



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

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Eighty-second session

### Summary record of the 1885th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 16 June 2022, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Peláez Narváez (Vice-Chair)

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*Ms. Peláez Narváez (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.*

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

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

*Sixth periodic report of Azerbaijan* (CEDAW/C/AZE/6; CEDAW/C/AZE/Q/6; CEDAW/C/AZE/RQ/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Azerbaijan joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair** expressed appreciation of the expertise and innovative approach of Mr. Safarov, its Azerbaijani Vice-Chair, who had greatly contributed to the Committee's work.
3. **Ms. Muradova** (Azerbaijan) said that a three-year national action plan on the prevention of domestic violence, a five-year action plan on the implementation of the Child Strategy, a five-year action plan on the prevention of sex-selective abortion and a four-year national action plan to combat trafficking in persons had been adopted in 2020. The President had approved a 10-year Employment Strategy in 2018 and a five-year action plan for its implementation. Work was currently under way on a draft national action plan on ensuring gender equality, a draft national action plan for ensuring the employment of women and a draft national action plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security.
4. New Child and Family Support Centre facilities had been opened in three regions during the period from 2019 to 2021, and a modern building would shortly be constructed in the recently liberated Aghdam district. The centres provided opportunities for women and offered them community-based services. The Agency for the Development of Small and Medium-sized Businesses had been established to promote women's entrepreneurship activities. A recently established Social Services Agency provided rehabilitation-oriented social services for vulnerable groups, and a Department of Social Rehabilitation for Victims of Domestic Violence had been launched in 2021 at the Shelter and Social Rehabilitation Institution for Vulnerable Persons. In addition, three community resource centres and 15 women's resource centres provided employment and self-employment support services for women living in vulnerable and disadvantaged situations.
5. Gender commissions had been established in municipalities and in 2021 the Gender Azerbaijan e-portal had been created with assistance from the German Agency for International Cooperation to promote gender equality. A project aimed at raising awareness of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and other gender equality standards was being implemented by the Council of Europe in Azerbaijan. Government bodies, legal professionals, civil society and the general public would all benefit from the project. The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs had submitted two annual reports on gender equality to the parliament, which had established a Committee for Family, Women and Children's Issues. In addition, the parliament worked closely with international organizations on issues relating to gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence.
6. The Government had taken important steps to improve women's access to justice. Legal assistance was provided, where necessary free of charge. The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, the Azerbaijan Bar Association and the United Nations country office in Azerbaijan had in 2019 signed a tripartite memorandum of understanding on the provision of legal assistance to victims of domestic violence. Penitentiary institutions for women and juvenile prisoners had recently been constructed and modernized. A hotline, 860, has been launched with the help of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to receive calls concerning domestic violence. All government agencies had set up call centres or hotlines.
7. Vigorous action was being taken to increase the representation of women in elections. A woman had been appointed to the office of the vice-presidency in 2017, and the newly elected speaker of the parliament was a woman. The number of women members of parliament and of municipal institutions had also increased in recent years. Women

prosecutors had been appointed in two districts in 2020 and the number of women lawyers had tripled during the past four years. They now accounted for 18 per cent of all lawyers.

8. The Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) promoted the empowerment of women and girls and their participation in public and political life. The Agency for State Support to Non-governmental Organizations had allocated about 1.4 million Azerbaijan manats to NGOs for the implementation of 200 projects during the period from 2018 to 2021. In addition, a plan for gender equality in the civil service and guidelines governing the activity of persons responsible for gender equality had been published.

9. The President had recently approved a five-year State programme for the education of youth at prestigious universities in foreign countries. Women accounted for 30 per cent of applicants who had won scholarships under the previous State programme. The first Gender Equality Hackathon had been implemented jointly in 2021 with international organizations such as the European Union, UNFPA and UN Women. A TEKNOFEST Aerospace and Technology Festival had also been held in May 2022 in Azerbaijan, and 40 per cent of the Azerbaijani participants had been women and girls. Textbooks were assessed prior to publication in order to ensure, inter alia, a sensitive approach to gender, race, ethnicity and religion.

10. Government agencies and NGOs encouraged girls to pursue careers in engineering and information and communications technology (ICT). A key priority of the State's employment policy was to increase employment opportunities for women, including in small and medium-sized enterprises. They currently accounted for 48.3 per cent of the total employed population, 27.5 per cent of civil service employees and 21.4 per cent of individual entrepreneurs. In 12 regions, more than 270 women involved in agricultural activities were benefiting from the Partnership Programme jointly implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Ministry of Agriculture. The 540 women entrepreneurs who participated in the Association of Rural Women of Azerbaijan, which had been established in 2019, had attended training courses on financial literacy, business and life skills.

11. The Government had adopted extensive measures to protect the health of the population during the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. A socioeconomic stimulus package of \$2.7 billion had been adopted to protect people's health and to prevent the loss of jobs. About 50 per cent of the population had received both doses of the vaccines, and a number of hospitals had been built. The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions had been lifted.

12. The three-decade-long Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory had seriously affected the rights and freedoms of Azerbaijani women and children. The 44-day military conflict between the countries, during which 93 Azerbaijani civilians, including 12 children and 27 women had been killed, had ended with a historic victory and the liberation of occupied Azerbaijani territories. The country had entered into a phase of post-conflict recovery, during which priority would be given to peacekeeping, reconstruction and reintegration. The fact that the liberated territories were heavily mined constituted a major impediment to the realization of the inalienable right of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons to return to their homes safely. About 200 people had fallen victim to the mines since the end of the conflict. The Government, civil society organizations and international organizations were seeking to improve the psychosocial situation of conflict-affected people and to provide them with legal assistance. Although positive results had been achieved, a long-term and comprehensive approach was required to resolve existing issues.

13. The Government and civil society were taking joint action to combat stereotypes and promote gender and cultural equality, especially in regions outside the capital area. Research had shown that while stereotypes persisted, there was a positive dynamic towards ensuring gender equality. Political parties organized regular meetings with gender focal points, NGOs and human rights activists. The ruling New Azerbaijan Party had established a Department of Gender Issues, which conducted awareness-raising events to combat stereotypes.

14. A bill providing for 14 days paid parental leave for fathers had been drafted, as well as proposals for amendments to the Labour Code. A decision by the Cabinet of Ministers to remove legal barriers to women's employment would reduce the list of 674 professions and

jobs deemed to be hazardous for women to 204. Such restrictions would only be applicable to pregnant women and women with children under 1 year of age. Early marriages had not been eliminated, but the number of marriages and of births to mothers under the age of 18 had decreased. Projects to prevent sex-selective abortion, to enhance girls' status in the family and society and to combat gender-based violence were being implemented with the support of international organizations.

15. The Economic Support for Entrepreneurship and Employment project and a project on domestic violence funded by the European Union had bolstered the legal framework for women's rights and enhanced women's empowerment in the regions outside the capital. Quality medical services for women were provided by maternity hospitals in all regions, *inter alia* by 17 specialized maternity wards and 137 women's consultation centres.

16. Azerbaijan had ratified international instruments on climate change and had implemented programmes and strategies aimed at ensuring environmental integrity and sustainable development, especially in the liberated territories. It also supported investors who used environmentally friendly technologies and renewable energy sources. In line with State policy, the President of Azerbaijan had declared 2016 the Year of Multiculturalism.

#### *Articles 1–6*

17. **Ms. Leinarte** noted that Azerbaijan had prepared a statement to the current session of the Human Rights Council on the importance of promoting cultural diversity in combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination and establishing an environment of tolerance, empathy, mutual understanding and inclusiveness. She underscored in that connection the important role played by cultural diversity in combating discrimination against women and girls.

18. The national action plan on gender equality, the national action plan for preventing prenatal sex selection, the national action plan on preventing and addressing gender-based violence and the draft national action plan on gender equality and women's empowerment demonstrated that Azerbaijan was fully focused on creating an egalitarian society. However, the successful implementation of gender equality strategies faced some obstacles in the national legal framework. Neither the Constitution nor the 2006 Act of the Republic of Azerbaijan on gender equality (equality between men and women) addressed direct and indirect discrimination against women in the private and public spheres. Such an approach led to so-called gender neutrality and often reflected a failure to recognize gender specificities in practice. Article 6 of the Act attributed responsibility to the State for creating equal opportunities for men and women, but that goal could not be achieved without giving preference to women in areas where their status had historically been much less favourable than that of men. It was essential to adopt temporary special measures and quotas for women in order to expedite the elimination of discrimination.

19. Domestic violence, marital rape and stalking had not yet been specifically criminalized in the Criminal Code. The State party's reliance on mandatory mediation in cases of domestic violence was ineffective. It would be preferable to facilitate the access of women victims to free legal assistance and to overall State support. The State party's gender-neutral approach to discrimination might underlie its reluctance to sign and ratify the Istanbul Convention, which focused on historical gender stereotypes.

20. She wished to know whether the general public and the judiciary were aware of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and whether it was invoked in domestic courts. She would also be interested to hear whether the Government engaged with civil society in drafting its reports to the Committee and national action plans on gender equality. The adoption in 2014 of restrictive legislation on NGOs, which prevented them, for instance, from receiving foreign grants, might impede civil society from fully participating in the implementation of women's rights and gender equality.

21. The humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh remained a matter of concern, notwithstanding the ceasefire agreement reached between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020. While she commended the scale of the resources allocated to internally displaced persons, whose poverty threshold had dropped from 75 per cent to 12 per cent during the past 15 years, she regretted the failure to adopt a gender perspective in analysing their return to the liberated

territories. Technical support for the territories from international organizations would expedite the inclusion of women in the post-conflict process and the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. She wished to know why the State party had not yet adopted the national action plan on the women and peace and security agenda.

22. **Ms. Muradova** (Azerbaijan) said that the Government was committed to assisting all civil society organizations. While the Act on gender equality did not refer specifically to sexual harassment, it contained a general definition of discrimination against women that was in line with the Convention and could be used by all persons to seek legal remedies. Work was under way to improve implementation mechanisms, and more specific measures that addressed different forms of discrimination against women had been proposed, such as the inclusion of domestic violence as a distinct offence in the Criminal Code. Under the Constitution, international instruments took precedence over national legislation.

23. The implementation of the Act on the prevention of domestic violence would require funding, strong political will and significant monitoring. The Government was analysing the situation, together with civil society, the media and experts, and there were plans to increase funding in that area. Promotion of the Istanbul Convention involved all government agencies and was coordinated by the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs by means of an action plan created with the support of the Council of Europe, which drew on the experience of other countries. A guide to the Istanbul Convention for members of parliament had been drafted. The Council of Europe Action Plan for Azerbaijan 2022–2025 would bring Azerbaijani legislation into line with European standards and help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. More must be done to increase women's participation in political life.

24. The trilateral declaration signed in 2020 between the Russian Federation, Armenia and Azerbaijan was intended to bring an end to military operations in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, paving the way for a peace agreement and enabling internally displaced persons to return home, reclaim their rights and contribute to the peace process, with women and men participating on an equal footing. The Government was drawing up strategic and development plans that would ensure women's participation in line with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. That resolution would be implemented through a national action plan.

25. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that, despite civil society's initial misgivings in relation to the legislative changes on funding for NGOs, such organizations had received almost 181 million manats from foreign sources, 36 million manats of which had gone to the almost 200 NGOs working with women and girls. The country's more than 3,500 NGOs were involved in consultations and decision-making.

26. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that the Act on gender equality stipulated that specific measures should be adopted to bring about gender equality; such measures must not be considered discriminatory. Free legal assistance was provided to vulnerable persons involved in criminal and administrative cases, and specific provisions on legal assistance for victims of domestic violence were contained in the national action plan on the prevention of domestic violence and in proposed amendments to the Act on Lawyers and the Legal Practice.

27. **Ms. Haidar** said that she wished to know what the time frame was for the adoption of the draft national action plan for gender equality and the draft national action plan to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs appeared to have a fragmented mandate and apparently lacked the authority to ensure government-wide gender mainstreaming. She would welcome information on any plans to make it a fully-fledged government ministry. Gender focal points had not been appointed in decision-making positions in the Government or in all the regions. It would be useful to the Committee to receive information on efforts to establish clear terms of reference for them, to ensure that they occupied decision-making positions and to afford them adequate human, financial and technical resources.

28. While the regulation of NGO funding was necessary, the legislative changes in that regard continued to hinder the work of such organizations. The Committee should be informed of measures to ensure sustainable funding for civil society organizations and to create an enabling environment for defenders of women's human rights. She noted that the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner had been downgraded to B status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), and she asked for information on the State party's commitment to preserving the Office's independence and increasing its resources.

29. **The Chair** said that she wished to know how the provisions on temporary special measures contained in the Act on gender equality were implemented. To her knowledge, no such measures had been implemented for disadvantaged women or to improve women's participation in political or public life. A survey undertaken by the Government in conjunction with UNFPA had found that there was support among women and men for quotas for women in government and leadership positions. Such quotas should therefore be introduced to accelerate de facto gender equality in public and political life, including for disadvantaged women.

30. **Ms. Muradova** (Azerbaijan) said that, although the draft action plans had been finalized, they could only pass into law once the process of legislative harmonization had concluded. Nevertheless, action had already been taken in the relevant areas, although those activities had been somewhat hindered by the armed conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic. The competences of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs had already been strengthened, and any further change to its mandate to enhance its status would be welcome. The competences of the State Council for the Support of NGOs had been expanded, and it had become a State agency. The parliament was considering solutions to the problems caused by the changes to legal provisions on NGO funding, and serious consideration was also being given to a response to the downgrading of the status of the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner.

31. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that, although the Government had taken some action to increase women's participation in the public sector and in entrepreneurship, there was uncertainty as to whether those initiatives could be considered temporary special measures, and technical support from international organizations was required to clarify that point. The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs had submitted proposals that would improve the interpretation of the measures set out in legislation.

32. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that a major aim of the State Agency that supported NGOs was to provide funding, particularly to women's NGOs in rural areas. To date, 1.4 million manats had been allocated to some 200 projects run by women's NGOs.

33. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that gender focal points were appointed in all government and law enforcement agencies, notwithstanding the fact that a specific control mechanism had yet to be defined in law. That shortcoming was addressed in the proposed amendments to the Act on gender equality. The activities of all gender focal points were recorded in a portal that also provided information on gender initiatives at the international and national levels, and guidance for gender focal points had been issued.

34. **Ms. Haidar** said that she wished to know whether the proposed amendments to the Act on gender equality and the draft national action plan for gender equality contained specific terms of reference for the gender focal points.

35. **Ms. Muradova** (Azerbaijan) said that, in response to the results of a survey carried out jointly with UNFPA, private sector entities had been asked to appoint gender focal points. The competences of gender focal points were addressed in the draft national action plan for gender equality and the proposed legislative amendments.

36. **The Chair**, referring to general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, said that it would be interesting to hear whether the Government planned to introduce quotas to increase the political participation in decision-making of women, who accounted for just 18.3 per cent of members of parliament.

37. **Ms. Muradova** (Azerbaijan) said that her Government did not have a clear understanding of what was meant respectively by quotas and temporary special measures.

Once the Government had clearer definitions it would be able to take concrete measures to strive for women's participation in public and political life on a more equal footing.

38. **Ms. Reddock**, noting the numerous positive steps that had been taken to ensure gender equality and combat gender-based violence in recent decades, said that she was concerned that too little had been done in respect of many of the recommendations included in the concluding observations issued at the end of the previous constructive dialogue. She was particularly concerned about the implementation of the Act on the prevention of domestic violence and establishment of State-funded shelters for women victims of violence. Although the 2020–2025 action plan on the prevention of sex-selective abortion had been introduced to counter patriarchal attitudes prevalent in Azerbaijan, the Committee had received reports that execution of that action plan faced challenges, in particular owing to a lack of trained State personnel. In view of that lack of progress, she wondered whether the State party would consider a comprehensive national campaign to transform prejudicial attitudes, stereotypes, norms and values related to women and girls, conducted through gender-awareness training for parliamentarians, senior civil servants, teachers and members of the judiciary, journalists, parents and children and through the national media. Such a campaign would require a dedicated ministry or equivalent institution.

39. In addition, she hoped to hear about the gender-equality training curriculum in the civil service and to find out whether it included components on women's rights, issues of masculinities and femininities and discriminatory gender stereotypes. It would be useful to know whether such training was also available to staff at Child and Family Support Centres, the gender commissions in the municipalities and the gender focal points.

40. She would welcome information on the mechanisms in place for executing the action plan to combat gender-based violence. Hopefully, funds could be made available to expand the domestic violence hotline to reach all survivors of gender-based violence, including girl survivors of sexual abuse; to make it available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; and to equip it with a referral system to available services, such as shelters and specialist police personnel. It would also be useful to secure funding for programmes in all regions for working with perpetrators and fostering male allies against gender-based violence and for the establishment of dedicated shelters. Lastly, she wished to know about existing mechanisms to strengthen local capacities for the successful implementation of the action plans, such as formal qualifications in women's and gender studies, education programmes and university programmes.

41. **Ms. Muradova** (Azerbaijan) said that the Government was working with international organizations and international NGOs on a large-scale and open-ended national campaign, across traditional and social media, addressing the stereotypes underlying the cultural preference for sons over daughters. The compiled data from the gender commissions in all municipalities were reported to the President, including details of shortcomings in the execution of the action plans. Moreover, every aspect of the shortcomings noted during the constructive dialogue had been presented to the parliament. The Government was determined that the entire State apparatus would coordinate to remedy those shortcomings.

42. The Government was mobilizing funding and financing from international organizations, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and authoritative international NGOs. When calls for proposals were published for grants, participation of women and girls was one of the priority criteria for awarding resources.

43. Members of either sex could use the 860 domestic violence hotline, which was available around the clock. In addition, the 111 hotline provided support for children.

44. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that, every year, the Government, backed by international donors and working with civil society, ran schemes targeting implementation of the Act on the prevention of domestic violence, later analysing their outcomes. In the past, few protection orders had been issued, but the number had recently increased. More remained to be done in that connection, so the Government had increased its efforts to encourage courts to issue such orders. The establishment of groups to monitor gender violence and violence against children in all districts was an important achievement. Since building their capacity was a priority, training, both in Azerbaijan and abroad, was being provided for their members.

45. The 860 hotline was a joint project implemented with UNFPA. Information about it was available on the website of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, which also included infographics setting out data disaggregated by sex, age, family status and other indicators.

46. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that the 2020–2025 action plan on the prevention of sex-selective abortion involved cooperation between various government agencies and international partners for the implementation of a large-scale awareness-raising campaign. International organizations had provided training for some 50 employees of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, several of whom had now been tasked with representing the campaign in remote villages and areas, and an information campaign was also carried out on public transport networks. On 15 May 2022, a festival for fathers and daughters from all over the country, including remote villages, had been organized as a means of communicating positive messaging about the value of daughters.

47. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that, every year, the Ministry of Youth and Sport awarded grants to between 10 and 15 NGOs working on capacity-building for youth in the areas of human rights, gender equality and combating trafficking in persons. The Ministry had also recently established a master's degree programme in social work, which helped to address problems related to gender issues.

48. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that the Academy of Justice organized training courses for judges and all prison staff, including a special online course on women's access to justice and another course about mechanisms for punishing perpetrators of violence against women and children. In addition, the Academy had worked with the Council of Europe to organize courses promoting the Istanbul Convention. Over 1,700 persons had attended the courses, including hundreds of prosecutors and judges.

49. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that a number of universities had dedicated gender equality centres or special chairs on gender issues and that the country's universities had hosted specific conferences on gender equality featuring distinguished international experts. The Institute of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan was conducting research into the reasons for women's underrepresentation in engineering faculties, on the basis of which the Ministry of Education had increased its efforts to make the engineering professions more attractive to girls, including through the organization of summer camps.

50. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that preventing all types of violence against women was one of the most important tasks of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Ministry closely monitored all calls to the 860 hotline and always took measures in response. Although a relatively small proportion of criminal offences were related to violence against women and children, the Ministry paid very close attention to those crimes. With a view to their prevention, special public councils had been set up, often including celebrities and other prestigious persons.

51. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she wished to know how the State party dealt with the criminal offence of bride abduction and whether that offence was still committed. She would welcome more information about the root causes of the phenomenon. Given that the Committee had received reports of female genital mutilation in some regions and that Azerbaijan had welcomed refugees from countries where the practice was common, she wondered whether it was becoming more widespread.

52. Turning to the database of domestic violence cases mentioned in the report, she said that there had apparently been some problems with its maintenance. It was unclear whether the database still existed or whether it had been a one-time project.

53. **Ms. Muradova** (Azerbaijan) said that the historical practice of bride abduction had resulted exclusively from situations where young couples had eloped, having been refused their parents' permission to marry. The Ministry of Internal Affairs took action when such cases arose.

54. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that, since their establishment in August 2021, the special care centres for victims of domestic violence had already provided accommodation and assistance for 94 persons. More centres were being set up in Baku and in another city.



55. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs continued to operate the database established under the Act on the prevention of domestic violence, which received financial support from UNFPA. Sometimes, however, the uploading of data was delayed or ineffective. The State Committee had organized training for the persons responsible for inputting the data, and it was hoped that the database would be upgraded; disaggregated data could already be extracted from it.

56. Turning to the issue of female genital mutilation, she said that instances had been reported by a single NGO, in Zagatala district. The State Committee had investigated thoroughly, enquired with the local authorities and reported the matter to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It had subsequently been ascertained that no female genital mutilation had taken place.

57. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she would appreciate information on any mid-term review of the national action plan to combat trafficking in persons in the period from 2020 to 2024 and on plans to further develop indicators, standard operating procedures and cooperation to improve the identification of women and girls at risk of trafficking, including internal trafficking, and to improve the prosecution of traffickers. It would be useful to know whether the State provided timely legal aid for free for victims of trafficking. She also wondered whether reports on the implementation of the national action plan were submitted to the parliament and whether that plan was related to the plans addressing gender equality, the situation of vulnerable groups, poverty alleviation and the education and employment of women and girls.

58. It would be useful for the Committee to receive information on the timeline for opening new centres for victims of trafficking in persons and on the funding allocated for that purpose up to 2025. She would appreciate information on the financial support planned for NGOs providing gender-sensitive support to female trafficking victims and on the maintenance of the helpline for them. It would be useful to learn whether the State party planned to amend or repeal the legislative provisions on prostitution that penalized women and whether it would strengthen measures against forced prostitution and the exploitation of women in prostitution, and increase the liability of pimps and other persons involved. She would also like to hear about programmes to support and rehabilitate women involved in prostitution, especially those subject to multiple forms of discrimination, and about measures to prevent sex trafficking by reducing demand.

59. **Ms. Muradova** (Azerbaijan) said that all government bodies were involved in combating trafficking in persons, in line with their competences. Efforts were being made to raise public awareness of human trafficking and to provide information and support to victims. Annual reports on combating trafficking in persons were submitted to the parliament, which allowed parliamentarians to issue recommendations and raise concerns.

60. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that a department had been established within the Ministry of Internal Affairs to lead efforts to combat trafficking in persons. The areas of competence of the department had been approved by the President and the parliament, and actions were taken in line with the relevant international instruments. The efforts made by Azerbaijan had been acknowledged in the 2019 and 2020 Trafficking in Persons reports of the United States Department of State. Nonetheless, further work was needed, as criminals continued to develop new methods of working.

61. The fourth national action plan to combat trafficking in persons had been approved in 2020. Its implementation was overseen by a working group comprised of all relevant stakeholders, including government ministries, which met at least once per quarter to discuss cases. The working group's annual reports were submitted to the parliament, which discussed and approved the working group's plans. The results had been tangible, with increasing numbers of perpetrators brought to justice, in line with the Criminal Code.

62. Trafficking-related offences such as prostitution and the sexual exploitation and kidnapping of girls were criminalized under Azerbaijani law. The Government provided assistance to victims of trafficking, including accommodation in shelters, a one-time payment of 700-800 manats, free translation and interpreting services and psychological support from the Ministry of Health. To ensure their future integration into society, the victims were also helped to consider potential areas of employment or training. Major awareness-raising efforts

were being made to prevent trafficking, including in-person visits to schools and other institutions by public officials to disseminate information and highlight the dangers of fake education and employment notices.

63. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population provided special assistance to victims of trafficking in persons, including health-care and psychological services. The Government announced calls for tenders from NGOs to organize social services for victims; the main aims were to help victims, prevent re-victimization, facilitate their social integration and provide assistance in accessing education and training.

64. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that the national action plan to combat trafficking in persons included a section on children which addressed the situation of both actual and potential victims. The plan also broached the topics of early marriage, access to appropriate documentation and services, adoption and trusteeships. In addition, a law on children's rights had been adopted, and rules on identifying children with special educational needs had been developed.

65. Moreover, the Code of Administrative Offences established criminal liability for persons who involved women in prostitution. It was hoped that a public survey on the reasons that women became involved in prostitution would be held in 2023.

66. **Ms. Manalo** said that it would be useful to hear about any programme in place to ensure that employees of law enforcement agencies were not involved in trafficking in persons.

67. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that there was a series of training programmes for civil servants that covered trafficking in persons; however, no such training was provided to police or law enforcement officers. Azerbaijan was a party to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which provided for criminal liability for all perpetrators. Hopefully, legislation would be adopted in the future to prevent the involvement of law enforcement employees in trafficking in persons.

68. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that all relevant measures to prevent trafficking in persons were taken by government agencies, notably the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Border Service and the State Migration Service. Hundreds of people had been included in public consultations, and the mass media were used to raise public awareness of trafficking. There was a hotline available nationwide that could be used by trafficking victims to access support or by others to report suspected perpetrators. The hotline had received over 5,700 calls in 2020, over 4,500 in 2021 and over 1,700 in the first five months of 2022. All crimes reported using the hotline received immediate police attention and the victims of trafficking in persons were guaranteed protection in shelters.

#### *Articles 7–9*

69. **Ms. Akizuki** said that she would like to hear about any efforts made to promote the participation of women in the parliament, the Government and the judiciary. The State party should consider introducing a quota or temporary special measures to increase the proportion of women in those bodies. In that regard, she said that she would like to know what measures existed to enhance the political and public participation of women belonging to disadvantaged groups, including women with disabilities. She wondered whether there were nationwide awareness-raising efforts to promote women's participation in public and political life and whether there were any capacity-building programmes for women to improve their skills in leadership and their participation in decision-making. Information on awareness-raising measures intended to eliminate discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles of women and men in public and political life would be welcome. Did the State party have legal mechanisms to protect and promote the participation of female human rights defenders, including those advocating for the human rights of rural women?

70. **Ms. Muradova** (Azerbaijan) said that increasing the participation of women in public and political life was a priority for the Government, but it remained challenging; it was particularly difficult to encourage women raising families and those in rural areas to participate. The Government worked with international organizations and local NGOs to

boost participation, and the Ministry of Economy had various projects to support female entrepreneurship, small and medium-sized enterprises led by women and women engaged in agriculture. As self-confidence and adequate preparation were key to encouraging women to participate in public and political life, many efforts were focused on the development of the leadership skills of girls, with a view to their future involvement. Such events included a biennial children's forum where pupils at all levels of schooling met to debate political issues; public officials attended the forum to ask questions, and the majority of participants were girls. In addition, since 2017, there had been a very popular Young Ambassador programme, under which the children selected travelled to engage with their peers, debate issues and learn about diplomacy.

71. Another event was the Women's Forum, which took place every five years and had been held six times. Women from across Azerbaijan attended that event to debate the challenges they faced and their expectations of the Government, international organizations and themselves. The issues raised at the Forum were taken into account in the development of State programmes. Training was available for women running in elections, and pre-election awareness-raising campaigns were held with the aim of engaging women in the political process.

72. All political parties in Azerbaijan were responsible for determining their own electoral lists; it was hoped that more female candidates would be chosen in future, with a subsequent increase in the number female parliamentarians. The number of female candidates in municipal elections had noticeably increased in recent years. Political parties each had their own consultative body for women, and the ruling New Azerbaijan Party had a special department for gender-related issues, which worked with female members of both that party and opposition parties.

73. Every year, a number of women received awards in recognition of their achievements in public and political life. For example, in 2022, the President had awarded the prestigious Shohrat Order to three female human rights defenders. Such awards increased public interest in contributions to public life and created a healthy spirit of competition.

74. Research indicated that women accounted for almost half of all students in Azerbaijani law faculties, but that many did not pursue legal careers after graduation. The Government had launched a project with the national Bar Association to establish a special association for female lawyers with the aim of encouraging women to join the judiciary and enabling them to make the most of their rights.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*