



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

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

Summary record of the 770th meeting (Chamber A)

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 25 January 2007, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Dairiam (Rapporteur)

Contents

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

Third periodic report of Suriname (continued)

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In the absence of Ms. Šimonović, Ms. Dairiam, Rapporteur, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

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

Third periodic report of Suriname
(CEDAW/C/SUR/ 3; CEDAW/C/SUR/Q/3 and CEDAW/C/SUR/Q/3/Add.1)

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

Articles 7 to 9 (continued)

2. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling**, noting that the Government apparently intended to have a consultant heavily involved in the preparation of the next report, asked how that consultant would receive information and how much control the Government would exercise in the preparation of the report.

3. **Mr. Joemmanbaks** (Suriname) said that gender focal points would provide information to ministries, which would then forward it to the consultant.

Articles 10 to 14

4. **Ms. Simms** noted, with reference to article 10 of the Convention, that only about 60 per cent of girls in the interior were in school and asked what the Government was doing to ensure that girl students in the interior received a good education.

5. **Mr. Flinterman** said he was struck by the tables in the report that showed that female students outnumbered males in higher level education. Noting that under the current laws the activities of various groups aimed at providing sex education and information on family planning were illegal, he asked whether there was a time frame for changing those laws. Welcoming the fact that teenage mothers were being encouraged to return to school, he asked why pregnant girls couldn't benefit from the same policy and what was being done to support pregnant girl students in Maroon and indigenous communities. Noting that, although education was supposedly free, a small enrolment fee was charged, he asked how that affected enrolment in families with girls. He requested more information on efforts to eliminate stereotypes particularly in textbooks. Noting that non-governmental organizations seemed to be doing the

bulk of the work as regards providing continuing education, he asked whether the Government had any plans to become more active in providing lifelong schooling, which was especially important for women.

6. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** stressed, with reference to article 11 of the Convention, the importance of statistical data, without which it was impossible to see the real picture regarding the situation of women compared to men and to monitor discrimination. Noting that the Suriname General Statistics Bureau had apparently burnt down in 2003, she urged the Government to seek assistance from bilateral donors or international agencies to rebuild that vital office. She was struck by the low budget allocations for certain ministries, in particular the Ministry of Labour, Technological Development and Environment, which played a key role in monitoring and improving the employment situation of women. She requested the Government to provide a table of budget allocations by ministry with indications of gender components.

7. Noting that Suriname had not yet ratified a number of International Labour Organization conventions which were in accordance with the Convention, she asked whether it would not be simpler just to integrate the Convention into the labour laws. The report indicated some past activity in the area of protecting women workers' rights. She asked whether there had been any follow-up to that activity. Noting the proposal to create a fund to finance maternity leave, she asked how such a fund would be financed. The burden such a plan would impose on small businesses was not a problem unique to Suriname; other States had instituted State subsidies to reimburse such businesses.

8. **Ms. Shin** asked whether there had been any follow-up to the various research papers on labour policy matters referred to in the report. She requested more information on legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace and on childcare. Noting that women in Suriname apparently avoided technical subjects in job-training programmes, she asked what sort of jobs women had taken after completing such training and whether the Government intended to provide incentives to encourage women to enter non-traditional and technical fields. She also requested more information on training provided to minority women.

9. **Ms. Gabr** noted, with reference to article 12 of the Convention, that the data on health services seemed

somewhat out of date and she requested more recent information. She asked what was being done to increase the number of households with health insurance and to ensure that Suriname achieved the health targets of the Millennium Development Goals. Noting the relatively high maternal mortality rates, she asked what plans the Government had to improve that situation, especially in rural areas. She also requested more information on how the Government was going about eliminating stereotypical thinking, which had a negative impact on reproductive health projects. Finally, she requested more information on the diseases leading to death among women as well as on under-nourishment and anaemia among school girls.

10. **Ms. Pimentel** expressed concern at the statement in the report that, while a married woman did not need her husband's permission to make use of health care, the involvement of her partner was required for family planning. In that connection, she urged the Government to study the Committee's general recommendations, especially No. 15 on HIV/AIDS and No. 24 on health. Suriname's position on contraception was problematical, given that education and information on the topic was illegal though contraceptives and information were apparently available. Since use of condoms was the best way to reduce HIV infection, the availability of such devices was crucial in reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS, which was listed as the second most common cause of death in women. Lastly, she expressed concern at a statement in the report that appeared to blame prostitutes for the spread of HIV in villages.

11. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, noted that the report seemed to suggest that the maternal mortality rate might be increasing. Since it also identified certain weaknesses in the health service that could be contributing to the high maternal mortality rate — difficulty of transportation, lack of blood for transfusions — she asked whether there were any plans for addressing the situation and whether the health service carried out confidential inquiries into maternal deaths.

12. According to the report, contraceptive usage was much lower among less-educated women. She asked what programmes were in place to promote awareness and acceptance of contraceptive use among such women and whether health insurance covered contraception. That was not clear from the report.

13. She asked whether data were available on maternal mortality linked to unsafe abortion, and whether such information was disaggregated by categories such as rural or urban areas, indigenous or Maroon peoples. Finally, noting that, according to table 12.4, a high proportion of women died from "external causes", she asked for clarification of the term. Since it was usually understood to mean accidents or violence, she wondered whether in the report it denoted violence against women.

14. **Ms. Simms** noted that rural women and those living in the interior were underserved, particularly as regards education and health. Moreover, since they were served by the Lobi Foundation, a religious foundation, its statistics might be skewed by religious values. She noted, for example, that there were statistics on married women's use of contraception and sterilization, but none relating to unmarried women and she wondered whether the Foundation simply could not accept that unmarried people might be in sexual relationships.

15. In terms of the environment and national resources she said that while the Government was legally entitled to all the country's minerals and natural resources, it also had a moral responsibility towards its native peoples. She asked whether Maroon women were involved in the discussions and negotiations about what happened to their community and which companies were allowed to come in and exploit the resources in partnership with the Government.

16. **Ms. Coker-Appiah**, noting that the report gave information on some of the measures taken to address some of the difficulties facing rural women, in terms of access to schools, health care, water and sanitation, it said little about the results. She hoped that that omission could be rectified in the next report.

17. According to the report, responsibility for health care in the interior had been transferred to the Medical Mission, but it was not clear whether that was a private or non-governmental organization, and whether its services were free. The report also drew attention to difficulties with health services, such as a shortage of doctors and facilities. She asked what steps had been taken to improve the health-care situation in rural areas.

18. Referring to women's access to land, she asked how many women had been granted title to land since the launching of the "Land for Women" campaign.

Finally, noting that mining and logging concessions were being given to companies and individuals not indigenous to the localities of the mines or forests and that that was threatening the livelihood of rural people, she asked what the Government was doing to ensure that the latter's livelihoods were safeguarded.

19. **Mr. Joemmanbaks** (Suriname) stated that the Ministry of Education had prepared a sectoral education plan designed, inter alia, to promote gender mainstreaming and to eliminate stereotypes. It also contained provisions relating to teenage pregnancy and measures to help teenage mothers resume their studies. The plan had yet to be adopted and was currently being reviewed by the teachers' union.

20. Notwithstanding the provisions of the Penal Code, no one was punished, in practice, for giving out contraceptive information. Nor were doctors punished for performing abortions based on medical indications. However, because of the rules on medical confidentiality, it was very difficult to gather data on abortions.

21. It was true that enrolment fees were charged at all levels of education, and the fees increased as pupils advanced through the system. Any parent who could not afford the fees could apply to the State for assistance.

22. **Ms. Tobing-Klein** (Suriname) said that answers to the various questions regarding maternal mortality rates and children would be given in the context of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. In response to a recommendation by UNICEF the Government had developed a system for monitoring various indicators relating to children; the findings were published in the statistical yearbook issued by the General Bureau of Statistics. With the assistance of donations from UNICEF, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Government of the Netherlands, the Government was implementing policies to improve child health care and education.

23. Finally, regarding the comments on the Lobi Foundation, she said that it was not a religious foundation but a non-governmental organization that worked in close cooperation with the Government.

24. **Mr. Landveld** (Suriname) acknowledged the difficulties associated with providing educational services in remote regions of the country. During the reporting period, however, the European Union's

Microprojects Programme had provided funding for the construction of a number of schools in the interior, and the Government had introduced a series of financial incentives, including the provision of rent-free accommodation, in order to attract teachers to those schools. In addition, the first nucleus centre — a one-stop shop providing accommodation and educational facilities for students from remote areas — had been established in Brokopondo, and evening classes for mothers had been introduced.

25. Teenage pregnancy posed a major challenge, particularly in the interior. The Government, in partnership with the Medical Mission Foundation, was working on a number of awareness-raising projects, but the impact of tradition on that phenomenon should be studied in more detail, since, in the absence of other prospects, girls who had completed their primary education were often regarded as adults and therefore considered ready for motherhood. In order to improve maternal health, a number of traditional Maroon midwives had received training, and the Ministry of Health had recently launched a tertiary-level, four-year midwifery course.

26. Health-care services were available to Maroons, other indigenous groups and low-income families free of charge; the Ministry of Health intended to introduce a general health insurance programme within the framework of the Multi-Annual Development Plan 2006-2011. Free contraceptives were provided to Maroon and indigenous women, although further measures were needed to increase their usage rate. Efforts to eradicate malaria had borne fruit: the incidence of the disease had dropped by 75 per cent. There was also a growing interest in the use of traditional medicines.

27. As far as land rights were concerned, the President of the Republic had established a committee to study the best way forward. That committee would cooperate with an analogous body composed of indigenous chiefs.

28. **Mr. Joemmanbaks** (Suriname) said that tripartite discussions on funding for parental leave, involving the Government, employers and trade unions, were still ongoing. While the State ran a number of childcare facilities, families tended to prefer private institutions, which were generally better located. In order to promote women's employment, new draft labour laws

would have to provide, inter alia, for appropriate sanitary facilities.

29. In response to the question put by Ms. Pimentel, he said that, in recent years, more and more prostitutes had begun working in villages, thereby contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS. A comprehensive reform of the health-care sector was already under way: further details would be provided in the next periodic report.

30. **Ms. Shin** stressed that the full and effective implementation of the Convention was indispensable for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

31. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** added that every country should take a human rights approach to development planning. In that connection, she drew the State party's attention to a brochure produced by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the German Government, which placed particular emphasis on the human rights aspects of the Millennium Development Goals.

32. Referring to article 11 of the Convention, she wished to know whether the draft law on equal treatment of men and women was applicable to the private sector. She also asked whether the Government had information about the attitudes of all the various ethnic groups towards women in the workplace.

33. **Ms. Pimentel** pointed out that the phenomenon of prostitution itself, rather than individual prostitutes, was responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS in villages. She also drew attention to an apparent contradiction between the statement in the report to the effect that Government subsidies for contraceptives had not yet been introduced, and the comments made by members of the delegation.

34. Lastly, emphasizing the link between maternal mortality and abortion, she said she wondered how the Government could be sure that all abortions were performed in hospitals, since illegal abortions were, by their very nature, clandestine. Further research was needed in that area.

35. **Ms. Simms**, while recognizing the efforts being made by the State party to ensure respect for the cultural integrity of all ethnic groups, said that she was troubled by the descriptions of the fertility ceremonies performed by the Saramaccan Maroons, particularly since they seemed to involve children under the age of 18. Since Suriname was a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, pursuant to which it had an

obligation to outlaw any practices that violated the rights of underage boys and girls, she wondered whether the Government had taken any steps to address the situation.

36. **Mr. Joemmanbaks** (Suriname), replying to Ms. Schöpp-Schilling's question concerning the draft law on the equal treatment of men and women, said that a social and economic council was being set up so that Government, unions and employers could discuss the issue of application in the private sector as well.

37. Responding to the question from the Chairperson, he said that contraceptives were still not covered by health insurance. However, the Government had been supplying them free of charge to the Medical Mission, the Maroons and people in remote areas and subsidizing those offered through the Lobi Foundation. Finally, he said that while it was generally accepted that some clandestine abortions were performed it was impossible to obtain any data on the subject.

38. **Mr. Landveld** (Suriname), replying to the question put by Ms. Simms about the reproductive behaviour of the Saramaccan Maroons, said that the Government was trying to adopt an integrated approach and to educate them about alternative courses of action.

39. **Ms. Tobing-Klein** (Suriname) said that a civil society forum would be held to discuss the Millennium Development Goals, with the participation of the Government, and that as much information as possible would be made available.

40. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, asked whether the Government would consider expanding the draft law on the equal treatment of men and women in the public sector to include the private sector. With regard to the difficulty of obtaining data on clandestine abortions, she suggested that hospitals and doctors should be asked to provide rough estimates of such procedures.

Articles 15 and 16

41. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** asked which laws had been found to be discriminatory following the analysis of the report published by the Ministry of Home Affairs containing the results of a test of national legislation against certain international conventions. She commended the Government for abolishing the Asian Marriage Act, but wondered why the marriageable age for both boys and girls could not be increased to 18 to

bring it into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

42. **Ms. Saiga**, after noting that the revision of the marriage law did not satisfy the recommendations of the Committee or those of the Human Rights Committee, asked whether the minimum age for marriage was part of the Civil Code or the Marriage Act and what were the practical implications of the abolition of that Act. Finally, she wished to know whether the marriageable age for boys was 17 as explained in the oral statement, or 18 as noted in the report.

43. **Mr. Joemmanbaks** (Suriname), replying to the question posed by Ms. Coker-Appiah, said that the Committee on Gender Legislation had recommended and obtained the abolition of discriminatory provisions in certain laws, including the Personnel Act, which contained restrictions for women to hold certain posts because of marriage or pregnancy, the Election Act, which obliged married women on ballot lists to be identified by their husband's name, and the Traffic Act, which did not reimburse women for their relocation expenses when they took up a new job.

44. In response to the question from Ms. Saiga, he said that the Marriage Act only amended the provisions of the Civil Code. Moreover, the Asian Marriage Act, which consisted of the Hindu Marriage Act and the Muslim Marriage Act, had been passed in 1973 but had never come into force. Finally, he said that the marriageable age for boys was currently 17, but that the latest draft revision of the Civil Code included a suggestion that the age be increased to 18 for both boys and girls.

45. **Ms. Saiga** expressed the hope that the draft revision of the Civil Code would be adopted as soon as possible.

46. **The Chairperson** said she was encouraged by the Government's recognition of the need to integrate the Convention into its gender policy and urged the delegation to endeavour to have the Convention incorporated into domestic law.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.