



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Eighty-sixth session**

Summary record of the 2015th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 19 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Bethel (Rapporteur)

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In the absence of Ms. Peláez Narváez, Ms. Bethel (Rapporteur) took the Chair.

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)*

Eighth periodic report of Malawi (CEDAW/C/MWI/8; CEDAW/C/MWI/Q/8; CEDAW/C/MWI/RQ/8)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Malawi joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Sendeza** (Malawi) said that her country's eighth periodic report (CEDAW/C/MWI/8) was the product of a wide consultative process, led by an interministerial task force, entailing regional consultations and workshops and involving various stakeholders working in the field of women's rights. In the light of the hardships and inequalities faced by women in Malawi, the Government was working tirelessly to promote and protect women's rights. In the Constitution, women were specifically recognized as marginalized persons requiring special protection. The Constitution enshrined the human rights of all persons without discrimination on the basis of sex and contained a specific provision on the fundamental rights and freedoms of women.
3. In terms of legislative developments, the Gender Equality Act of 2013 was currently being reviewed with the aim of improving its effectiveness in the promotion and protection of women's rights. To that end, a national task force committee had been established to identify existing gaps in the Act and emerging issues and to draft a position paper on the attendant amendment bill. Among other elements, there were proposals to: extend gender quotas to promote women's representation in the private sector; ensure the protection of whistle-blowers, complainants and witnesses in cases of workplace sexual harassment or gender-based violence; and increase penalties for breaches of the Act. In addition, the Penal Code had been amended in December 2022 to make sexual intercourse with a child punishable with a sentence of up to life imprisonment.
4. In addition to legislative measures, a new anti-sexual harassment policy and guidelines for the public sector had been finalized and were pending Cabinet approval. It provided a framework for preventing, reporting and addressing sexual harassment in public sector workplaces, creating a safe environment for employees and clients and addressing gender inequalities and discriminatory practices.
5. To improve access to justice for women, the judiciary had established specialized divisions of the High Court, including the Family and Probate Division. It had also increased the number of judges and scaled up the use of mobile courts. In general, the courts were becoming more vigilant about the rights of women in the workplace. In one case, a company had been found negligent for failing to act on allegations of sexual harassment reported by a female claimant, who had been awarded aggravated damages. The Legal Aid Bureau and the Malawi Law Society had introduced a pro bono scheme to ensure that poor and marginalized members of society, including women, could gain access to private lawyers at no extra cost. Similarly, an initiative had recently been launched to further enhance the provision of pro bono legal services nationwide, including in rural areas, where the vast majority of marginalized women resided. Three prisons had recently been designated as women-only, thus ensuring that women in detention had access to education and vocational training. Same-sex relationships were prohibited by law in Malawi, but the constitutionality of the relevant legal provisions was currently being challenged before the courts.
6. The representation of women in governance and leadership positions was a priority of the Government. Under the Gender Equality Act, provisions on quotas requiring no fewer than 40 per cent and no more than 60 per cent of either sex in public sector recruitment, appointment and promotion procedures were being actively enforced. As a result of those quotas, more than 40 per cent of Cabinet ministers and more than 22 per cent of legislators were women. In addition, the first female speaker of the National Assembly had been elected, and women occupied various positions of leadership, such as the posts of director of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the Ombudsman and the head of the Malawi Human Rights Commission.

7. Efforts to promote women's economic empowerment included the Social Cash Transfer Programme, which currently benefited almost 300,000 ultra-poor and labour-constrained households, many of which had women heads of household. The Programme's positive outcomes included the improved health and nutrition of some 80 per cent of beneficiary households, increased school enrolment and retention rates and enhanced food security and living conditions. A national action plan on women's economic empowerment had been adopted and a women's economic empowerment programme was being implemented, inter alia to provide business management coaching, mentoring and capacity-building. The Financial Inclusion and Entrepreneurship Scaling Project run by the Reserve Bank of Malawi with the support of the World Bank to promote entrepreneurship and increase access to financial services had reached some 33,000 micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises to date. More than 45 per cent of its beneficiaries were women.

8. Substantial progress had been made in terms of preventing and responding to sexual violence and gender-based violence. The National Plan of Action against Gender-based Violence had already been implemented and was currently pending review. A strategy designed to engage men in efforts to address gender-based violence, gender equality, sexual reproductive health rights and HIV/AIDS issues and to promote positive masculinities had been introduced for the period 2023–2026. A national protection cluster and subcluster on gender-based violence had been put in place to facilitate the response to and monitoring of gender-based violence in emergency situations. During Tropical Cyclone Freddy, the subcluster had coordinated awareness campaigns on preventing gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse, and it had distributed dignity kits to affected women and girls and had referred cases to the proper authorities. A national plan of action to combat trafficking in persons had also recently been launched covering the period 2023–2028. It was centred on human rights-based and gender-sensitive approaches, with a special focus on safeguarding victims and placing them at the centre of all measures.

9. Awareness-raising on the content of the Convention continued. Public officials, including social welfare and child protection officers, had been trained on the promotion and protection of women's rights. Intensive efforts, for instance aimed at raising public awareness of gender-based violence, harmful cultural practices and the existing legislation on women's rights, including in the framework of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign, had borne fruit. An information management system aimed at collecting, analysing and disseminating gender-disaggregated data on gender-based violence had been put into operation.

10. When it came to challenges, the Government's efforts to create a better Malawi for women and girls and to promote their rights had recently been affected by adverse natural events, such as Cyclones Anna and Freddy, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and a cholera outbreak; such disasters had also deepened poverty levels, in particular among women, and had hindered access to services. The implementation of programmes relating to women's rights and the Convention was affected by low levels of funding and the persistence of harmful customs and norms that perpetuated violence against women. More resources were therefore needed, and the technical assistance of international and regional partners would be welcomed.

Articles 1–6

11. **Ms. Morsy** said that the State party had demonstrated its commitment to the implementation of the Convention through several policies, national action plans and strategies intended to enable women and girls to exercise their rights. Noticeable progress had been made in various areas, including the enactment of laws concerning gender equality, but more still needed to be done to overcome challenges of implementation. The Committee welcomed the election of the State party's first female speaker of the National Assembly as a great milestone for Malawi.

12. **Ms. Ameline** said that, despite the rights enshrined in the Constitution, many women, in particular rural women, women with disabilities, women refugees and women accused of witchcraft, continued to face discrimination and be deprived of their rights. In the light of the revision of the Gender Equality Act, she wished to know whether the body tasked with reviewing legislation had a broader, more comprehensive mandate to identify legislative gaps

relating to the women's rights guaranteed under the Convention; to what extent the State party had considered leveraging the support of United Nations, European Union agencies and civil society to aid in efforts to incorporate the Convention into the legal system; whether the State party had plans to adopt a comprehensive definition of discrimination to include direct and indirect discrimination; and whether it intended to become a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention. She would also be interested to hear the delegation's comments on reports that a law enacted in 2022 had restricted the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

13. In the light of the State party's dual systems of customary and positive law, she wondered what measures were being taken to strengthen women's rights and bolster dialogue with religious leaders. The Committee would like to know whether the Supreme Court considered that the provisions of the Convention had constitutional rank; whether more information could be provided on the mobile courts, including whether their performance had been evaluated; and whether there was accountability for all human rights violations, including with regard to access to justice.

14. **Ms. Sendeza** (Malawi) said that awareness of gender-based violence was being promoted through projects developed in collaboration with United Nations and European Union agencies. Funding had been provided through the Spotlight Initiative to deliver capacity-building training sessions to actors such as social welfare offices, police officers, magistrates and health-care staff on gender-based violence prevention, response and case management.

15. The Government had initiated accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention and planned to commence consultations with all relevant stakeholders in the near future.

16. Through the Social Cash Transfer Programme, women in rural areas were supported in obtaining decent housing, sending their children to school and gaining access to land. Data on the number and effectiveness of mobile courts would be provided at a later stage.

17. The Constitution prohibited all activities related to witchcraft. The Law Commission's review of the Witchcraft Act had shown that poor women were often accused of witchcraft and harshly treated as a result. The Government was therefore reviewing the Act to ensure that all women were fully protected.

18. **Ms. Ameline** said that it was crucial to revise the Gender Equality Act to ensure that all forms of discrimination were included. International bodies should work with the Government to draft a text that fully addressed the numerous and systemic forms of discrimination present in the country while promoting women's leadership and involving women in the country's development.

19. **Ms. Sendeza** (Malawi) said that she had appealed to both international and regional partners to provide the necessary technical assistance so that the amended legislative text on witchcraft could be put in place as soon as possible and women's rights could be more effectively defended.

20. **Ms. Eghobamien-Msheli** said that only 25 per cent of the time of the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare was reportedly available to lead and deliver on the State party's commitments under the Convention and other obligations for women's advancement. She would be interested to hear how the State party ensured effective system-wide, results-oriented gender mainstreaming. The Committee would welcome information on the operational linkages between the Ministry, the Malawi Human Rights Commission and the gender empowerment and social inclusion working group charged with mainstreaming gender, international development programmes.

21. She wondered what was the lead agency for gender mainstreaming, what authority the Ministry had to drive results and whether Cabinet-level mechanisms existed, in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention's concluding observations and general recommendation No. 6 on effective national machinery and publicity. What positive and impactful results had been achieved, and did the Malawi Human Rights Commission have a pact or memorandum of understanding with the Ministry?

22. The Committee would be interested to learn about the policy measures, governance instruments and tools available to assist the Ministry in delivering its oversight mandate, to redress systemic, vertical and horizontal institutional barriers and, in the context of the global digital economy, to handle emerging gender concerns in areas such as artificial intelligence robotics, the metaverse and climate change.

23. She wished to know whether a system for monitoring compliance and a regulatory system existed to ensure the effective functioning of the implementation plans for gender equality and whether the plans had clear gender-related targets. The Malawi Human Rights Commission was an independent entity. It would be of interest to hear how it held the Government accountable for ensuring access to justice and appropriate legislative policy to make sure that a whole-of-society approach was taken to gender mainstreaming.

24. She would appreciate information on the achievements recorded thanks to collaboration between the Malawi Human Rights Commission and women's organizations. The Committee would like to confirm the percentage of the national budget allocated to the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare. Did it currently have adequate human and financial resources to establish benchmarks and acceptable standards to close gender gaps and to deliver results in line with the Convention's principles?

25. She wondered what the substantive impact of gender-responsive budgeting had been and what percentage of the budget was allocated to gender-related activities in priority sectors, such as the agricultural, education and water sectors. Were there sectoral targets, and in which sectors had there been concrete results?

26. She would like to know when the review of the Gender Equality Act would be completed and the projected time frame for adopting amendments to it; what steps had been taken, or would be taken, to strengthen the system for collecting gender-specific data in a range of areas, including education, health, employment and violence against women; and how the State party used gender-disaggregated data to inform evidence-based planning and policymaking, target programme interventions and monitor progress towards gender equality goals.

27. **Ms. Morsy** said that it would be useful to know what processes and measures were in place to ensure the broader implementation of the 60/40 quota system for males and females that was currently applicable in public appointments and recruitment. She wondered whether the Gender Equality Act would be amended to establish gender quotas in procurement, the private sector and politics, and would like to learn how women with disabilities were included within gender quotas. Lastly, she would like to know whether the aims of the Legal Aid Act had been achieved, including the adoption of the temporary special measure of quotas for women's access to legal aid had been achieved.

28. **Ms. Sendeza** (Malawi) said that the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare had separate directorates devoted to gender and women's rights, children's rights and rights of persons with disabilities, among others. The Ministry took a leading role in gender mainstreaming, while all other ministries, departments and agencies had gender mainstreaming focal points.

29. The National Task Force Committee was reviewing the current Gender Equality Act of 2013 to ensure that the Act effectively promoted and protected the rights of women. It had written a position paper to guide the drafting of amendments, including the proposed extension of gender quotas to the private sector. The private sector was encouraged to adopt and develop human rights-based enterprise policies.

30. As the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare was allocated a small budget, its ability to implement measures relating to gender-based issues relied on funding from sources such as United Nations agencies and NGOs.

31. **Ms. Eghobamien-Msheli** said that she would appreciate it if the delegation would inform the Committee of the percentage of the Ministry's time and budget that was dedicated to gender issues; the estimated completion date for the review of the Gender Equality Act; and the budget of the Ministry and the national implementation plan for specific gender-mainstreaming activities in critical sectors such as agriculture, education and water resources. The Committee had not yet received information on the steps planned or already

taken by the State party to strengthen data collection and to improve its information management system. She also wished to know what measures the State party had in place to enhance the Ministry's governance capacity and to give it the authority to deliver on gender-related issues.

32. **Ms. Sendeza** (Malawi) said that she would respond to the questions on budget at a later stage. The Ministry was working with the Ministry of Agriculture to address women's issues, for example through the Affordable Inputs Programme, since women were heavily involved in the agricultural sector. Free primary school education was available to both boys and girls, and the Ministry was working with the Ministry of Education to ensure that girls who had dropped out of school, for example due to early pregnancy, were re-enrolled.

33. **A representative of Malawi** said that the review of the National Gender Policy and the Gender Equality Act should be completed by the end of 2023 and 2024, respectively.

34. **Ms. Morsy** said that she would like to know whether the State party had completed a costing exercise for the plans and policies funded and mobilized by United Nations agencies and, if so, how much funding was required to implement the gender equality policies of the Gender Equality Act.

35. **Ms. Sendeza** (Malawi) said that the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare carried out costing exercises for each project undertaken in collaboration with their cooperating partners.

36. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that the Committee would like to establish whether the free and full consent of women and girls was taken into consideration when harmful traditions were practised. It would be of interest to learn how the constitutional prohibition of child marriage had been implemented and whether any cases of child marriage had been brought to the courts for annulment on the grounds of a violation of the Constitution. She also wondered how marital property and inheritance rights were affected by the practice of customary marriage.

37. She wished to know whether the State party would consider criminalizing gender-based violence and expanding the definition of the term to include gender-based violence in all its forms. It would be of interest to find out whether female genital mutilation, marital rape, "virgin cleansing" and ancestral rape were criminalized and what punitive and preventive legal mechanisms were in place to combat gender-based violence, and also whether punitive provisions were applicable for chiefs and family members involved in such crimes.

38. The Law Commission had reportedly decided to acknowledge witchcraft and define it as a supernatural art within the spiritual realm. The Committee would like to know how its decision had affected the levelling of false accusations against women for witchcraft or sorcery. It would also be of interest to know how the State party intended to address the superstition that harvesting the bone tissue of people with albinism would bring wealth to the harvester, and how it would enforce the Anatomy (Amendment) Act of 2016, which had provided more stringent penalties for the removal of human tissue. How many people had been charged under that Act?

39. Referring to reports that police officers had raped 18 women during post-election violence, she would like to find out whether they had been brought to justice and how political leaders were being held accountable for the incident. She also wondered how the State party intended to prevent sexual harassment and violence against women in politics, including cyberviolence.

40. **Ms. Leinarte** said that it would be useful to know whether any measures had been planned to combat the corruption of officials and trafficking crimes within the framework of the National Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons. She wished to learn how the Government intended to efficiently investigate cases in which underage girls were exploited in private houses through forced labour or sex trafficking, and what it did to avoid retraumatizing victims who participated in criminal proceedings. She would welcome information on the measures implemented by the Government and the High Court to protect women working in prostitution against exploitation and violence.

41. **Ms. Sendeza** (Malawi) said that female genital mutilation was not a traditional practice in her country. Other harmful cultural practices, such as the *fisi* (hyena) tradition, were no longer practised, thanks to the understanding of chiefs and awareness-raising campaigns. A national action plan on persons with albinism was aimed at ending violence and discrimination against them. A memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare and the judiciary ensured that legal proceedings were expedited in cases concerning albinism. The Penal Code established penalties for any person found guilty of gender-based violence. The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act was under review, and any gaps identified in the Act would be addressed.

42. The issues of electoral violence and political violence against women were under review and consultations were being held with the Malawi Electoral Commission and the Law Commission to ensure that women could enjoy the same space in politics as men. Concerning acts of violence committed against women by police officers during post-election violence in 2019, the Malawi Human Rights Commission had concluded that such acts had taken place, and the women concerned were receiving appropriate compensation. The domestication of the Southern African Development Community model law on gender-based violence was under way.

43. Pursuant to the Electronic Transactions and Cyber Security Act of 2016, a computer emergency response team was being established and guidelines on reporting cyberincidents were being drafted. The section of the law on data protection had been deemed too limited by stakeholders, and the Department of E-Government had therefore drafted further measures on data protection that would be presented to the parliament for enactment in law.

44. Notwithstanding the adoption of the Trafficking in Persons Act in 2015, the number of trafficking victims was increasing. The Act protected women against exploitation in the workplace and in private homes. Any person, including police officers, who infringed the law on trafficking in persons was subject to arrest. Approximately 400 million kwacha had been allocated to repatriate Malawian women who had been victims of trafficking.

45. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she wished to know whether the police officers who had raped women during the post-election violence in 2019 had been brought to justice. She asked whether the proposals to address gaps in data protection included provisions on gender and whether the State party had considered the introduction of a law on gender equality to tackle the unequal power relationship between men and women that was replicated and exacerbated online.

46. **Ms. Hacker** said that she wished to know how child marriage was prevented and whether any services were in place to help the victims of forced marriage escape. Further information on the murder of older women would be appreciated, including data on femicide, disaggregated by age, with information on the situation before and after the launch of prevention campaigns.

47. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she wished to learn more about the protection of sex workers.

48. **Ms. Sendeza** (Malawi) said that, if police officers were reported for abusing their power by engaging in sex with sex workers, the law took its course. Between January and October 2023, 20 older women had been murdered. A bill on older persons was currently under review by the Cabinet and would address the killing of older women. It would be forwarded to the parliament for approval together with the bill addressing the situation of persons with disabilities.

49. **A representative of Malawi** said that, in the case of the violence committed against women during the post-election violence in 2019, the matter had been reported to the Independent Complaints Commission by the Women Lawyers Association. The Commission was looking into the reported misconduct by police and, depending on the findings, the case would be transmitted to the courts.

50. **A representative of Malawi** said that child marriage had become a particular problem during the COVID-19 pandemic, when children were not in school. Girls were often married early for economic reasons; once they had been removed from such marriages, ensuring them access to income-generating activities and education was a key challenge that the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare was working with partners to

address. A number of chiefs were working to prevent early marriage. Government programmes to tackle early marriage included a campaign for girls' education initiated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

Articles 7–9

51. **Ms. Manalo** said that she wished to know the status of efforts to enact the recommendation issued by the special Law Commission on the Review of Electoral Laws to add to the National Assembly 28 seats reserved for female candidates at the district level. It would be useful to learn about the steps taken to boost the number of women in senior level positions in the civil service and the number of women representing the State party at the international level. Reports indicated that reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities at polling stations had not been fully implemented, and that in some cases election officers had effectively denied women with disabilities the secrecy of the ballot. The Committee would appreciate information on the efforts made to tackle the lack of appropriate support for women with disabilities to allow them to effectively participate in elections and to enable women with disabilities to run for public office, including by addressing negative attitudes to persons with disabilities.

52. **Ms. Morsy** said that she would be interested to learn about the efforts made to raise awareness of the provisions in the Malawi Citizenship Amendment Act 2019. Non-Malawian women who married Malawian men had reportedly still faced difficulties in obtaining the country's nationality. She asked how application of the law on nationality by State institutions was ensured. The inability of asylum-seekers to register births was of concern. She wished to receive information on the results of the report on statelessness and risks of statelessness in Malawi that had been commissioned following the high-level segment on statelessness hosted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in November 2019, and she would like to know how the State party would reduce statelessness and raise awareness of citizenship rights, including the right to dual citizenship. The State party's periodic report mentioned a special Law Commission review of statelessness. The Committee would like to receive information on a timeline for the introduction of the recommendations that the special Law Commission had issued.

53. **Ms. Sendeza** (Malawi) said that the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare had a comprehensive programme on the political empowerment of women and women's representation in decision-making positions. The Government had championed the 50:50 Campaign and had worked to ensure meaningful participation by women in the development of policies and laws that affected them. The participation of women with disabilities in the 2019 local and parliamentary elections had been supported through funding for campaign materials and an exemption of women from the nomination fee. In terms of women in diplomacy, 50 per cent of the people recently appointed as ambassadors to foreign missions were women.

54. **A representative of Malawi** said that, following the enactment of amendments, the Malawi Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 was in force.

Articles 10–14

55. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that, while she welcomed the progress made in providing for girls' education since the State party's previous periodic report, she would be interested to receive data on their performance in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects) at all levels of education. She would appreciate information on the timeline to fully prohibit the use of corporal punishment in schools; the steps taken to increase the school enrolment and completion rates for girls in compulsory education and to eliminate secondary school fees; the action to track girls who dropped out of school early due to marriage or pregnancy, including the measures taken to tackle stigma and to provide access to early years childcare; the proposals to amend the data protection bill to protect children's data; and the remedy provided to children whose data had been tracked and shared by the Notesmaster platform, which had been used by the State to provide online education and training for teachers and parents, and to prevent a reoccurrence of such practices.

56. She wished to receive details of the school enrolment, retention and completion rates for children with special educational needs; measures taken to ensure that schools provided reasonable accommodations for girls with disabilities in terms of facilities and access to learning, including the percentage of schools that had made changes to accommodate disabilities using structural grants; the action taken to protect girls against multiple discrimination and gender-based violence in schools; the allocation of resources to address poverty and to provide trained instructors for specialist programmes; and statistics from special education programmes, disaggregated by type of disability and age. Details would be appreciated of how children in refugee camps received an education; the breakdown of the allocation of funds for education showing how girls and boys respectively benefited from such funds; the efforts to tackle low morale among teachers whose pay had been reduced; measures to address overcrowding in schools; and plans to tackle the lack of infrastructure at boarding schools.

57. **A representative of Malawi** said that one of the country's universities was dedicated mainly to STEM subjects, and that many others also delivered STEM courses. Those subjects were addressed by a dedicated directorate within the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, as well as the National Commission for Science and Technology. Children were encouraged to take an interest in STEM subjects through clubs in primary schools, and the subjects were included in secondary school curricula. Several costs associated with secondary education, such as fees for textbooks, had been assumed by the State, while primary education was free, and financial support was provided to vulnerable students at the tertiary level. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology received around 20 per cent of the national budget. Efforts to increase access to education included the training of more teachers, improvements to infrastructure and the provision of teacher training materials. Schools had been constructed within refugee camps.

58. Teachers' morale was boosted by measures to ensure that they received their wages in a timely manner and to enable them to undertake continuous training. A programme to allow primary schoolteachers to obtain diplomas or university degrees was under development, for example, and the number of training colleges for primary schoolteachers had been increased to 11, with each college accepting around 600 students per year. Secondary schoolteachers were trained at universities or dedicated colleges, one of which specialized in STEM subjects and another in arts. Housing had been built for teachers posted in remote areas.

59. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that it would be helpful to know whether the State party had adopted temporary special measures to encourage girls to opt for STEM subjects. Education was pivotal to girls' rights, and every effort must therefore be made to remove the caps on teachers' salaries.

60. **Ms. Hacker** said that she wished to know whether school curricula addressed child marriage, equality within families and equality and gender more generally.

61. **Ms. Mikko** said that she would welcome information on steps to promote education in STEM subjects among girls in rural areas, where facilities might be lacking when compared with facilities in urban areas.

62. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she would like to know whether the State party continued to provide conditional and unconditional cash transfers to encourage girls' attendance at school, thereby reducing adolescent pregnancy, as it had done successfully during the COVID-19 pandemic.

63. **A representative of Malawi** said that in order to address the imbalance in the number of girls opting to study science in rural and urban areas, the Government had rolled out a computer programme that allowed students in rural schools to experience science experiments in a virtual laboratory. Pupils in rural schools that lacked science facilities also had access to mobile laboratories and could visit schools that did have such facilities. Rural schools always employed science teachers, even if they were limited to theoretical teaching.

64. The developer of the Notesmaster platform was a member of the Digital Public Goods Alliance and therefore adhered to the privacy and online child safety standards established by the United Nations Children's Fund. The Government was developing its own version of

the platform, which would be reviewed comprehensively to ensure user safety. All online platforms developed by third parties were handed over to the Government and would eventually be hosted at a data centre run by the Department of E-Government. An e-government emergency response team was being set up, and there were plans to draft guidelines on reporting cyberincidents. A data protection bill had been drafted in response to stakeholders' criticisms that the Electronic Transactions and Cyber Security Act contained only limited provisions on data security.

65. It was not possible to remove the cap on teachers' salaries. The cap applied to all public sector workers and was subject to regulations set out by the International Monetary Fund. There were plans to recruit a significant number of teachers in late 2023. The subject of equality within families was addressed in school in the social development, life skills and language curricula. Bursaries, mainly at the secondary level, were provided to rural and vulnerable girls and girls from poor backgrounds.

66. **Ms. Sendeza** (Malawi) said that the Constituency Development Fund had been increased significantly to cover bursaries for vulnerable secondary students. Under a cash transfer programme, the families of children with special needs who wished to attend secondary school received financial assistance, provided that it was used for that purpose. A department within the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare dealt with issues concerning family relationships, and the families of children with intellectual disabilities received psychosocial support. A manual on parenting and family relationships had been drafted, and the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act contained provisions on the subject.

67. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she wished to know how the State party would guarantee women and girls' access to sexual and reproductive health services and information, particularly for women with disabilities, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons and rural women, as well as whether the subject was covered in school curricula. The Committee wished to know how the State party addressed harmful cultural, religious and social barriers to sexual and reproductive health, including the stigma associated with HIV prevention and treatment, family planning and contraception. It would be useful to know what percentage of complaints of discrimination lodged by women living with HIV or AIDS resulted in prosecutions and what proportion ended in a conviction. Information would also be welcome on the support available to encourage women to report discrimination that they faced because of their HIV/AIDS status.

68. She would like to know what steps were taken to improve post- and neonatal health outcomes and reduce maternal and infant mortality. Clarification was required as to the circumstances in which abortion was legal and the steps taken to educate health-care workers on the relevant legislation. Information would also be useful on any plans or timelines to implement the recommendations of the special Law Commission contained in the review of the Law on Abortion. She wished to know whether there were plans to render the policy on sexual and reproductive health rights inclusive of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons and women with disabilities, and whether the State party would incorporate a human rights-based approach to disability in the Public Health Act and the Mental Treatment Act.

69. **A representative of Malawi** said that the biggest barrier to contraception faced by young persons was judgmental attitudes among health-care providers. Training was therefore provided to health-care staff, and youth-friendly health facilities had been established, resulting in an increase in the uptake of health-care services among that age group. Abortion was permitted when a woman's life was in danger, and the confusion surrounding that provision – particularly when the danger was posed by mental, rather than physical, health problems – was being addressed through awareness-raising programmes for health-care professionals. The sexual and reproductive health policy had expired in 2022, and work was under way to review and draft its replacement.

70. **A representative of Malawi** said that the Public Health Act was under review.

71. **A representative of Malawi** said that the Act had been approved by the Cabinet and was awaiting submission to the parliament.

72. **Ms. Malera** (Malawi Human Rights Commission, Malawi) said that, in accordance with the Gender Equality Act, the Malawi Human Rights Commission worked closely with the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare to protect and promote women's rights. The implementation plan for the Gender Equality Act was overseen by the Commission, which also participated in technical working groups under the aegis of the Ministry, and the two bodies engaged in joint resource mobilization in shared areas of their mandates.

73. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that it would be helpful to know when amendments to abortion legislation would come before the parliament and whether those amendments would introduce a new approach to abortion or simply implement the Law Commission's recommendations.

74. **Ms. Morsy** said that she wished to know whether the State party had implemented conditional cash transfers linked to attendance at women's health screening services, particularly for early breast cancer detection.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.