might indicate whether the legal definition of sexual harassment in the workplace was in line with international standards, and whether any measures were being taken to ensure equal access to social support and health care for migrant women, pregnant women, women with children and women with disabilities.

5. The Committee would be interested to know whether the Government would consider ratifying the International Labour Organization (ILO) Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and the ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). He wished to know what percentage of working women were employed in the formal sector; what legal restrictions were placed on children's employment and how such restrictions were implemented; and what was being done to prevent employers from including discriminatory criteria in job advertisements.

6. **Ms. Morsi** (Egypt) said that the principle of equal pay for equal work was enshrined in the Constitution and wage discrimination was prohibited under the Labour Code. Furthermore, Egypt was a member of the Equal Pay International Coalition. The National Council for Women had decided to conduct research into possible ways of reducing the gender pay gap, especially in the private sector, where it was more pronounced. A new bill on employment contained an article that would provide for equal wages. Egypt had participated in the drafting of the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), which had been adopted at the 108th session of the International Labour Conference. The Government, employers and the trade unions were reviewing the laws currently in effect to determine what legal gaps must be filled before ILO Convention No. 190 could be ratified.

7. Parliament had adopted a law intended to improve health-care institutions and ensure the provision of quality health care to all citizens, without discrimination.

8. The Government had established laws to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and punish any person who violated those rights. In 2016, the National Council for Women had created a standing committee of women with disabilities, which had participated in national and international forums. The Council emphasized the importance of mainstreaming

disability in its various programmes and had delivered training sessions on social and economic issues to over 60,000 women and girls with disabilities. It had also established a code of conduct that addressed various issues relevant to women with disabilities, including the treatment of persons with disabilities by State officials and the measures that should be taken to improve the lives of women with disabilities in the community.

9. The Council had launched a manual on protecting women and girls with disabilities against coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the workplace and elsewhere. The Ministry of Solidarity provided rehabilitation services to women with disabilities, as well as training on finding employment. The National Council for Women cooperated with various human rights agencies within the framework of the Ministry of the Interior and worked with the Police Academy to raise police cadets' awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities.

10. **Ms. Ammar** (Egypt) said that, in accordance with Act No. 10 of 2018 on the rights of persons with disabilities, the Ministry of Justice had decided to make all court buildings accessible to persons with disabilities and to ensure that they were treated humanely at all stages of proceedings, irrespective of their role therein.

11. The Ministry of Justice had organized a number of training sessions and workshops on disability issues, including in relation to the teaching of sign languages. Offices providing health care, social welfare and technical assistance to persons with disabilities had been set up in a number of locations around the country. The Ministry of Justice respected its commitment to ensure that at least 5 per cent of its staff members were persons with disabilities and had drawn up a code of conduct concerning their treatment within the Ministry. Staff members who had a disability were entitled to select their working hours in accordance with the flexible working arrangements established by the Ministry. Since 2005, persons with disabilities and their assistants had benefited from a significant reduction on income tax.

12. **Mr. Khalil** (Egypt) said that the majority of working children were employed in the informal sector. Employment law provided that children were not allowed to work if they were under 15 years of age or had not completed primary school. It also regulated the nature of the work that they could undertake, the rest times to which they were entitled and their remuneration. Regulations on children's employment were enforced by labour inspectors. Children aged 14 years and over were able to attend special training centres established by the Government.

13. **Ms. Morsi** (Egypt) said that, under the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), children in Egypt were prohibited from undertaking the worst forms of child labour.

14. **Ms. Al-Rammah**, noting that women's participation in the labour market was restricted by the lack of available childcare services, said that she would welcome up-to-date figures on the number of day-care centres per 100 children in the State party and any measures being taken to improve the availability of childcare for working women.

15. **Ms. Morsi** (Egypt) said that the President of the Republic had recommended facilitating the granting of licences for the establishment of affordable child day-care centres in order to encourage mothers to return to work. Accordingly, the Government had taken steps to promote the establishment of additional day-care centres. However, the closure of the centres during the COVID-19 pandemic had created the need for innovative measures to cater for women's needs.

16. **Ms. Al-Rammah** said that there had been a significant improvement in matters related to maternal health in the State party during the previous 20 years. She wished to commend in particular the increase in pregnancy care services and the decline in the maternal mortality ratio, as well as the fact that 82 per cent of women reportedly received postnatal care within two days of giving birth. On the other hand, 80 per cent of women and 63 per cent of men lacked health insurance, although there were high rates of non-communicable diseases in the country. She would therefore appreciate information regarding measures to ensure that women had access to adequate health-care services and to promote the equal distribution of high-quality health-care services, especially in remote areas.

17. The rights of women living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) were regularly violated in the area of sexual and reproductive health, and their condition increased the likelihood of discrimination and vulnerability. The estimated number of people with HIV in Egypt remained relatively low but the country had reportedly recorded the most rapidly rising rate in the Middle East and North Africa between 2010 and 2016. She would be grateful for disaggregated data on HIV prevalence. She also wished to know what measures were being taken to prevent discrimination and violence against women living with HIV, to prevent any stigma and social marginalization, and to ensure their access to sexual and reproductive health services and effective HIV treatment.

18. Women accounted for 91 per cent of the State party's nursing staff. As they were at risk of occupational exposure to transmissible diseases, she asked whether measures were taken to protect them from occupational hazards.

19. Abortion was illegal in the State party except where it was necessary to save a woman's life. According to the Ministry of Health and Population, abortion had caused 1.9 per cent of maternal deaths in 2006, but that figure was probably unduly low because many cases were unreported. She wished to know whether the State party planned to decriminalize abortion in the cases recommended by the Committee, namely risks to a mother's health, infant abnormalities, incest and rape. If so, steps should be taken to ensure safe abortions in a manner that protected women's health, dignity and privacy.

20. Girls and women with disabilities reportedly found it difficult to access adequate health-care services. She would therefore appreciate information about measures to render health-care services more inclusive. There was also a need to establish specialized health-care and support facilities for women suffering from trauma, violence, addiction and other mental health problems.

21. **Ms. Morsi** (Egypt) said that vigorous action had been taken to guarantee health-care coverage for all citizens, including children, women and older persons. Millions of women had access to breast cancer screening and to files maintained at the Ministry of Health and Population. More than 1.9 million babies had been examined to detect disabilities. In addition, more than 70 million citizens had been screened for hepatitis C and other non-communicable diseases.

22. The President of the Republic had decided, during the COVID-19 pandemic, to increase the salaries of women health-care workers by 75 per cent and to provide tax exemptions for female doctors. The Government had also decided to distribute bonuses to all health-care staff during the pandemic. In addition, the budget allocated to the health-care sector had been increased. The authorities had also launched initiatives aimed at providing women with home-based physical and mental health-care services.

23. **Ms. Ammar** (Egypt) said that article 61 of the Criminal Code granted exceptions to the prohibition of abortion in cases of absolute necessity, namely when it was necessary to save a pregnant woman's life or where the pregnancy seriously endangered the health of the woman or baby. In cases of rape, abortions were not deemed to constitute a crime and could be carried out as emergency procedures.

24. **Ms. Morsi** (Egypt) said that the Ministry of Health and Population was implementing strategies under the National AIDS Programme and in coordination with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) aimed at providing coverage for 90 per cent of the estimated number of persons living with HIV/AIDS, ensuring their access to treatment and antiretroviral drugs, and improving their quality of life. It was hoped to reduce the number of infected persons by 2030.

25. Special centres had been established to provide breast cancer screening and other health-care services for women and girls with disabilities. Complaints could be lodged in the event that services were unavailable.

26. A hotline had been established for mental health-care services, and a number of awareness-raising programmes had been implemented by the National Council for Women and the Ministry of Health and Population. Although access to such services had been undermined by the COVID-19 lockdowns, the Ministry and other governmental authorities

were committed to maintaining contact with women and girls through the hotline and social media, in order to guarantee access to the necessary services.

27. Many girls and women suffering from addiction had requested and received assistance and treatment from mental health-care centres that specialized in providing such services.

28. **Ms. Toé-Bouda** said that the Committee had been informed that women were subjected to virginity tests, including in detention centres, in violation of their right to privacy. She wished to know what was the purpose of such tests and whether there were any plans to terminate them.

29. **Ms. Ameline**, noting that the State party supported women's empowerment in the context of family planning, said that she would welcome additional information regarding such action. She also asked whether all women were guaranteed access to COVID-19 vaccines.

30. **Ms. Morsi** (Egypt) said that family planning was addressed under the Family Development Plan. All relevant stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health and Population, the Ministry of Social Solidarity, the Ministry of Planning, the National Council for Women and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, formed part of a commission chaired by the Prime Minister. The commission would raise awareness among women and men of the benefits of a small family, and its programmes, including the "Decent life" programme, would be implemented in all governorates. A programme on the empowerment of Egyptian families would shortly be launched to address issues of family planning and demography in a coordinated manner. New legislation would also be adopted to prevent child marriage and to penalize the non-registration of births.

31. COVID-19 vaccines were accessible to all. The National Council for Women was setting up vaccination centres, in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Population, to provide vaccinations for women, especially in remote areas.

32. **Ms. Ammar** (Egypt) said that there was no provision for a virginity test in Egyptian legislation. According to the Ministry of Justice, a medical examination could be carried out in a specialized clinic following a sexual assault, so that the woman could prove that she was the victim of such an assault. The same procedure was applicable to victims of female genital mutilation.

33. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that she welcomed the Government's commitment to providing women with family benefits, loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit. The data on women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship provided in paragraphs 106 to 108 of the State party's report were impressive. Although advances had been made in terms of women's leadership and entrepreneurship and financial inclusion, there was still significant room for progress when it came to equality in economic life, particularly as part of post-COVID recovery efforts. The delegation might comment on the State party's strategy in that regard.

34. She would appreciate information on the participation of women in sport and recreational activities and any relevant strategies.

35. **Ms. Al-Rammah**, noting that women in rural areas were at much higher risk of being subjected to harmful traditional practices than their urban counterparts, said that she would be interested to hear what efforts were being made to prevent and raise awareness of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage in rural communities. She would also welcome information on any plans to improve literacy and digital literacy among rural women and measures being taken to ensure sustainable economic development for rural women working in agriculture. Were women working in agriculture protected under labour law?

36. She would like to know about any measures taken to ensure access to health care, education and justice services for women with disabilities and to support their economic stability and independence. She also wished to hear about efforts made to improve the situation of women and girls in detention, who were reportedly held in poor conditions that did not meet international standards and sometimes lacked access to appropriate food and medical care.

37. With regard to refugee and asylum-seeking women, she would appreciate information on efforts being made to overcome delays in the issuance of official documentation and residence permits and to address gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices. She would like to know how the State party ensured access to quality public health services and housing for that group.

38. **Ms. Morsi** (Egypt) said that women's financial inclusion with respect to bank transactions had increased from 27 per cent in 2017 to 47 per cent in 2021. The Government had taken a range of measures to increase women's economic empowerment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A market assessment had been conducted to identify the types of companies that had the potential for growth in the post-COVID context. Cash transfers and economic support packages had been provided, to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on women's living conditions and to support their return to work. Loan and savings programmes had been introduced, and the use of electronic banking was being promoted. Extensive awareness-raising campaigns were being organized on remote work and part-time work arrangements for women, and programmes were being run to combat financial and digital illiteracy. Financial and non-financial assistance was provided to small and medium-sized enterprises, including special packages for companies led by women, to help them deal with work disruption caused by the pandemic.

39. The special committee for women's sport established by the Ministry of Youth and Sports had four objectives: reviewing ministerial budgetary allocations for women's training and sports, raising awareness of the importance of sport in the life of women and girls, providing training support for female athletes to participate in international competitions, and promoting the active participation of older women in physical activity. The National Council for Women and the Ministry were working on a comprehensive strategy on women's sport.

40. The National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women for 2016–2030 contained measures aimed at rural women in the areas of agriculture, rural development, food and nutrition, and poverty reduction. Training programmes were in place for women working in agriculture to improve their productivity and open up new opportunities for them, and efforts were being made to better integrate women into agricultural supply and value chains. The "Decent life" initiative also included measures to support the economic and social development of women in rural areas. Campaigns were being run to raise awareness of legal matters among rural women, who also received legal assistance.

41. As to women in detention, judges and prosecutors were responsible by law for supervising prisons and detention centres and receiving complaints from persons in detention. The National Human Rights Council conducted regular visits to prisons, detention centres and rehabilitation and treatment centres and made recommendations. The National Council for Women also made regular visits to women's prisons. Every prison had its own medical clinic, and there was a central hospital in every prison district in the country. Women in detention had access to State-run paid vocational training programmes, rehabilitation workshops and educational services up to university level. Efforts were being made to decrease the number of people in detention by granting conditional releases and presidential amnesties and by allowing prisoners to be released after serving half their sentence. An online appointment platform had been introduced for registering prison visits. Specific medical services were provided for persons with disabilities in detention. Female prisoners with a good disciplinary record could be granted 48-hour leave to visit their families.

42. The law on the criminalization of female genital mutilation had been passed in 2016 and updated in 2021. Particular importance was attached to raising awareness of the existence of the law throughout the country, especially in small villages, and a hotline had been set up to receive complaints concerning female genital mutilation. Many cases had been reported through the hotline, thus saving the lives of many girls.

43. **Mr. Khalil** (Egypt) said that efforts were being made to combat harmful traditional practices such as early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, including awareness-raising and monitoring enforcement of the law. A draft law on forced marriage was currently under consideration by the parliament. In 2021, sexual harassment in public and private places, including workplaces, had been made a crime.

44. **Ms. Ammar** (Egypt) said that persons residing in Egypt as refugees had the same rights as Egyptian citizens, including the right to education.

Articles 15 and 16

45. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she wished to know what measures were in place to help protect women from the financial consequences of divorce which, in some cases, a woman would be granted only if she forfeited her financial rights and returned any gifts she had received from her ex-husband and his family. She also wished to know more about women's right to inherit their husbands' estates.

46. She asked whether plans had been made to repeal the unconstitutional provision of the laws governing personal status, under which the State party's courts could rule on whether a woman needed the consent of a guardian to marry. She would welcome an explanation of how, in the State party's view, its laws, under which the best interests of the child were not the primary consideration in decisions on child custody cases, were compatible with its obligations under the Convention.

47. She wished to know whether the authorities had considered using the country's laws on trafficking in persons to combat the temporary marriages of village girls to wealthy foreigners vacationing in Egypt. Polygamy was still legal for Muslims, but it would also be interesting to know something about the legal and other aspects of marriage in the State party's large Christian community.

48. **Ms. Morsi** (Egypt) said that the National Council for Women had set up a committee to draft and consider possible amendments to the laws governing personal status. Dozens of proposals had been submitted by both governmental and non-governmental institutions; none, however, would be submitted to the country's lawmakers until they had been considered by the Council of Ministers. In March 2021, the President had said that he would not sign into law anything that would entail a step back for Egyptian women, families or children.

49. **Ms. Ammar** (Egypt) said that, for Muslims, laws on child custody and guardianship were based on sharia. The children of divorced parents could opt to remain with their mother until they married or completed their schooling. The best interests of the child were always a consideration in custody decisions. Fathers were required to pay child support and other costs until their children completed their schooling.

50. The precepts of sharia could take precedence in cases not explicitly regulated by the State. The parents of a married girl who had had a child could be awarded custody of the child in the event of a divorce. In divorce cases, the woman's testimony was worth more than the man's.

51. Christians had personal status laws particular to their community. Mixed marriages were governed by the laws applicable to Muslims. Woman married under Islamic law could apply for a divorce using a procedure known as *khula*. Harmonizing the country's different sets of family laws would require overcoming a number of obstacles.

52. **Mr. Khalil** (Egypt) said that a man's verbal repudiation of his wife became effective in one week. Religious authorities were required to make a record of the divorce, thereby giving the woman an opportunity to take any necessary legal steps. Marriage contracts stated that women had the right to ask for divorce. A woman could also refuse to allow her husband to enter into a polygamous marriage. Divorce and polygamy were issues that had to be considered and regulated very carefully; adopting an ideal law on those issues was thus a long process.

53. **Mr. Afifi** (Egypt) said that the Christians of Egypt, who accounted for 5 to 10 percent of the country's population, did not consider themselves to be minorities. Under the law, there was no discrimination on grounds of religion. The single difference under the law that did exist – concerning the personal status of Egyptian Christians – was one that the Christian community itself had requested.

54. Although there were several million people in Egypt who had been forced to flee their countries, most refused to register as refugees or asylum seekers for fear of losing the right

to work and other rights. However, refugees in Egypt had the same rights to education and health care as Egyptian nationals.

55. The country's reservation to article 16 of the Convention did not concern that article in its entirety; the reservation concerned only those provisions that were incompatible with sharia. A withdrawal of the reservation could violate the rights of the members of the country's three historic religious communities. Under the Constitution, the religious laws of those three communities were to be the main source of legislation on the personal status of community members, family matters and religious affairs.

56. **Ms. Morsi** (Egypt), thanking Committee members for the thought that had gone into their questions, said that she and her delegation were looking forward to the Committee's recommendations.

57. **The Chair** said that the dialogue had given the Committee further insight into the progress made by the State party and the challenges that lay ahead, not least as it attempted, with the Committee's help, to amend its personal status laws.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.