



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

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

Summary record of the 1866th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 17 February 2022, at 11 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Narain (Rapporteur)

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In the absence of Ms. Acosta Vargas, Ms. Narain (Rapporteur) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

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

Sixth periodic report of Lebanon (CEDAW/C/LBN/6; CEDAW/C/Q/6 and CEDAW/C/LBN/RQ/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Lebanon joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon), speaking via video link and introducing her country's sixth periodic report (CEDAW/C/LBN/6), said that the current dialogue was being held at a time when Lebanon was facing economic and social collapse with half of the population living below the poverty line. People who had been affected by the explosion in the port of Beirut in August 2020 were still struggling to cope with the aftermath and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic constituted yet another challenge.
3. It was to be hoped that the elections scheduled for May 2022 would lead to an increase in women's representation in the parliament from its current level of 4.7 per cent. The National Commission for Lebanese Women had failed in its attempt to have a quota for women members of parliament introduced by law, which meant that nothing had been done to increase women's participation in decision-making positions. The Commission had held meetings with all political parties in an effort to ascertain why the promise to empower women in the forthcoming elections had not been met. Three workshops had been organized with representatives of the media to encourage them to play a constructive role in boosting women's participation in political life by giving women candidates as much coverage as male candidates. After the elections, the Commission would continue to press for the introduction of a legal quota in electoral law, as it would help improve the predominantly male political culture in Lebanon. To that end, the Commission had also prepared a bill designed to ensure that women made up one third of company boards of directors. Trade unions had been urged to amend their rules of procedure to include a quota for women in order to secure their participation in decision-making in those bodies.
4. At the local level, a pilot project aimed at increasing the number of women on municipal councils had enabled 14 women councillors to take part in a workshop and, as a result, 13 of them had carried out social and psychological support projects in their own municipalities. Women had also taken part in development projects in 12 municipalities. A network of women municipal councillors was helping them to improve the administration of their local authorities through contacts with their counterparts in other municipalities. The Commission was endeavouring to broaden that network. Against a challenging background, the Commission had concentrated on making sure that a gender perspective was included in capacity-building measures for officials. It was trying to mobilize parliamentary support for a ban on child marriage and measures to curb domestic violence. It was also striving to increase community awareness of the need for gender equality through workshops and media campaigns.
5. As a result of the national action plan to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, great progress had been achieved in gender mainstreaming in the armed forces. For the first time, a gender section had been set up in the army. The number of women soldiers had increased significantly in the past year and just under half of the 2022 cohort of graduates from the military academy were women. In 2021, the Commission had held many meetings with the coordinating committees and working groups involved in the implementation of the plan. Recent meetings held by the working groups had covered procedural issues, combating trafficking in persons, online blackmail and domestic workers. The Commission planned to hold meetings on the development of services for children. It had drafted a report that clearly analysed the laws and policies that might directly or indirectly have an impact on the economic participation of women.
6. It was hoped that the forthcoming parliamentary elections would lead to the election of men and women who would champion women's issues and legislative reform, especially with a view to recognizing women's full citizenship and lifting Lebanon's reservation to

article 9 of the Convention. Awareness raising was required in order to change attitudes expressed in the 1926 Constitution, which did not regard a woman as an independent being able to pass on her nationality to her children. It was hoped that the newly elected parliament would cleave less to traditional interpretations of article 9 of the Constitution and would ban child marriage. It was also hoped that the new parliament would be prepared to adopt new legislation on personal status which would provide Lebanese women with more freedoms, would respect human rights and ensure equality between men and women.

7. A national policy was being drafted to criminalize sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace and ensure that the authorities would actually punish offenders. The Commission had also drafted recommended standards for women refugees' centres. Draft legislation that would be submitted for parliamentary approval would extend maternity leave to 15 weeks and introduce paternity leave. The Commission had further sought guarantees of equal wages and was coordinating the implementation of a comprehensive programme to foster women's economic participation. It would provide the legislature with the data needed for the requisite legislative reforms. The purpose of the National Gender Observatory was to gather information and provide decision makers with evidence-based recommendations, in order that they could draw up appropriate legislation and take account of the gender dimension in their response to the current crisis. The Observatory was currently drafting a plan based on an evaluation of needs.

8. The Commission had helped to organize two media campaigns to combat violence against women and, in that context, had collaborated in the production of two short video clips concerning online blackmail and sexual harassment. The videos explained who could be termed a victim and what her rights were.

9. Lebanon was determined to continue to enhance women's status and to abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was committed to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Commission was endeavouring to advance those aims by drafting legislation and engineering a change in public opinion and the mindset of decision makers. The authorities were determined to apply a new strategy in order to meet Sustainable Development Goal 5 by 2030. However, the current situation, where it was necessary to secure basic living conditions for everyone and where refugees and displaced persons constituted one third of the population, made it difficult to give separate attention to and impeded progress in promoting women's rights. Nevertheless, she was confident that the Committee's concluding observations would help to improve the status of women in Lebanon.

Articles 1–6

10. **Ms. Gabr** said that she wished to know what role women played in the various bodies set up to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). She wondered whether shelters had been provided for the 50,000 women and girls who had been internally displaced by the explosion in Beirut in August 2020 and whether any special measures had been adopted to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women.

11. **Ms. Ameline** said that she wished to know whether the State party envisaged ratifying the International Labour Organization (ILO) Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Protocol thereto. She wondered how the State party would strengthen the protection, status and response capacities of women's rights defenders, whether civil society organizations were authorized to manage international aid directly and how the Government would strengthen civil liberties, the democratic space and the right of women activists to operate in the country.

12. It would be interesting to know what procedure would be adopted for implementing the Committee's concluding observations and whether a national action plan on their implementation would be developed. She would be grateful to know whether the Government would consider withdrawing its reservations to articles 9 and 16 of the Convention and ratifying the Optional Protocol thereto.

13. She asked what was being done to ensure that the country had an adequately funded national human rights institution that was accredited by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. The Government might consider adopting a comprehensive law

prohibiting all forms of discrimination, including intersecting forms of discrimination directed at migrant women and women belonging to sexual minorities, among others.

14. The Committee wished to know whether the Government would conduct a review of article 9 of the Constitution, which placed personal status laws under the exclusive control of religious authorities, whether women were involved in discussions concerning constitutional reforms and whether there was a framework for inter-religious dialogue on such matters. She wondered whether the Government would increase the extent to which the Convention was applied by the courts, particularly the family courts, and whether it would reform the legal aid system, strengthen the capacity and independence of the judiciary and streamline judicial procedures, including in connection with processing complaints and gathering evidence. Lastly, she wished to know whether the three women facing the death penalty were receiving adequate legal assistance and whether their right to a defence was being upheld.

15. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that, unfortunately, women's participation in the Council of Ministers had regressed, as only one member of the current Council was a woman as opposed to 30 per cent of the members of the previous Council. Women in the armed forces were no longer restricted to administrative and health-care roles, as they had been previously. In fact, a woman now occupied the post of colonel in the army.

16. **Ms. Saoud** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that women in the army now participated in decision-making but only in connection with administrative matters. Efforts were being made to strengthen women's participation in other areas, including combat operations and planning. The Government had adopted a national plan on the incorporation of the gender perspective in decision-making, including in the area of national defence.

17. **Ms. Abou Haidar** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the Ministry of Social Affairs, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), had established shelters and drop-in centres for women and children displaced by the explosions in 2021. Women living in shelters were protected against intimidation and therefore felt more empowered to submit complaints. Training had been provided to women workers to ensure that they could provide emergency assistance as effectively as possible. Following the explosions, the women assisted by the Ministry had included a much higher proportion of Lebanese nationals.

18. The Ministry had provided services to around 15,000 women and girls during the reporting period. It had expanded the range of services that it provided to the poorest families and established partnerships with various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In partnership with UNICEF, it had adopted a programme for supporting children living in precarious conditions.

19. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that some women's shelters were run by the Ministry of Social Affairs while others were managed by NGOs and civil society organizations.

20. **Ms. Zgheib** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought about an increase in mortality rates among women living on low incomes. A number of maternal deaths had occurred during the pandemic because the women concerned had not had access to hospital care. Steps had been taken to rectify that situation and to provide pregnant women with support in their homes.

21. Two hotlines – one for pregnant women and the other for women in general – had been set up in response to the rise in incidents of domestic violence during the pandemic. A further hotline had been established for persons contemplating suicide. In partnership with the United Nations Population Fund, the Ministry of Health had established a national strategy on providing support, including medical care and legal assistance, to victims of rape. The Ministry and the Fund had worked together to develop guidelines on maternal and infant health and the mental health of pregnant women and new mothers. Free mental health care was provided to women refugees and internally displaced women.

22. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that the National Commission for Lebanese Women had cooperated with the Ministry of Education to provide support to persons affected by the explosions of 2021. The armed forces had established an emergency assistance hotline and

had managed the provision of support to persons displaced by the explosions, all of whom had found a place to stay.

23. **Ms. Abboud** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that women took part in humanitarian responses to emergency situations, including as members of civil society organizations, but relatively few participated in decision-making in that area. When more women became members of the National Assembly, it would be more likely to adopt laws promoting gender equality and prohibiting discrimination against women. For that reason, the National Commission for Lebanese Women had put forward various proposals for new bills, including one for a law on enhancing women's participation in the next legislative elections. It had also proposed that a quota system should be established for the representation of women in elective positions. In order to promote the financial empowerment of women, the Commission had suggested establishing gender quotas for the boards of companies and trade unions.

24. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that the Ministry of Justice would provide a written response to the question on capital punishment. In line with a suggestion made by United Nations agencies, the Government held daily coordination meetings with civil society organizations to discuss all its action plans, including the new gender equality strategy for the period up to 2030. The Constitution provided that the Government was required to uphold international treaties that Lebanon had ratified, including the Convention. The Government had not currently tabled any amendments to the law to allow for the recognition of civil marriages in Lebanon.

25. **Mr. Ahmad** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the Ministry of Justice was currently discussing a bill on the independence of the judiciary. The Minister of Justice and the head of the Supreme Judicial Council had requested that the bill should be submitted for a final reading.

26. **Ms. Ameline** said that there was an urgent need to push through reform on parity in the legislative elections, to carry out a review of the Constitution and to lift the reservations to the Convention with a view to applying the Convention more effectively, which would be a response to the crisis currently facing the country.

27. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that no plans were in place to review the Constitution. However, the preamble to that instrument established that all citizens were equal before the law.

28. **Ms. Gabr**, noting that bills intended to promote gender equality often failed to be adopted, said that she wished to know what steps would be taken to enhance the effectiveness of the National Commission for Lebanese Women and its influence over decision-making processes. She wondered whether the Commission had received all the budgetary allocations to which it was entitled and whether efforts had been made to ensure that all other mechanisms for the advancement of women operating during the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be adequately funded. The Committee would welcome further information on the new gender equality strategy for 2022–2030, including the time frame for its adoption. She asked whether the Government would enhance its cooperation with civil society organizations and their influence over decision-making processes, particularly in connection with the submission of bills to the National Assembly.

29. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that temporary special measures should be adopted in areas where women faced severe discrimination, such as political representation and decision-making. She wished to know whether the State party had considered setting a mandatory 30 per cent quota for women in the upcoming legislative elections. Legislation aimed at promoting free and equal access to the media for women could serve as an incentive for the nomination by political parties of more women candidates. The abolition of candidacy fees for women could also encourage women to run as candidates and prompt political parties to nominate more women.

30. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that improvements were required in the National Commission for Lebanese Women, particularly the expansion of its executive functions. The current economic situation in Lebanon had reduced the availability of budgetary funds but financial support had been received from international organizations.

31. Civil society played an important role in defending women's rights, particularly with respect to women's personal status. National institutions and local organizations were also involved in the process. When dealing with religious dimensions of personal status, it was important to cooperate with organizations and women who played an active role in religious communities, particularly the Maronite Council, when discussing legislative measures.

32. **Ms. Halabi** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the National Strategy for Women in Lebanon to be adopted in 2022 would focus on achieving equality rather than merely enhancing women's role in society. With a view to achieving legislative equality, laws requiring amendments, such as the Personal Status Code, had been identified. A bill aimed at enabling women to pass on their nationality to their children would be drafted, and Lebanon would then be able to withdraw its reservation to article 9 of the Convention. Another bill sought to prohibit marriage for persons under the age of 18 years. In addition, the Strategy would enhance women's participation in political and public life. The issue of quotas, particularly for women's involvement in political parties, would be considered.

33. An impediment to women's participation in economic life, notwithstanding their skills and qualifications, was their family obligations. Under the new strategy men were encouraged to assume their fair share of family obligations and household activities.

34. **Ms. Abou Haidar** (Lebanon) said that the Ministry of Social Affairs cooperated closely with civil society. However, it had proved difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic to implement activities comprehensively at the national level. The Ministry had nonetheless cooperated with academic centres and had raised the issue of sexual harassment in that context. A working group had organized a number of workshops to investigate conditions in isolation and quarantine centres with a view to protecting women and children.

35. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that candidacy fees were quite high compared to other countries. Initiatives aimed at achieving equality for men and women candidates required the amendment of electoral legislation. Action had been taken to increase women's quota, but no further amendments had been proposed. The issue of fees would be considered prior to future elections.

36. **Ms. Rana** said that she welcomed the amendment to Act No. 293 of 2014 concerning the protection of women and other family members from domestic violence, and the adoption of an Act concerning the criminalization of sexual harassment and the rehabilitation of victims. She wished to know what steps would be taken to effectively implement Act No. 293 of 2014 in order to prevent recidivism. She also asked whether the special fund to help women victims of violence provided for in article 21 of the Act had been established and whether special courts would be created to deal with family matters and violence against women.

37. The Government depended on NGOs and United Nations agencies to run shelters for women, which currently had limited capacity to provide safe shelter promptly and temporarily for abused women. She would therefore appreciate information concerning plans to expand the scope of services to meet existing requirements and to ensure their sustainability.

38. As the Act that criminalized sexual harassment failed to provide for key means of protection and to meet international standards, she asked whether the Government would consider amending it to incorporate a comprehensive approach, including by ratifying the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

39. She wished to know why assaults and rapes committed by members of the security forces were investigated at the request of the military or civilian courts rather than by an independent judicial authority.

40. The Committee remained deeply concerned about the persistence of adverse cultural norms, practices, patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles, responsibilities and identities of women and men in the family and in society and the part played by the media in overemphasizing the traditional role of women as mothers and wives. A study of the stereotypical representation of women and men in the media undertaken in 2020 had revealed and documented such problems. She was interested in hearing about programmes and plans to monitor the media and provide training for media personnel based

on the findings of the study with a specific timeline, budget and targets. She also wished to know how the code of conduct for men and women media professionals was being monitored and implemented by media organizations. As a United Nations study had found an increase in online harassment and violence, she asked whether the State party would consider developing legislation to address online violence against women.

41. Sexual violence and torture were common in detention centres, especially against vulnerable groups such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Alternate sources had also reported that transgender women in Lebanon regularly faced violence, including on the part of the security forces. She wished to know what action was being taken to ensure that credible allegations of torture, in detention or otherwise, were investigated promptly, independently, transparently and impartially, regardless of a person's sexual orientation.

42. **Ms. Leinarte** noted that the National Anti-Trafficking Commission was responsible for the operation of the national referral mechanism and effective victim identification. She said that she welcomed the establishment of a complaints system and visits by inspectors to identify exploitation in workplaces. Syrian refugees were reportedly at high risk of sex trafficking and forced labour. She asked how many complaints had been received from refugees and foreign workers and how many shelters and hotlines were available for victims of trafficking. She would welcome information regarding cooperation with civil society and NGOs with a view to victim identification, assistance and protection. She also wished to know whether the State party had adopted the recently developed strategy to combat trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

43. The confiscation by employers of workers' passports or travel documents was not legally prohibited and migrant domestic workers were entirely dependent on their household employers under the *kafala* (sponsorship) system. The existing legal gaps thus facilitated the use of forced labour.

44. Although prostitution was prohibited, as many as 3,000 women had been recruited each year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic through the artist visa scheme, which permitted traffickers to exploit women from over 40 countries for sexual purposes. Foreign women were unable to terminate contracts signed under the scheme without the approval of the Directorate General of General Security. If the women were found to be engaged in prostitution or filed a complaint, they were automatically deported and deprived of any access to justice.

45. An amendment to article 523 of the Criminal Code adopted in December 2020 had increased the maximum term of imprisonment prescribed for prostitution from 1 to 3 years, thereby further discriminating against vulnerable groups of women, including refugees and migrants. The amendment had also greatly reduced the penalties for offences covered under Act No. 164 relating to trafficking in persons. She therefore urged the State party to repeal article 523 of the Criminal Code. It would be preferable to prescribe penalties for exploitation of prostitution of women and recruitment of persons for illegal prostitution, with or without their consent. The State party should also take action to reduce the demand for commercialized sex. In addition, the 1931 Act on Safeguarding Public Health from Prostitution was entirely inconsistent with Act No. 164.

46. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that it had taken three years to adopt the amendments to the Protection of Women and Other Family Members from Domestic Violence Act that had been made in 2020. They were deemed to be quite an achievement.

47. **Ms. Massaad** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the National Commission for Lebanese Women cooperated closely with the media in view of their role in defending and promoting women's rights. It had hosted workshops with media directors and journalists with that end in view and had requested them to respond to questionnaires. The responses were used to produce recommendations aimed at promoting gender equality in the media. Media support for the role of female candidates in parliamentary elections and the abolition of traditional stereotypes had been discussed.

48. Campaigns aimed at combating domestic violence had been conducted in 2020. On International Women's Day each year, the National Commission organized joint campaigns

with UNICEF and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on child marriage. It had also worked with law enforcement officers and the security forces to create a hotline for victims.

49. **Ms. El Mohtar** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the Internal Security Forces had established hotline 1745 for complaints of violence. They had received 60 complaints in 2019 and 124 complaints in 2020. The number of calls had decreased in 2021. A programme to handle complaints and a centralized database had been established. A training course had been held for police in Beirut and additional courses would be held throughout the country.

50. **Ms. Abou Haidar** (Lebanon) said that the Ministry of Social Affairs had undertaken a study of Act No. 293 of 2014 on the protection of women and other family members from domestic violence, which had made it possible to improve the services provided and avoid the duplication of efforts made by various ministries pursuant to the Act and ensure the appropriate use of resources. There were also plans to allocate funds for services to victims of sexual harassment under Act No. 205.

51. **Ms. Dagher** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the Ministry of Justice had submitted a bill concerning trafficking in women and girls that was consistent with international law and would promote cooperation with other States in the fight against trafficking in persons. The bill was currently before the Council of Ministers for consideration.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.