



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

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

Summary record of the 973rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 25 January 2011, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Pimentel

Contents

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

Seventh periodic report of Belarus

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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)*

Seventh periodic report of Belarus (CEDAW/C/BLR/7; CEDAW/C/BLR/Q/7 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Belarus took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus), introducing the seventh periodic report of Belarus (CEDAW/C/BLR/7), said that it covered the period 2002–2007 and had been prepared in cooperation with the relevant authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The report had been widely disseminated and was posted on the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare website. More up-to-date information was provided in the written replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/BLR/Q/7/Add.1) and through the dialogue with the Committee. The National Council on Gender Policy attached to the Ministry, the national mechanism responsible for carrying out State policy on gender equality since 2001, was composed of representatives of the State authorities, parliament and NGOs. Parliamentary commissions responsible for employment, health, family and other social issues also dealt with legislation concerning the status of women.
3. Since the submission of the previous periodic report, there had been many developments in Belarusian society affecting gender issues. Belarus had already embarked on its third national plan of action to promote gender equality and had a range of programmes to improve the situation of women. It was natural that equal opportunities for men and women formed an integral part of State social policy, since women made up more than 53 per cent of the population. More than 75 per cent of the population lived in urban areas. Most young women lived or had migrated to urban areas. The country had experienced negative demographic trends such as a low birth rate, a decreasing and ageing population and a relatively high mortality rate. Demographic issues had become particularly acute in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear accident.
4. Legislation and a national demographic security programme had been adopted to promote health in the country, including maternal and children's health. A number of measures taken between 2007 and 2010 had succeeded in increasing the birth rate and life expectancy at birth and reducing infant and maternal mortality. In 2009, the mortality rate of children under 5 had been comparable to that of developed countries (6.2 per 1,000 live births). From 2007 to 2010 the material mortality rate had gone from 12 to 1 per 100,000 live births. The decrease in maternal mortality could be explained not only by safer pregnancies and childbirths, but also by a considerable decline in the number of abortions performed.
5. The Government would continue to improve the system of financial and social support for families with children, including children with disabilities. It had already extended maternity leave by two weeks. Furthermore, all forms of social welfare were provided to both the mother and father, thus helping to instil in society the notion that men and women shared equal responsibility for raising children.
6. The protection of motherhood and the social welfare of women with children were directly related to women's opportunities to exercise the right to education and employment. The share of female students in institutions of higher education, about 10 per cent more than male students, was among the highest in the world. All children, boys and girls, received primary and basic secondary education. There was no longer any profession in which women did not work. Women currently studied in formerly "male" educational establishments such as the Police Academy and others, and constituted the majority of postgraduate students.

7. Progress had been made in incorporating gender studies into the education system. Yearly conferences were held on women's issues, the outcomes of which were used in developing State policy on gender issues. Materials on gender equality were included in further training courses for supervisors and specialists in the education, social welfare and justice systems.

8. The right to work was a State policy priority. Women had constituted 52.6 per cent of the working population in 2009. Resource centres had been established to encourage women to start up businesses. Women had made up more than 46 per cent of the recipients of business loans and grants in 2010. Over 54 per cent of working women had higher or specialized secondary education, versus some 37 per cent for working men. The State conducted a yearly employment assistance programme that included a yearly career fair and other measures. Legislation had been adopted in 2008 that prohibited job discrimination. As a result of the measures taken, gender was hardly a factor in unemployment. Just over 52 per cent of persons currently registered as unemployed were women, as opposed to more than 65 per cent in 2008.

9. Women had the right to equal pay for equal work. In 2009, the average monthly salary of women had been approximately 75 per cent of that of men. The discrepancy reflected the fact that more men than women worked in the industrial sector, which paid higher wages than in other sectors, such as the service industries and public service, where women were predominant.

10. The retirement age was 55 years for women and 65 years for men. Women received a pension earlier than men because of the added burden of combining their careers with raising children and unpaid housework. The earlier pensionable age, however, did not reduce women's employment opportunities, as they were entitled by law to continue working after the age of 55. To date, some 24 per cent of women of pensionable age were taking advantage of that opportunity. There was little difference in the size of men's and women's pensions, with men receiving 4.7 per cent more than women.

11. An important criterion for the achievement of genuine gender equality was the level of women's participation in State administration and public life. The number of women in public office had increased sevenfold in the 1990s, from 4.5 per cent to 32.8 per cent. For details of the relatively high share of women in decision-making positions in Belarus she referred the Committee to paragraph 100 of her Government's written replies (CEDAW/C/BLR/Q/7/Add.1).

12. The State had also created an environment conducive to the establishment of voluntary associations, including women's organizations. Women were more active participants than men in public movements, constituting some 57 per cent of members of voluntary associations. Belarus currently had 33 women's voluntary associations. Information about such associations was widely available on the Internet, including ministry websites. Women's organizations were included in the drafting of all relevant legislation, social programmes, international technical assistance projects and national plans of action on gender equality. The Government took an interest in working more closely with NGOs to address such issues as women with HIV/AIDS and human trafficking. It had embarked on joint projects to combat domestic violence with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and others.

13. Combating human trafficking was a high priority of the Government. The number of offences associated with trafficking in persons had decreased fourfold between 2005 and 2010 because of State anti-trafficking measures. The Government had put in place a system of assistance, rehabilitation and compensation for victims of trafficking. Belarus had made great strides in addressing the problem, as had been recognized by the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children following her visit in 2009. It had

also made efforts at the international level, including its sponsorship of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

14. Historically, Belarus had not experienced any conflicts on ethnic, racial, linguistic or religious grounds, and there had been no cases of discrimination against women on those grounds. Foreign nationals and stateless persons were guaranteed the same rights as Belarusian citizens. Belarus had won a high appraisal of its efforts to protect and promote human rights, including ensuring gender equality, in the course of the universal periodic review in May 2010. Belarus would continue to work closely with international organizations and human rights mechanisms, including the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, to build on its achievements.

15. **Ms. Šimonović**, noting the reply of the State party to the Committee's request concerning the ratification of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, urged the State party to reconsider ratifying the article, as that would facilitate the work of the Committee. She requested more information on specific cases in which the Convention was invoked before the courts. Welcoming the establishment of a national commission on the rights of the child, she said that the State party should also consider setting up an ombudsman's office to promote gender equality and prevent discrimination against women. More details were needed concerning the involvement of NGOs in the preparation of the periodic report. Lastly, she recalled the recommendation made by the Committee in connection with the previous periodic report that the State party should adopt a law on gender equality that included a definition of direct and indirect discrimination in accordance with the Convention.

16. **Mr. Bruun** said that he was also concerned that Belarus lacked specific legislation on gender equality with a definition of direct and indirect discrimination and recalled the Committee's general recommendation No. 28 on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention. It was not clear why Belarus had not adopted such legislation. The principle of gender equality and non-discrimination could be upheld effectively only in an environment where women enjoyed basic human rights, such as the right to freedom of expression, assembly and association. However, he noted with concern that those rights and freedoms had been infringed. One example was the ban on the Belarusian women's political party, Nadzeya (Hope), in 2007 because of paperwork irregularities. Registration and legal address requirements, particularly under article 193 of the Criminal Code, were also used to suppress trade unions and civil society organizations, in violation of international agreements, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise (No. 87) of 1948 and ILO Convention concerning the Application of the Principles of the Right to Organise and to Bargain Collectively (No. 98) of 1949. He enquired whether the State party intended to abolish such requirements. He would like assurances that the representatives of NGOs currently present in Geneva would not face intimidation, judicial harassment or other negative consequences on their return to Belarus.

17. **Ms. Ameline** said that equal rights could not be dissociated from the rule of law and independence of the judiciary. However, to date, Belarus did not observe democratic standards and international standards relating to life, liberty and security of person. She wished to know what the State intended to do to ensure greater protection of civil liberties under the law.

18. She enquired about Natalya Radina, Irina Khalip and Anastasia Polozhanko, to cite just a few of the women journalists and human rights activists currently detained, and whether the State party would be willing to receive a commission of inquiry into such detentions. She also asked whether those women had the benefit of counsel and the right to family visits. It would be useful to have statistical information on the number of women arrested in connection with the expression of political views.

19. She wondered whether there were any plans to reform the judicial system. The fact that the highest judicial officials were appointed or removed from office by the President seemed incompatible with the principle of the independence of judges. More information was also needed on gender education for judges in Belarus. She noted with satisfaction the State party legislation on human trafficking and asked about plans to amend legislation on domestic violence and whether it would include training for judges. She also wondered whether the State party was prepared to launch a campaign against impunity for such violence. She expressed concern that the considerable focus given by the State party to the family, and the role of women in the family, might jeopardize women's freedom to pursue their careers and participate actively in public life.

20. **Ms. Neubauer** said that she was concerned about the status of the national machinery for the advancement of women and recalled the recommendation made by the Committee in connection with the State party's previous periodic report that such machinery should be strengthened by providing it with adequate visibility, decision-making power and human and financial resources. Clarification was needed as to why the National Council on Gender Policy had been inactive for several years. She requested the delegation to compare the functions of the Council with those of the Department of Population and Gender and Family Policy of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and to provide the number of gender experts working in the Department and details of efforts to build the capacity of those experts and experts in other departments. She would welcome an update on the status of the current national plan of action for gender equality.

21. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said that her delegation was familiar with the NGO reports posted on the Committee's website and welcomed alternative views. One member of the Women's Independent Democratic Movement, which had drafted a shadow report, was also a representative of the National Council on Gender Policy. No one was imprisoned in Belarus for political reasons. Men and women were equal before the law under the Constitution of Belarus and had the right to equal protection of their rights and legitimate interests. All the requirements of the Convention were covered by the Constitution, labour legislation, the Marriage and Family Code, Civil Code and Criminal Code. Furthermore, the Marriage and Family Code had been amended to cover such issues as prenuptial agreements and child custody issues. Thus, the rights of women were protected and all forms of discrimination against women were prohibited by domestic legislation.

22. Turning to NGOs, she said that the legal address issue was no longer raised by ILO, as it had been resolved. A bill on non-profit organizations was currently being drafted. Furthermore, the number of voluntary associations had increased considerably since 2009. As at 1 January 2010, 15 political parties had been registered in Belarus. She drew attention to the many voluntary associations, including women's organizations, listed in paragraphs 6, 7 and 8 of her Government's written replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/BLR/Q/7/Add.1). Non-governmental organizations had been closely involved in the drafting of the present report. Her Government encouraged the active involvement of NGOs, in particular women's associations, in civic life. While the National Council on Gender Equality had not ceased its work, it was true that it had been inert for a short period owing to staff changes. However, in 2009, it had renewed its activities and its work with NGOs.

23. The declining population was a matter of concern to her Government, as was the case with many other European Governments. The overwhelming majority of families with children had only one child. Only 6 per cent of families had three or more children. Women were postponing marriage and raising children in order to pursue their careers. The Government had taken steps to enable women and men to balance family and professional life, such as paternity leave and paid leave for grandparents to care for children. The vast majority of children attended preschool institutions, where they were cared for and

provided with meals free of charge. The Government was also pursuing other policies to encourage men to take a greater share of responsibility for raising their children.

24. **Mr. Lazarev** (Belarus), referring to the question concerning an ombudsman for gender equality, said that discussions were currently under way on the establishment of a national human rights institution. His Government received and responded to a good many complaints from Belarusian citizens, which were covered by a law on citizens' appeals. The number of such complaints was steadily increasing, not because people's rights were increasingly violated, but rather because they were better informed about the available opportunities to assert their rights. There had been more than 40,000 such complaints in 2009, of which only 5 per cent had concerned human rights violations as such, and less than 0.5 per cent gender equality and discrimination. The decision to create an ombudsman's office must take into account the number of citizens' complaints. His Government would, however, consider creating such an institution, with the involvement of civil society.

25. Referring to the issue of the training of judges, he said that Belarus attached great importance to raising awareness about human rights, including international human rights law, especially the international agreements to which it was a party. Human rights education was provided at all levels, and special human rights courses were offered to law students and judges. Judges received further training and took part in international conferences on human rights issues. The UNFPA and UNICEF projects referred to earlier would of course include training for judges. His Government had requested the United Nations Democracy Fund to assist in its efforts to train judges, including on gender issues, and had entered into an agreement with the Council of Europe to enable Belarusian judges to take part in its education programmes.

26. Turning to the question of ratifying the amendment to article 20 of the Convention, he said that Belarus fully supported the article. However, he could not provide an immediate answer, as the domestic procedures for the ratification of amendments were not yet completed. His delegation would keep the Committee informed of any developments concerning those procedures.

27. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said that a new plan of action for gender equality was currently being drawn up and discussed by the National Council on Gender Policy. The draft would be put on the website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare for discussion. The Ministry did indeed have a Department of Population and Gender and Family Policy, composed of 17 persons, which, as its name suggested, took up gender issues as a matter of priority. All legislation underwent an expert assessment of its social impact before being submitted for adoption. The National Council on Gender Policy, of which, as Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, she acted as Chairperson, also assessed legislation dealing with labour, population, gender, family and other issues.

28. Referring to the Belarusian women's political party, Nadzeya, she said that there was no question of improper treatment. The Government had been interested in having a women's party in the country. However, all voluntary associations and political parties in Belarus must work within the bounds of the law. The courts alone decided whether they had overstepped those bounds. In August 2007, the Ministry of Justice had appealed to the Supreme Court to dissolve the party because it had broken the law. The party had failed to comply with written warnings issued by the Ministry of Justice. The Supreme Court decision to dissolve the party had been taken in accordance with domestic law and international practice and principles and had no political connotations whatever.

29. **Ms. Lavkovich** (Belarus) said that the gender perspective was taken into account in the training of civil servants, although further efforts were needed. Accordingly, the national plan of action for gender equality would include the requirement that State, regional and local officials must have knowledge of gender issues and must be aware that

gender discrimination was prohibited in the discharge of their duties. The implementation of State programmes and projects was regularly reviewed to assess their impact on men and women alike. The preparation of information on gender issues was coordinated with international organizations. All such work was based on a thorough analysis of statistical data disaggregated by gender.

30. **Ms. Popescu** said that, while the Committee fully understood the demographic problems facing Belarus, it was important to strike a balance between the role which women played in the family and the need to ensure that their rights were protected and their aspirations taken into account. The Committee would like to have specific replies to its questions on the bill on gender equality and on the three women journalists who were held in detention.

31. **Mr. Bruun** said that the Committee had information that in 2009, ILO had urged Belarus to abolish or amend presidential decree No. 2 of 1999 to eliminate the requirement of a legal address for registration of unions. He asked whether the delegation could confirm that such a step had been taken.

32. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said that the issue to which the previous speaker had referred had not been resolved and was still under discussion, because any decision would require an amendment to the relevant legislation. She reminded the Committee that the rules were the same for all, and one of those rules was that all public associations must have a legal address. That was not an inhibiting factor for their work. Indeed, the number of public associations in Belarus had been growing. The Government did not have the right to interfere in their work; it cooperated with them on various questions, providing assistance if requested.

33. She was under the impression that existing Belarusian legislation already incorporated the rights set out in the Convention, thereby making a bill on gender equality superfluous. Both the Convention and the Optional Protocol had been ratified and were implemented in all areas. They were published on a website, and they were used in training courses for members of the judiciary.

34. **Mr. Lazarev** (Belarus) said that Belarus was a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which contained provisions requiring States parties to guarantee freedom of expression and opinion but also specified that States must ensure public order. National legislation to that effect was in line with the Covenant. The women held in detention to whom reference had been made had been accused of serious offences; as in any country, their fate would be decided in the courts. If the women were treated differently from their male co-defendants, it would constitute a violation of article 15, paragraph 1, of the Convention, pursuant to which States parties must accord to women equality with men before the law.

35. **Ms. Popescu** stressed the importance of incorporating a definition of direct and indirect gender discrimination either into a specific law on gender equality or into the Constitution. Belarus was to be commended for the many measures taken with regard to motherhood, but it would be useful to learn what temporary special measures the State party had taken under article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention to promote the rights of Roma women, elderly women and rural women. She also asked whether Belarus planned to introduce quotas for political representation and whether any other affirmative action measures had been taken for vulnerable groups in the areas of political representation, education or health care.

36. **Ms. Zou Xiaojiao** said she had the impression that stereotypes and prejudices were deeply ingrained in Belarusian society. The references in both the report and the replies of the State party to measures taken to eliminate stereotypes focused on the role of women as mothers and spouses. For example, paragraph 143 of the report gave an account of national

competitions open to journalists for the best coverage of the topic of childhood, motherhood and family values. She could understand that Belarus, with its declining population, should want to promote motherhood, but attention must also be given to other potential roles for women in society, and it would be useful to learn whether any other measures were planned. She would also appreciate it if the delegation could explain what was meant by the words “positive stereotypes” in paragraph 145 of the report.

37. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said she was deeply disappointed that the report did not contain a separate section on the question of domestic violence and did not show that any progress had been made in addressing the points raised about violence against women in the family in paragraph 348 of the Committee’s previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/6). That indicated a total lack of understanding of the State party’s responsibility for eradicating the problem, which apparently was of a staggering scale in Belarus. The Belarusian Criminal Code did not have any provision specifically addressing domestic violence. She urged the State party to consult the Committee’s general recommendation No. 19 as well as the Secretary-General’s database on violence against women, which suggested best practices for countries in similar situations.

38. It would be useful for the Committee to have statistics reflecting the extent of domestic violence in the country. Were such statistics collected, and if so, did they indicate the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim? Paragraph 85 of the replies to the list of issues referred to several mechanisms for the rehabilitation and reintegration of such victims, but she wondered whether shelters existed which actually took in women and children. The figure provided of 99 persons who had received assistance in 2009 seemed very low compared to information available to the Committee. She would also like to know whether police or court officials received training on issues of domestic violence and whether specially trained police officers, including women, were instructed on how to deal with complaints. What rights did victims have and were the police obliged to inform them of those rights? Lastly, was marital rape treated separately under the Criminal Code?

39. **Ms. Awori** said that amendments to legislation on domestic violence, which envisaged access to justice and protection for women and also addressed questions of shelters, safe alternative housing, compensation and psychosocial rehabilitation, had been awaiting enactment by parliament since 2002. The real scale of domestic violence in Belarus was still unknown, and most cases went unreported, because either women silently endured their fate, or divorced their husbands, although without reporting the violence. She asked the delegation whether it could confirm reports that alcoholism or physical abuse had been the reason for divorce in more than half of all cases.

40. Paragraph 79 of the State party’s written replies stated that the Criminal Code did not identify such acts as violence against women in the family or marital rape as separate offences under criminal law. The Committee once again urged Belarus to enact and implement the domestic violence bill in order to ensure better protection for women in line with the Convention. Amendments to current legislation on domestic violence should be given high priority. When would it be reviewed by parliament? She also asked whether any steps were being taken to enact legislation specifically addressing sexual offences; that would afford more protection for women and would be in line with the requirements of the Convention.

41. **Ms. Šimonović** said that, according to paragraph 81 of the written replies, cases involving rape were tried under a private prosecution procedure. She stressed the importance of trying such cases in public, as was common practice in other countries. Moreover, the definition of rape should not be based on the threat or use of force, but on lack of consent. She asked whether Belarus was considering amendments to the Criminal Code to bring it into line with the requirements of the Convention and the standards of the Council of Europe.

42. **Ms. Gabr** said that Belarus had made positive strides in addressing the problem of trafficking in persons, but a number of points needed clarification. The Committee would like to know what legal framework regulated the issue. Did any legislation specifically define the offence of human trafficking? She asked about the status of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (the Palermo Protocol) in national law and enquired whether a specific mechanism was responsible for coordinating efforts to combat the phenomenon.

43. She enquired whether Belarus had a comprehensive national plan covering all aspects of human trafficking, including prevention, protection and awareness-raising; if so, were such activities funded by the various ministries or by a separate budget? The Committee would also welcome information on steps taken to deal with the underlying causes of trafficking.

44. It would be useful to learn how Belarus ensured protection of the privacy of the victims. Reference had been made to the importance of shelters, but according to her information, Belarus had only one rehabilitation centre. She enquired whether it was planned to open further centres and if so, how they would be funded, what body would be responsible for monitoring them and how cooperation with NGOs active in the area would be ensured.

45. She invited the delegation to comment on cooperation with neighbouring countries in combating human trafficking and to indicate what body coordinated activities aimed at addressing the problem at the national level.

46. **Ms. Neubauer** said that, since most victims of trafficking in Belarus were also victims of sexual exploitation, it was also important to look at the issue of prostitution. The report and the written replies did not give a clear picture of whether or not prostitution was prohibited. According to paragraph 170 of the report, article 171 of the Criminal Code criminalized making use of prostitution. The phrase “making use of prostitution” was unclear. Did it mean that clients of prostitutes were criminalized? What about women who engaged in prostitution because they were in desperate financial straits?

47. It would be useful to know more about the extent of prostitution in Belarus, the profile of women who engaged in it, what factors led them to prostitute themselves, how Belarus was dealing with the underlying problem and whether the State party was attempting to combat the stigmatization of prostitutes. She sought information on the results of the 2008–2010 State programme which included measures to reintegrate persons engaged in prostitution. Were any other programmes available to women who prostituted themselves but were not involved in trafficking in persons?

48. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said she could not confirm that the main reasons for divorce were alcohol and physical abuse. Divorce had many causes, both in Belarus and elsewhere.

49. With regard to the question on data, she said that Belarus had an independent national statistics committee. A booklet containing extensive demographic data was published every three years in Russian and English. The delegation would leave a copy with the Committee.

50. According to statistics on crime, which were disaggregated by gender, in 2010, there had been more than 2,600 cases of domestic violence, including some 1,950 in which women had been the victims; some 100 persons had been murdered, of whom more than 50 had been women. Gender-disaggregated statistics were available for all categories of domestic violence. The trend was downward: compared to 2009, the number of crimes committed against women in 2010 had declined.

51. A question had been posed about positive stereotypes; the underlying idea was to ensure gender equality and promote women's self-realization. With regard to the reference to motherhood, she said that women should have the right to choose what they themselves considered to be most important. The Government was working on a wide variety of initiatives to make that possible. Support for mothers, children and the family was merely one aspect. For example, there had been nationwide competitions for the country's best businesswoman, the best female head of an enterprise and the leading female civil servant. Thus, Belarus was supporting other opportunities for women as well.

52. Initiatives were being conducted to encourage men and women to divide childcare and household tasks more equally. Needless to say, it would take time to achieve that goal, because traditional stereotypes were difficult to overcome.

53. Turning to unemployment, she said that, in December 2010, the figure for registered unemployed persons had stood at 0.7 per cent. The number of job vacancies was greater than the number of registered unemployed persons; around 52 per cent of those persons were women, because often women sought well-paid employment, and they were not interested in the jobs offered. Measures were being taken to improve the situation, including a nationwide employment programme to boost female employment. Women could do training, including at university level, for more than 100 different occupations. Many professions offered on-the-job training. Women were given priority in the allocation of subsidies for business start-ups.

54. Women were granted childcare assistance for infants up to the age of 3 years. An employer could not dismiss a female employee if she had a child under the age of 5; that way, a woman who wished to take a year off work to raise her child could do so and then return to her job. In addition, an employer could not dismiss a female employee during the two years prior to her reaching the age of retirement.

55. More than 500,000 elderly persons in Belarus lived alone and relied on the State for support. Below a certain income, some services and support were free of charge. Elderly persons in rural areas were registered in the national social welfare database to ensure that they received the assistance to which they were entitled. They received various forms of support from their local social service centres. Mobile teams paid visits to the elderly in their homes to help them with their everyday needs. A programme to improve services for the elderly was under way.

56. Any woman who had been the victim of violence or had been threatened by violence could go to a crisis centre (shelter) at the reintegration and rehabilitation unit of her local social service centre to obtain temporary lodging, food and assistance. In fact, the crisis centres were open to men and women alike. A similar arrangement operated by an NGO in Minsk also provided effective assistance. The local authorities were empowered to take decisions on material support and housing for the needy. In 2010, approximately 50 women had requested assistance. Non-nationals permanently residing in Belarus had the same rights as Belarusian citizens and were entitled to equal protection under the law.

57. Approximately 7,000 Roma lived in Belarus. They had a sedentary way of life. Belarus did not have a minority problem with the Roma or with any other population group. Roma were entitled to assistance like anyone else. Children living with their families had access to basic compulsory education.

58. **Mr. Lazarev** (Belarus) said that Belarus had been very attentive to implementing the recommendations on domestic violence and human trafficking which the Committee had made in its concluding observations in 2004. It had more than 150 shelters throughout the country for longer-term residence of women and children who had been victims of domestic violence. Victims received counselling from specialists in violence against women and in human trafficking, depending on the offence.

59. An anonymous domestic violence hotline was in place, and the police immediately responded to calls. In cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), police officers were trained in the use of non-violent measures, in particular when women were concerned. Every effort was made to draw on international experience in the area. Belarusian legislation specified that the victims of domestic violence were women. If anything, it could be criticized for not addressing the case of male victims.

60. Although Belarus was not a member of the Council of Europe, it was eager to benefit from its experience, and it was in the final stages of acceding to its Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. Unfortunately, accession was a protracted administrative process.

61. Following the Committee's consideration of its previous periodic report, Belarus had examined the framework for model legislation on domestic violence prepared in the 1990s by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, but had concluded that it was not suited to today's world: any such legislation would need to cover all aspects of domestic violence, including violence in unmarried couples and violence against men. Belarus was taking steps to draw on international experience in improving existing legislation on domestic violence so as to avoid the mistakes made by other countries and to ensure that the law was consistent with international obligations when it entered into force.

62. Belarus had had a presidential system of government, and when it had held its last dialogue with the Committee in 2004, it had made use of presidential decrees to introduce temporary measures aimed at addressing the more than 1,000 cases of human trafficking registered at the time. The victims had been placed at the centre of attention, and thanks to the presidential decrees, their number had been reduced fourfold, and the number of trafficked minors tenfold; today Belarus no longer had a big problem with human trafficking.

63. A special office responsible for coordinating activities to combat human trafficking had been set up in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. All told, some 15 ministries were involved in those efforts. Parliament was currently examining a bill on human trafficking which incorporated best practices and international experience and was consistent with the obligations which Belarus had entered into under international human rights conventions. The bill envisaged the appointment of a national rapporteur on human trafficking to address and report to the President. It was to be hoped that it would be adopted by the end of the year.

64. All international conventions to which Belarus had acceded took precedence over national law. The courts made active use of the Palermo Protocol.

65. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said that prostitution in Belarus was an administrative offence. A total of 1,930 prostitutes were registered; the figure included a small number of men. Replying to a question about the phrase "making use of prostitution", she explained that it was a punishable offence for a person to benefit from the income of a prostitute.

66. **Mr. Lazarev** (Belarus) said that shelters and rehabilitation centres were State-funded, but NGOs and international organizations were also permitted to engage in such activities. Thus, victims of human trafficking could choose, the only difference being that the State rehabilitation services provided legal assistance, medical care and help with job placement. Belarus was currently considering how NGOs could play a more active role in assisting the victims of human trafficking.

67. At the initiative of Belarus, a programme to combat illegal migration and human trafficking had been adopted by the Community of Independent States (CIS) to coordinate the efforts of its member States. An agreement on legal assistance in the framework of human trafficking had also been concluded with non-CIS countries.

68. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said that Belarus had bilateral cooperation agreements with the Russian Federation in the above-mentioned areas. Cooperation with Ukraine, Germany and Poland was excellent. Belarus was committed to promoting active participation by NGOs, because any decision by the Government depended on the support of civil society – thus the need for NGO feedback.

69. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** asked once again whether any female police officers were specifically trained in dealing with victims of gender-based violence, what legal rights victims had and whether they were informed of those rights. She also would like to know whether victims were provided with legal and medical assistance and psychological counselling.

70. **Ms. Awori**, referring yet again to new legislation on domestic violence, said that nine years was a long time to be considering such legislation. Could the delegation indicate when it would be reviewed by parliament? She also wondered whether Belarus was considering drafting a specific piece of legislation to cover all sexual offences.

71. **Ms. Šimonović** asked whether there were any statistics on the number of women murdered by their husbands or former husbands.

72. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, enquired whether alcoholism was treated as an underlying cause of domestic violence or as a phenomenon which reinforced paternalistic, male chauvinist attitudes.

73. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said that priority attention was given to the problem of alcoholism and drunkenness, which also affected women. In fact, the Belarusian Women's Union had been conducting initiatives for many years to combat drunkenness among women. Drunkenness during the commission of an offence was regarded as an aggravating circumstance. A programme was under way to combat drunkenness.

74. As at 1 November 2010, more than 5,200 persons, including some 1,165 women, had been placed by court order in facilities for treatment of alcoholism; once treatment was completed, they were assisted in the search for employment. Every month, under an intergovernmental initiative, trained specialists visited homes in which a member of the family was an alcoholic. The local authorities provided assistance to alcoholics to help them overcome their dependency.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.