



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
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Summary record of the 901st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 31 July 2009, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gabr

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*Combined initial, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth periodic report
of Liberia*

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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)*

Combined initial, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth periodic report of Liberia (CEDAW/C/LBR/6; CEDAW/C/LBR/Q/6 and Add.1)

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

2. **Ms. Gayflor** (Liberia) said that the Government of Liberia recognized the persistent challenges faced by women in the country. It had a strong commitment to implementation of the Convention, and was proud of the great strides being made towards equality for women and girls. Preparation of the report, which served as an honest baseline for evaluating future progress in achieving gender equality, had been challenging, particularly for a country and people just emerging from years of civil crisis. Almost all of the data used in the report had become available only in the past year, and in some areas, the necessary information was simply not available.

3. Recognizing the persistent discrimination facing women in its society, Liberia had prioritized gender mainstreaming in its development process and was working diligently to gain ground for women in the areas of the economy, the rule of law, health, education and security. Women were vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, and the maternal mortality rate was staggeringly high. Girls were underrepresented in secondary school and women were overrepresented in the informal and agricultural sectors of the economy. The Government had therefore prioritized policies and programmes to bring women's rights to the forefront. Most notably, the Government had convened a National Steering Committee on the Attainment of Millennium Development Goal 3 and was undertaking a major programme, funded by the Government of Denmark, to assist the efforts of that Steering Committee. The programme had already started with the distribution of farming implements, seeds, and processing machinery to rural women.

4. In addition, the Government, through the Ministry of Gender and Development, and with support from the Spanish Fund for African Women and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), was currently implementing a project geared towards

improving the economic well-being of women. The two-year project would provide microcredit to 3,000 vulnerable women and survivors of gender-based violence, as well as equipping five existing women's centres. With support from the Nike Foundation, the World Bank, and the Danish Government, the Government was in the process of implementing the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls project, providing new economic skills, preparing girls for entry into the formal sector through wage employment or for enhanced entrepreneurial activity. In July 2009, the Government had begun implementing the Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment Programme to increase women's access to credit, move women into the formal sector, and improve women and girls' educational access with a focus on secondary schools and adult literacy programmes.

5. In partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Government was currently finalizing an assessment for the joint implementation of the Individual Assistance to Conflict-Affected Women and Girls project. The overall goal was to contribute to peace, security and stability in Liberia through economic revitalization in conflict-affected communities with unabsorbed women and girls who had been associated with the armed conflict.

6. Closing the school enrolment gap, while at the same time reducing the drop-out rate of girls, was a major priority. The Ministry of Education had a number of ongoing initiatives aimed at enhancing enrolment of girls, and improving the retention rate. As a result, the ratio of primary enrolment in State schools had improved from 60 per cent boys and 40 per cent girls during the 2004-2005 school year, to 55 per cent boys and 45 per cent girls in 2007-2008. The data for 2008-2009 were expected to show further improvement. In addition, the Government had formulated several other plans including the construction of "girl-friendly" schools in targeted areas, community-managed childcare centres, awareness and outreach campaigns, and mentoring programmes for girls, as well as teacher training that prioritized women's participation.

7. The Government was committed to full implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and had developed a National Action Plan to achieve it. A Secretariat was being set up at the Ministry of Gender and Development to coordinate the implementation of the Action Plan. In

addition, a task force was to be set up to ensure the dissemination of information about the Action Plan.

8. In an effort to reduce the high rate of gender-based violence and to foster women's greater participation in community security, the Government had established a community policing programme throughout the country, as a partnership between the Liberian National Police and the community, which recognized the interdependence and shared responsibility of the police and the community in ensuring a safe environment for all citizens, both males and females.

9. Believing that access to land was one of the major ingredients for women's economic empowerment, the Government intended that a Land Reform Commission would work to remove the barriers to women's ownership of land. The Act creating the Land Reform Commission was awaiting the President's signature.

10. In June 2009, the President had established the Law Reform Commission, mandated to supervise all of the country's law reform processes, including reform of discriminatory laws that had not yet been repealed. The Government, with support from the Office of the Gender Advisor at the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was conducting an analysis of national laws to determine those that were discriminatory against women. The outcome of the analysis would then serve as the basis for advocacy aimed at changing such laws.

11. Improving access to justice was one of the key priorities of the Government. The newly established Sexual and Gender-based Violence Crimes Unit would provide prosecutorial and support services to survivors of sexual offences. The statute for the establishment of the Sexual Offences Court also provided for divisions of the Circuit Court to hear sex offence cases in all the political subdivisions. There was ongoing public education and advocacy to encourage women to engage with the formal justice system.

12. A second draft of the National Gender Policy had been produced. Additional consultations were currently taking place across the country which would lead to national validation of a final draft during the current year. The Ministry of Gender and Development had made sustained progress on the formation of the National Gender Forum. A total of 19 out of 21 Government ministries had designated gender focal

points. Additionally, thematic task forces based on the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action were being resuscitated. In an effort to boost women's participation in the political process, the Fairness Bill had been submitted to the legislature for enactment. The Bill provided for a minimum of 30 per cent representation of women as elected officers and heads of the principal and subsidiary organs and structures of each registered political party in Liberia.

13. In an effort to create public awareness and sensitize the public on the content of the Convention, the Ministry of Gender and Development had embarked on a massive public awareness campaign. Mini-dramas had been produced, based on a simplified version of the Convention content, and were currently being aired on local radio stations and being performed at street corners and in various communities.

14. Perhaps most important was the fact that all the recommendations in Liberia's report to the Committee were incorporated in the Government's three-year development strategy. They were all being tracked for accountability purposes and the Government was committed to making progress towards those goals in the next two years.

Articles 1 and 2

15. **Mr. Flinterman** said that he was pleased to learn that the Law Reform Commission had been established since the report was written. He wished to know the priorities of the Commission and whether a general law on equality, including gender equality, figured among them. Noting that the report referred to the reconstitution of the Human Rights Commission, he asked whether that Commission had now been established and, if so, whether its mandate included, as a matter of priority, addressing the issues of gender equality.

16. Noting some contradictory statements in the report regarding the status of the Convention in domestic law in Liberia, he asked what were the obstacles to speedy publication of the Convention, which seemed to be such a small step. Understanding that domestication and incorporation constituted a much longer process, he asked whether that, too, was a priority of the Law Reform Commission.

17. **Ms. Ameline** expressed appreciation for the frankness of the report, with its honest detailing of the many problems facing Liberian women. The

implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was very important to the Committee, because it was essential that the rule of law be established as rapidly as possible, particularly with a view to providing protection for women. The determination of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to make equality a reality was well known, but the duality of the legal system was a crucial issue, because it created a real discrimination between persons before the law and a double discrimination with regard to women, based on their geographical origin and their ethnicity. Since the Constitution did not specifically address discrimination, and there was not yet a specific law on equality, the dualistic system meant that the legal instruments that could be called on to enforce equality were very weak, and entailed a risk of preserving possibilities for violence against women and impunity for perpetrators. While it appeared that there was a willingness to legislate to improve that situation, and also to enhance the training of the judiciary and the police, it was essential to anchor the development of the country in the rule of law.

18. She asked what would be the order of priority in tackling the reforms of concern to women, and how the Government intended to eradicate the violence, a legacy of the war, that still marked Liberian society. She was also interested in any information about planned reparations for human rights violations during the war, notably of women, who had been the primary victims of violence. The death penalty had been re-established in Liberia, an action that was not in accordance with the Committee's vision of the rule of law, and she hoped to be reassured that its reintroduction was temporary.

19. **Ms. Šimonović**, noting that Liberia had 16 ethnic languages, asked about the plans for publication of the Convention. She also asked how domestication of the Convention was going to be coordinated with the twin processes of law reform and constitutional reform, and whether the Government might consider amendments to the Constitution that would allow international treaties to be immediately incorporated into domestic law, thus changing from a dualistic system of law to a monistic one. Noting that the United Nations Mission in Liberia was going to assist the Government in determining which laws were discriminatory, she hoped that the present constructive dialogue with the Committee would also assist in that process by providing a perspective on the compatibility of various

items of legislation and the Convention. Implementation of the concluding observations might also assist the Government in addressing discriminatory legislation.

20. Article 2 of the Convention made clear the obligation of States parties to enshrine the principle of equality between men and women either in the constitution or in a specific law. She sought information on how the Government intended to introduce the definition of elimination of discrimination against women in line with article 1 of the Convention. The current provisions in the Constitution was simply a prohibition of discrimination based on sex.

21. **Ms. Morgan** said that the Human Rights Commission had indeed been established and would work in concert with the Law Reform Commission to ensure that Liberia respected all international instruments on human rights, particularly those pertaining to the rights of women. Steps were being taken so that the Convention could be domesticated as quickly as possible after its publication.

22. The rule of law was one of the pillars of the Government's central policy document, the Poverty Reduction Strategy. One of the many plans under way related to the Liberian National Police Force, which now had a Women's Protection Unit in each of the country's 15 counties.

23. Regarding the death penalty, she noted that there had not been a formal execution in Liberia since 1980. However, legal provisions were sometimes promulgated in response to specific situations of urgency; the death penalty had been introduced with the legislation on armed robbery, which was a phenomenon currently plaguing the country. The President was already working with the Law Reform Commission on the matter.

24. **Ms. Gayflor**, referring to publication of the Convention, noted that the country used a simplified Liberian English that most people could understand. Additionally, there were a small number of languages that were common to most of its regions. The Convention would be re-expressed in that very simple English and the Government would work with rural radio stations to determine how either that version or one or other of the commonly understood languages could be used to make ordinary people aware of the Convention and the benefits it offered.

25. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was regarded as a landmark, and the Government intended to use it as a tool to challenge policymakers and achieve accountability for what needed to be done in the interests of women. Women were excited at the possibilities: they were no longer sitting at the back of the room and watching the men take the decisions. Like the President, they were not interested in token representation: they wanted to be fully involved.

26. **Ms. Morgan** (Liberia) said that there was continued political will to eradicate rape. Although medical care for rape victims was still a challenge, the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia was working with Government ministries and private clinics to ensure that both rural and urban women received access to such care in the event of rape. In an initiative of the new Sexual and Gender-based Violence Crimes Unit, victims were driven to medical facilities so that evidence could be properly collected and preserved. Although it was hard to prosecute crimes of rape that were not reported, women were often reluctant to come forward owing to the fear of stigmatization; the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Gender and Development were working to raise awareness in that regard.

Article 3

27. **Ms. Neubauer** asked whether the programmes initiated to build the capacity of the Ministry of Gender and Development, as described in the State party's response to question 8 of the Committee's list of issues and questions, had adequately addressed the understaffing and shortage of resources mentioned in the report. Additional information on the Ministry's actual needs in terms of human resources, financing and logistics would also be useful. While the Government was to be commended for initiating the drafting of a National Gender Policy, she wondered why that process was taking so long. It should already have been finalized, whereas in fact additional consultations were still taking place. The reporting State should also clarify whether the Convention was being used as a legal framework for drafting; whether the national parliament received systematic reports on the drafting process, in view of the requirement for it to endorse the draft Policy; and whether any time frame or indicators had been established to measure progress in implementing the Policy.

28. **Ms. Gayflor** (Liberia) said that significant progress had been made since the publication of the report. The Ministry of Gender and Development had benefited from the secondment of technical staff from the Senior Executive Service Programme, as well as obtaining support from the Scott Family Fellows programme. About \$1 million in capacity-building would be received from the Danish International Development Agency over the next three years, allowing for the provision of a gender adviser, regional coordinators to strengthen the capacity of the county coordinators, and economic empowerment officers. A national youth volunteer programme, supported by the United Nations Development Programme and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, had also been launched at the county level. The Ministry of Gender and Development had successfully lobbied other ministries to support gender focal points through their own budgets.

29. With regard to the National Gender Policy, it was important that it could be used to monitor implementation of all the relevant plans and instruments developed previously. It had taken a long time to finalize the policy because of a lack of internal expertise; the recruitment of consultants, who sometimes had to leave the project before their work was finished, had been time-consuming. The Ministry very much looked forward to concluding the process.

30. In terms of financial resources, there were competing priorities in Liberia. Although gender budgeting had not been adopted as a policy measure, the Ministry of Gender and Development worked with other ministries to ensure that issues affecting women were adequately addressed. Funding to tackle the issue of maternal mortality, for example, would go to the Ministry of Health rather than the Ministry of Gender and Development, but that Ministry considered that it was doing its work if the programmes of other agencies gave proper attention to women's needs.

Article 4

31. **Mr. Flinterman** noted that while temporary special measures had been introduced in the area of political participation, they had not been adhered to as they had no legal basis. He welcomed the fact that a bill had been submitted to parliament to remedy that situation; however it was important to recall that, according to the Committee's general recommendation No. 25, States parties were obliged to adopt temporary

special measures, where relevant, in all substantive fields governed by the Convention, and the mandate to adopt such measures should be based on explicit provisions in the Constitution or national law. He would therefore like to know whether the issue of temporary special measures was on the agenda of the Constitutional Reform Taskforce or the Law Reform Commission and whether the Government envisaged adopting such measures in other fields.

32. **Ms. Gayflor** (Liberia) said that the President of Liberia was committed to adopting temporary special measures and efforts were being made to achieve that goal. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was working in consultation with the Ministry of Gender and Development and the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia to establish how best to secure the support of the largely male parliament for the current bill. The Government would take up the challenge of ensuring that temporary special measures in other areas were included on the agenda of the Law Reform Commission; provided that all the groundwork had been done it should be possible to hold accountable those responsible for legal reform and remind them that their decisions must be based on the interests of their constituents, who included women. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was also helping the Government to review the country's laws and develop the tools needed to engage with parliament in the area of women's rights. Any information from the Committee on how the Government could strengthen its advocacy would be welcome.

Article 5

33. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked the State party to clarify why it had no laws criminalizing harmful traditional practices such as witch-hunting, trial by ordeal and, in particular, female genital mutilation. She also wondered whether international mechanisms, such as UNIFEM, the World Health Organization or the African Union, could provide assistance for the implementation of programmes to combat such practices.

34. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said that she commended the important steps taken to empower women by facilitating their access to education, health care and economic resources. However, the Government appeared to give less weight to measures aimed at changing the cultural practices and

stereotypes that treated women as inferior to men. It was necessary to clarify whether the Government's three-year development strategy incorporated such measures and how the Government would work with civil servants, teachers and health-care professionals to ensure the implementation of empowerment measures adopted in an environment free from prejudice and stereotypes.

35. It was very troubling to note that the Minister of Internal Affairs had condoned female genital mutilation by arguing that it was a cultural practice that should be respected. She wished to know whether that position was widespread within the Government and whether the Ministry of Gender and Development had seized on the Minister's comments to raise awareness and promote social debate. She would also like to know what obstacles had prevented it from modifying school textbooks to eliminate stereotyping, and how teachers, who were mainly male, could be trained to implement the policies aimed at expanding girls' educational opportunities. Lastly, she wondered what measures had been taken to educate community and religious leaders so that they could contribute to the elimination of stereotypes at the family and local community level.

36. **Ms. Rasekh** said that, as a State party that had ratified the Convention almost 30 years earlier, Liberia had an obligation to engage in a process to change attitudes on issues such as female genital mutilation and early marriage. Its efforts to eliminate female genital mutilation appeared very weak. Legislative and punitive measures, awareness-raising initiatives and education were all needed to eradicate that practice, which was a major health and human rights issue. In particular, it should indicate what measures were being taken to change the attitudes of Government officials. Concerning early marriage, she wondered what legislative or other measures existed to punish families who forced their daughters to marry at the age of 14 or younger.

37. **Ms. Begum** said that Liberia should clarify its stance on female genital mutilation and inform the Committee whether it planned to eradicate and condemn that harmful practice. She also wondered how many practitioners of female genital mutilation had sought alternative livelihoods and whether the Government encouraged them to do so. Despite the high levels of physical and sexual violence against women, as described in paragraphs 7.12 and 7.13 of the report, there was no law against domestic violence. The

State party should indicate whether it planned to enact legislation addressing all forms of violence, including domestic violence.

38. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** expressed concern that some provisions of the Revised Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia (Customary Law) clearly violated the Convention, as well as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. She wished to know whether such laws would be addressed as a priority by the Law Reform Commission. It was important to remember that culture and traditions were dynamic, not static, and could therefore be changed. The issue of female genital mutilation must be addressed with the same boldness that had been shown in relation to other issues. She hoped that the next report would include information on legislation adopted to prohibit that practice.

39. **Ms. Gayflor** (Liberia) said that trial by ordeal was already prohibited by law. The Minister of Justice had also strongly condemned the practice and, while it had not yet been totally eliminated, it was practised less frequently and was certainly not condoned. With regard to stereotypes, the situation was changing rapidly. Women were increasingly assuming positions of leadership — Liberia had a female President — and women and girls were no longer accepting stereotypes. Mentoring programmes existed to encourage girl students to take subjects such as mathematics and steps were under way to eliminate stereotypes in textbooks. Women were also increasingly involved in previously male-dominated fields, such as weaving. A number of awareness programmes had been launched and women were participating in decision-making processes at the community level. There was certainly the political will to eliminate stereotypes, and although further progress was needed, she was confident that the issue would gradually be resolved. In fact, since women were no longer accepting the status quo it was important to ensure that they did not instead become perpetrators of violence; both women's and men's rights must be respected.

40. More needed to be done to change attitudes regarding female genital mutilation; the comments of the Minister of Internal Affairs, for which there was no excuse, had been included in the report to highlight the challenges faced. The situation was gradually changing, however, as the practice was less prevalent than before. Although it was a very sensitive issue,

Liberia would take the Committee's advice on the need for a law prohibiting female genital mutilation. Awareness-raising initiatives were also vital, as some women felt they would be stigmatized if they did not accept the practice, and practitioners must be supported to find alternative livelihoods; a few former practitioners were now serving as mentors. The Government intended to use the Convention as an advocacy tool. Although it had been ratified almost 30 years earlier, no institution had been responsible for its implementation in Liberia until 1993. The Government was now fully committed to meeting its obligations under the Convention and would be developing a plan of action to achieve progress in all the areas discussed before the Committee.

41. **Mr. Korto** (Liberia) said that while it was not possible to change cultural practices overnight, Liberia was making strides. In the past, nursing had traditionally been considered a women's profession, while medicine and engineering were seen as male professions. Such views had even influenced how the Ministry of Education awarded scholarships. However, men and women now had equal opportunities for scholarships. Moreover, there were university and graduate scholarship programmes exclusively for women.

42. Female genital mutilation was a politically sensitive issue. When the Minister of Internal Affairs had commented in 2007 that it was a cultural practice which must be respected, he may not have meant it. Yet the comment was understandable, for it would take some time before the issue could be approached boldly.

43. Female genital mutilation was generally performed at institutions known as "bush schools", where young girls went to receive traditional knowledge. However, the function of the bush schools in Liberian society was lessening with the spread of Western-style education. The Cabinet was considering a request from the Ministry of Education to limit the operation of bush schools to times when regular schools were not in session. Previously, young girls had been removed from school while it was in session in order to be sent to bush schools, where they underwent female genital mutilation. Gradually, as more people became educated, the practice of female genital mutilation would die a natural death. Legislation alone could not change a political belief.

44. **Ms. Morgan** (Liberia) said that the Inheritance Law of 2003 had put an end to the identification of women as chattel, placed rural women on an equal footing with urban women and given rural women the opportunity to own property, whether bought during or before marriage. Rape laws had been expanded to cover all forms of rape, including gang rape. While there was no domestic violence law, the rape laws did not prohibit the prosecution of marital rape. In the past year, 15 qualified law graduates had been placed as county attorneys in the 15 counties of Liberia to carry out interviews, evidence collection and prosecution. In each of the 15 counties, there was an office with staff trained to respond to issues of gender-based and sexual violence.

Article 6

45. **Ms. Chutikul** asked whether the definition of trafficking contained in the Anti-Human Trafficking Act of 2005 covered forced labour, organ harvesting and prostitution, as in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. She wished to know the mandate of the ministerial anti-trafficking task force, its achievements since its establishment in 2006 and whether a trafficking action plan had been developed.

46. The report stated that no trafficking cases had been prosecuted. It would be helpful to know whether the Ministries of Justice and Labour envisaged a plan to improve the situation. What was the implication of Liberia's signature of the Economic Community of West African States Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons in regard to actions taken within Liberia and between Liberia and other States? Information on how the Government assisted and worked with non-governmental organizations which helped victims and engaged in preventive interventions would also be appreciated.

47. Further information was requested on the law against prostitution, in particular regarding prosecution of minors, forced prostitution and punishment of pimps and proprietors of houses of prostitution. It would be helpful to know what services were provided to those wishing to leave prostitution. Information about the effectiveness of programmes to help vulnerable girls would be appreciated, specifically regarding how many girls had been turned away from engaging in

prostitution. Information on what had been done in rural areas in that regard was also requested.

48. **Ms. Rasekh** requested further information on shelters for victims of trafficking. While Liberian law had stringent prosecution and punishment measures for trafficking offenders, none of those who had been caught and arrested had been punished, apparently owing to a lack of education on the part of judges and a lack of knowledge and human and other resources in the court system. More information on measures taken to address those lacunae was requested, and on efforts and activities to halt trafficking at the regional level. Efforts to educate border police were of particular interest.

49. According to the report, many victims of gender-based violence did not seek assistance due to shame; some lacked access to help, because they were poor. Victims received no support and perpetrators were not punished because domestic violence and violence against women were not criminalized. Elaboration on measures to change that situation was requested.

50. **Ms. Morgan** said that recently, trafficking in children had become a problem. The definition of trafficking covered prostitution and trafficking in organs. The Ministries of Justice and Labour co-chaired a national anti-trafficking task force. A national action plan had been developed.

51. Weak law enforcement was indeed an issue. Most of the laws were being reviewed for compatibility with international instruments. Committees to reform the Constitution and the laws had been established, as had a National Human Rights Commission. A national action plan for human rights was under way.

52. There was dialogue on trafficking with Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire and specifically on drug trafficking with Nigeria and Ghana. When pimps were found, they were prosecuted, but crimes had to be reported in order to be prosecuted. Court staff all over the country spoke with women and children to encourage them to report violence. The Ministry of Justice had established a mobile prosecution unit, which travelled from county to county gathering evidence and prosecuting perpetrators.

53. The President had recently established a central adoption authority, based on an international instrument, which might be sent to lawmakers for ratification as a measure to combat trafficking in

children. In the last six months, 36 children had been trafficked. They had been recovered and reunited with their parents, and the perpetrator was in jail.

54. **Ms. Gayflor** said that there were safe houses in five counties, but most were in Monrovia. A set of safe house guidelines had been developed. Most trafficking in Liberia was internal rather than transnational, with traffickers luring people from rural areas under false pretences. Labour and adoption were the two areas where law enforcement efforts were concentrated. A pilot project in nine communities, supported by Nike, provided assistance to girls. Through the programme, girls acquired skills as drivers, painters and plumbers. Employment and empowerment programmes to prevent girls from going into prostitution were being discussed.

55. **Mr. Flinterman** asked about the composition and mandate of the National Human Rights Commission and wished to know whether the needs of women and gender equality were a significant part of that mandate. While the report stated that the Convention had the same status as the Constitution, the Convention must nonetheless be incorporated into domestic law. He enquired about obstacles to the publication of the Convention, which would ensure that it was in fact on the same level as the Constitution.

56. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** said that clarity was lacking regarding the procedure for publishing international conventions. She understood that publication was an act of Parliament and that, as a result of publication, the treaty would become applicable. She asked whether there was a Law Reform Committee or a Law Reform Commission.

57. **Ms. Gayflor** said that it was a commission.

58. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** requested further information on the types of support provided to non-governmental organizations and collaboration with them. Did the Government provide financial resources to non-governmental organizations? It would be helpful to know whether the Revised Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia were on the priority list for the Law Reform Commission.

59. **Ms. Šimonović** said that it was not acceptable and not in line with the Convention for the Minister of Internal Affairs to condone female genital mutilation, nor for the Committee to be told to wait another four years to see concrete action on the issue. Female genital mutilation was a crime. There must be a clear

message to that effect. It was very clear that it was a form of bodily harm and gender-based violence. It was difficult to understand why it was classified merely as a harmful traditional practice. As a very first step, it should be criminalized and outlawed, in line with articles 1 and 2 (f) of the Convention, *inter alia*.

60. **Ms. Chutikul** asked if Government officials who engaged in trafficking received harsher punishment than others and whether that was stated in the law. It was hoped that the Law Reform Commission would consider the trafficking law in its review. She asked if victims of trafficking and prostitution and victims of domestic violence were housed in the same shelters, as psychosocial counselling for the two types of victims was in fact quite different. Further information about training for social workers who dealt with those victims would be appreciated.

61. **Ms. Neubauer** noted that a detailed action plan had been mentioned in the responses to the list of issues and questions (CEDAW/C/LBR/Q/6) as part of the draft national gender policy. She asked whether time frames and indicators for measuring outcomes and progress achieved in the implementation of a future national gender policy had been developed. Did the national gender policy strategy envisage systematic reporting to the national legislature after endorsement by the Cabinet?

62. It would be useful to know whether the obligations under the Convention had been used as a legal framework in drafting the national programmatic policy document. If not, the head of delegation and the Minister were urged to ensure that the recommendations of the Committee to the Government of Liberia be taken into consideration as the national gender policy was finalized.

63. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that information made available to the Committee indicated that all cases of sexual- and gender-based violence were referred to a single court, with the result that a backlog had built up. She asked for further information. There were also indications that, in view of that situation, women had recourse to customary law courts. Was it the case, however, that in those courts married women could not appear without their husbands, and did such courts have any women judges?

64. **Ms. Ameline** asked whether any scholarships were available for young women wishing to embark on a legal career. With regard to the approximately 25,000

women who had been involved in the armed conflict, she asked what the impact had been of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration measures.

65. **Ms. Begum** asked whether national data on violence against women were available and what mechanism existed for the collection of data, particularly with regard to rape, a serious problem in the country. What measures were available to assist victims of violence, particularly rape, and what counselling services were available?

66. **Ms. Rasekh** said that the impunity of perpetrators of gender-based violence left victims helpless in terms of accessing justice and receiving support, knowing that perpetrators would not be punished. What measures were intended to remedy that situation? Recalling that the former President faced charges before the International Criminal Court, she asked what was happening in the case of other perpetrators responsible for mass crimes against women. There appeared to have been an epidemic of rape during the conflict.

67. **Ms. Pimentel**, noting that most court buildings and prisons were dilapidated, asked what steps the Government intended to take to modernize them, taking into account a gender perspective and the human rights of women.

68. **Ms. Morgan** (Liberia) said that the function of the Human Rights Commission was to ensure that the provisions of the human rights instruments ratified by Liberia were reflected in the country's human rights plan. Commission members were currently under consideration for appointment. A working group had been established to consider the harmonization of domestic legislation with the international instruments to which Liberia had acceded, and to identify harmful practices that were not consistent with those commitments. The adoption of the Inheritance Law, in the context of review of the Hinterland Regulations, was an important aspect of that process. Regarding the naming of officials who committed crimes, officials guilty of bribery were named.

69. Perpetrators of domestic violence were prosecuted, and the establishment of the Sexual and Gender-based Violence Crimes Unit testified to the Government's commitment, as did the planned creation of the Roving Prosecution Unit. Regarding the backlog of cases, the Government was trying to establish more

courts. Courts met in 42-day long sessions, and a single case could easily occupy more than one session, perhaps tying up a court for half a year. In the context of efforts to prosecute gender-based crime, additional training was being provided for police in the collection of evidence and protection of the integrity of victims, and additional qualified lawyers had been appointed, which had resulted in improved prosecution rates. It was true that courts in the capital had a backlog, but cases were also prosecuted in the county courts. There were a number of women judges and attorneys, and ongoing training was provided for prosecutors, police, medical practitioners, local chiefs and, indeed, all stakeholders.

70. **Ms. Gayflor** (Liberia) said that the issues raised by Committee members would form part of the Government action plan and, in that context, the issue of female genital mutilation would certainly not be ignored. As for rape, it was simply not true that such offences had been a problem before the conflict. Rapists, when identified, had been treated badly. The war had changed that state of affairs. There was an urgent need for more-qualified counsellors to assist the victims of rape; many counsellors at present were not well qualified. She hoped that training programmes for counsellors could be established, and also that shelters, with the assistance of non-governmental organizations, could be set up.

71. Gender policy was still at a formative stage, but once finalized would be implemented through a plan of action. The Government was seeking to engage constructively with partners and non-governmental organizations, which mostly implemented programmes.

72. **Ms. Morgan** (Liberia) said that the question of perpetrators being charged by the International Criminal Court was being considered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and would be addressed in a report soon to be considered by the Government. As for the physical state of court and prison facilities, the Government had conducted a study in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme, and hoped to receive some \$700,000 from the Peacebuilding Fund for the improvement of prison facilities. Some court facilities had also recently been upgraded. As for the backlog of cases, magistrates from other areas had been seconded to the capital in an effort to clear the courts of cases, and it was hoped to implement similar programmes elsewhere in the country.

73. **Ms. Gayflor** (Liberia) said that data collection regarding domestic violence and rape was being improved, but that, at present, consolidated data were not available. The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme had focused on former female combatants, but there was a need for programmes to assist other women affected by the armed conflict, and efforts were being undertaken to that end. Initiatives were also being undertaken to assist victims of gender-based violence, funded in part by the European Union. Lastly, prostitution among minors was not a major issue, but could only be addressed through measures to address poverty by, for example, creating employment for parents.

74. **Mr. Korto** (Liberia) said, with reference to proceedings at the International Criminal Court, that the trial of former President Taylor had no bearing on the situation in Liberia, but concerned events in Sierra Leone. As for the possible involvement of other perpetrators, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement had resulted in the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whose report was currently being considered by the legislature. Subsequent action would depend on the outcome of that process. As noted, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme had concluded after five years, but consideration was being given to follow-up programmes to assist those not covered by the original programme.

Articles 7 and 8

75. **Ms. Neubauer** noted, with reference to representation on elected bodies, that the Fairness Bill provided for a 30 per cent target for women. She wished to know whether there was any enforcement mechanism, and whether any sanctions existed if political parties did not meet that quota when submitting lists of candidates to the National Elections Commission. Would any data-collection mechanism be established to collect information on participation by men and women in political and public decision-making bodies? While there were communication difficulties in Liberia, data collection was a prerequisite for informed action. Noting the low level of participation by women in public life, she asked what measures were being taken to resolve that problem. Lastly, while acknowledging the significant contribution by women in the Liberian Foreign Service, she regretted the absence of data in the report

on participation by women in the Foreign Service, particularly in senior positions.

76. **Ms. Gayflor** (Liberia) said that if the Fairness Bill was adopted, there were certain to be appropriate sanctions in the event of non-compliance, but the issue was still under consideration. As for data collection, it was intended, in coordination with the United Nations Development Programme, to produce appropriate information booklets, containing relevant facts to raise gender-awareness. Again, the project was still at a formative stage.

77. At present there were five ambassadors in the Foreign Service, and the next Permanent Representative to the United Nations would also be a woman. Women were being given every opportunity to participate in decision-making positions, strongly encouraged by the President of the country, who was, of course, a woman. Those measures were not in any way tokenism, but represented real opportunities. Such efforts extended down to the local community level, and it was fair to say that women were now a force everywhere in the country.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.