



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

Distr.: General
21 February 2013

English only

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Fifty-fourth session**

Summary record of the 1107th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 15 February 2013, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Ameline

Contents

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

Combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Cyprus

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of this document* to the Editing Unit, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

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 sixth and seventh periodic reports of Cyprus (CEDAW/C/CYP/6-7; CEDAW/C/CYP/Q/6-7; CEDAW/C/CYP/Q/6-7/Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1)

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

2. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus), introducing the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Cyprus (CEDAW/C/CYP/6-7), said that during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2012, Cyprus had championed a number of initiatives on violence against women, such as designating 2015 as the European year of zero tolerance of violence against women, developing a common European strategy and establishing a European helpline for victims of gender-based violence. Joining the euro zone in 2008 had enabled Cyprus to raise living standards and introduce reforms expanding the role of women in society. However, the economic downturn had had a severe impact, notably in terms of unemployment, and had forced Cyprus to request financial assistance to address its short and medium-term fiscal and structural challenges. She reminded the Committee that, because of the continued occupation of over one third of its territory by Turkey, the Government was unable to guarantee women's rights, apply gender equality measures or collect reliable data in that part of the country.

3. National action plans and strategies on employment, trafficking in persons, gender equality, social protection, social inclusion and violence in the family had been designed. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2007–2013) addressed six priority areas, namely, employment, education, decision-making, social rights, violence and gender stereotypes. It was the result of close collaboration between national and local governments, civil society and academia and took account of the Convention, the Committee's previous concluding observations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as European directives and policies. According to an external midterm evaluation of the Plan, there had been significant progress in employment and violence against women but little in education, the mass media and political participation. It had also revealed greater ministerial involvement, strengthened interdepartmental collaboration and increased the participation of local authorities in gender equality promotion.

4. On relevant institutions, she said that the Equality Unit at the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and the National Machinery for Women's Rights continued to lead efforts to promote gender equality through legal reform, policy and programme implementation, awareness-raising activities and support to NGOs. The Parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women had been merged with the Human Rights Committee and exercised parliamentary control over gender issues. The number of discrimination complaints registered by the Ombudsperson continued to grow. The Ombudsperson, in her additional capacity as Commissioner for Human Rights, had recently issued a report on domestic violence against women, with a view to delineating the problem and highlighting any shortcomings of the institutional framework addressing gender-based violence. Furthermore, equality inspectors from the Department of Labour at the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance examined complaints relating to discrimination in the workplace and advised employers and staff on their rights and obligations. The Gender Equality in Employment and Vocational Training Committee monitored the enforcement of relevant legislation and had launched a range of training, awareness-raising and research initiatives. It also provided victims of discrimination with assistance, including legal aid. The period under review had seen significantly more involvement of women's organizations and

NGOs in policymaking in such areas as family affairs, social inclusion, employment, violence and trafficking.

5. Noteworthy progress had been achieved in the production of gender-disaggregated data, notably with the 2008 and 2012 publication by the Cyprus Statistical Service of *The Statistical Portrait of Women in Cyprus*, which provided data on employment, education, health, poverty, public life and violence. The Cyprus Academy of Public Administration, in collaboration with the National Machinery for Women's Rights and expert consultants, had developed training programmes on gender mainstreaming directed primarily at civil servants.

6. Positive measures for the economic empowerment of women were gradually being implemented, including measures to integrate women into the labour market, balance family and professional life, close the gender pay gap and support female entrepreneurs. In addition, anti-discrimination legislation had been amended to bolster protection against discrimination in the workplace. For example, pregnant workers were now better protected against dismissal, even in cases where the employer was unaware of the pregnancy at the time of dismissal.

7. Cyprus was committed to addressing the problems of vulnerable women. Recent policies and legislative initiatives focused primarily on migrant women, particularly female domestic workers, and included setting up a ministerial committee to review employment policy, establishing a contract dispute mechanism and increasing minimum wage.

8. Highlighting measures on violence against women, she cited the adoption of a law and a national action plan on domestic violence, the establishment of incentives to report cases of violence and the founding of the Women's Multicultural Centre. In 2012, the Advisory Committee for Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence had conducted the first national study of the prevalence of domestic violence and its impact on women's health. A subcommittee on domestic violence, composed of psychologists, psychiatrists and family law experts from both the Turkish and Greek communities, had been established to design training seminars for professionals and the public alike.

9. Trafficking in persons, especially women and children, was another priority for Cyprus. Key developments included ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, formulating national action plans against trafficking in human beings, establishing the Multidisciplinary Coordinating Group for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, setting up a State shelter for female victims of sexual exploitation, holding seminars for police officers, prosecutors, judges and welfare workers and preparing a police manual on identifying victims of trafficking. In follow-up to the Committee's previous concluding observations, the Government had designed a new scheme covering entry, residency and work permits for third-country nationals.

10. Providing statistics on women in public office and an overview of the measures taken to increase the political participation of women and their accession to decision-making positions, she expressed concern about the underrepresentation of women in the House of Representatives and municipal councils. However, there were two female candidates in the presidential elections to be held on 17 February 2013.

11. Regarding education, she said that more women graduated from upper secondary school and completed tertiary education than men and their dropout rate was lower than that of men. A broad education reform was under way that challenged stereotypes and traditional gender roles and promoted equality and the acceptance of others. In addition, the University of Cyprus had upgraded its gender studies programmes, offering courses at the postgraduate and doctorate levels. Several health-care programmes had been put in place, such as a national strategic plan for the promotion of breastfeeding and networks of general practitioners, health visitors and community nurses to educate women about sexual and

reproductive health. State-run hospitals provided free prenatal, delivery and postnatal care to all migrant women, irrespective of their status.

12. Cyprus was determined to intensify its efforts to eliminate gender stereotypes, especially in education and the media. The Government intended to focus more on the multiple discrimination suffered by vulnerable women and to ensure the full implementation of existing legal safeguards.

Articles 1 to 3

13. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari**, referring to article 28 of the Constitution of Cyprus and the 1991 judgement in the *Melpo Grigoriou v. Nicosia Municipality* case, asked whether the ban on direct and indirect discrimination also extended to the private sphere. Noting the multiplicity of bodies seemingly attached to the Ombudsperson, she asked which were responsible for investigating and remedying complaints, how many complaints had been received, how they were treated, what the outcome had been and whether women who turned to those mechanisms were entitled to legal aid. She also wished to know what authority the bodies had in terms of reinstating wrongfully terminated workers, ordering compensation and providing legal aid. Lastly, she asked whether the activities of the national human rights institution, which the State party had acknowledged did not fulfil the Paris Principles, had in fact been transferred to the Ombudsperson.

14. **Ms. Bareiro-Bobadilla**, noting that international instruments were directly applicable in Cypriot courts, asked whether their application was systematic and what training judges were given on the Convention. Commending the State party on the considerable efforts made to include discrimination in its legislation, she wished to know what the penalties were for that offence and what compensation was available to victims. She also asked about measures taken or planned to remove barriers to access to justice for women, such as the length and cost of court proceedings and the perception that they were pointless.

15. **Ms. Gabr** expressed concern that there were too many mechanisms addressing women's rights, possibly leading to confusion. Pointing out that it might be more useful to have an overarching entity acting as a coordinating mechanism, she asked what the role was of the National Machinery for Women's Rights, including with respect to data collection, and whether it would be allocated additional human and financial resources. She asked whether it might not be sounder to keep the Parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women separate from the Human Rights Committee, in order to raise the profile of gender equality.

16. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked whether the State party intended to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in the near future. Although she fully understood the requirement to incorporate European legislation into Cypriot domestic law, she emphasized that that process should in no way reduce the visibility of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

17. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that the Constitution superseded all other legislation; therefore when domestic legislation conflicted with international law, the provisions of the Constitution were invoked instead. Article 28 of the Constitution did cover discrimination in both the public and private spheres and there were specific laws extending human rights to the private domain. The Convention was not invoked as much as might be expected, but it was nonetheless the most cited international instrument because for many years it had been the only legal instrument on women's rights in Cyprus. Efforts were under way to train judges and lawyers on international instruments. The country's accession to the European Union presupposed aligning its legislation with European law,

resulting in a plethora of small pieces of legislation to address all the issues covered in the Convention. The legislative alignment had also implied establishing a number of equality and anti-discrimination bodies and the State had deemed it appropriate to add powers to existing structures. As a result, the Ombudsperson had extrajudicial control of the administration as well as an anti-discrimination mandate. Acknowledging the confusion, she explained that the Anti-Discrimination Body had jurisdiction over goods and services, while the Equality Authority handled other matters. Cyprus being a small country, the public was aware of the various institutions. Limited resources did not impact the independence or effectiveness of the anti-discrimination bodies. The range of bodies established to promote gender equality together provided an effective remedy for citizens. Legal aid was widely available to women free of charge. Unlike other bodies, the Ombudsperson could not impose sanctions.

18. **Ms. Varnavidou** (Cyprus) said that recommendations made by the Ombudsperson were generally well received in society, with around 95 per cent of them being implemented by the public administration. The multitude of equality bodies was not considered to be negative, as each had its own specific terms of reference, and awareness-raising campaigns had helped to ensure that the general public and civil society organizations knew where to apply for support. The National Machinery for Women's Rights had been asked to play a key role in gender mainstreaming and, while it had been understaffed and underfunded in the past, it currently had three professionals and, until the recent budget cuts due to the economic crisis, its budget had been increasing steadily. A study conducted into the possible merger of the equality bodies had shown a preference for keeping them separate in order to monitor legislation in their own specific areas. Data collection and dissemination was carried out through a specialized statistics and research office, and financial support was also provided to NGOs to undertake research.

19. **Mr. Bruun** asked whether an assessment had been carried out into the impact on gender policy of the draft memorandum of understanding negotiated with the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

20. **Ms. Šimonović** asked whether training was provided for the judiciary, particularly for judges, on the provisions of the Convention, its Optional Protocol and on the Committee's jurisprudence.

21. **Ms. Gabr** asked who was responsible for coordinating all the different equality mechanisms dealing with women's issues.

22. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** asked what specific remedies the Ombudsperson was empowered to provide and requested statistics on the outcomes of appeals to the equality bodies.

23. **Ms. Xiaoqiao Zou** (Country Rapporteur) asked whether the Government provided financial support to NGOs to enable them to travel to Geneva and why none had attended the current session. She also asked what measures had been adopted to encourage more women to apply for legal aid and to address their reluctance to make complaints and bring cases before the courts.

24. **Ms. Schulz** asked what happened when a complaint had been investigated by the quality inspectors; what happened in the case of non-migrant workers; and whether the results of their investigations were of legal value in court proceedings.

25. **Ms. Kouroumba** (Cyprus) said that it had been decided to merge the parliamentary committees dealing with human rights and equality issues into one. Training was provided for judges and other court officials on gender issues, but she would report back to the Committee on whether specific training on the Convention was also provided. It was regrettable that NGOs had not attended the session; funding was available, but they had not

applied for it. She acknowledged that, for cultural reasons, women were reluctant to speak out on issues affecting them, but awareness-raising campaigns had been conducted to try to change that mindset. Legal aid was not necessary for filing complaints with the equality bodies because there was no cost involved; only court cases incurred costs, for which legal aid was available.

26. **Ms. Varnavidou** (Cyprus) said that, despite budget cuts, efforts continued to try to maintain subsidies to NGOs, as they were valued as partners with a recognized role in ensuring women's rights. New legislation had been enacted to encourage women to bring cases to court, and information on the outcomes of complaints would be included in the next periodic report.

27. **Mr. Michaelides** (Cyprus) said that the Ministry of Labour played a crucial role in promoting and protecting women's rights in labour and employment matters. Inspections were also carried out by labour inspectors, who had received 300 complaints regarding sexual harassment and maternity issues between 2008 and 2012.

28. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that the draft memorandum of understanding was still under negotiation and it was therefore too early to carry out an impact assessment.

Articles 4 to 6

29. **Ms. Pires** said that, despite the Committee's earlier recommendation on the use of temporary special measures to improve the low representation of women in public life and the labour market, the Government had failed to pass legislation on those measures. She asked what steps had been taken to address the prevailing negative attitude towards the introduction of quotas and what obstacles stood in the way of their wider use. Had an assessment been made of the advantages of introducing temporary special measures in the National Action Plan on Gender Equality?

30. **Ms. Patten** asked whether a specific budget had been allocated under the National Action Plan on Gender Equality to combat violence against women and violence within the family and how NGOs were included in its implementation. She also asked what measures were envisaged to address the shortcomings identified in the report of the Ombudsperson on domestic violence and how a gender perspective was ensured in the provision of services to victims of domestic violence and violence against women.

31. **Ms. Jahan** asked whether the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Human Beings had a gender perspective and how its results were evaluated. She requested more information on protection measures, access to shelter and psychological support for trafficking victims. The trafficking of women for labour purposes was a concern and she asked about the regulation of private employers, particularly concerning domestic workers. The issue of the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation should also be investigated. What was the extent of forced prostitution in the country and what measures had been adopted to curb it?

32. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked what steps were being taken to combat gender stereotyping.

33. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that, in response to the Committee's recommendations, the visa issuing system had been revised to prevent its abuse for the purposes of trafficking, and it had largely been successful.

34. **Ms. Varnavidou** (Cyprus) said that the Committee's recommendations concerning the use of temporary special measures had been taken seriously and had been included in the National Action Plan on Gender Equality. Furthermore, a dialogue had begun on the use of temporary special measures, and research findings and good practices from Europe had been made more visible. She acknowledged that the media failed to give equal attention and

space to female political candidates, but Cyprus was taking a soft approach and would continue to address the issue of women's political participation. The January 2013 report of the Ombudsperson on domestic violence had recommended the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and the adoption of other measures to support victims throughout the criminal system. Action on combating trafficking had, in the main, been successful and included the establishment of a legal framework, the relevant national action plan and a victim support system. Anti-trafficking activities would be evaluated by an independent external assessor.

35. **Mr. Veis** (Cyprus) said that training for law enforcement officers on how to deal with domestic violence, human trafficking and sexual exploitation cases had been placed high on the Government's agenda. However, that did not mean that other areas or issues were overlooked. For example, the Government also implemented awareness-raising campaigns on issues such as sexual violence and prostitution, as well as information on gender equality and advice on personal safety. Training schemes on sexual harassment were jointly organized by the police force and the committee on gender equality. Specialized services were also provided to victims of human trafficking. Persons engaging in human trafficking had been prosecuted under the anti-trafficking legislation introduced in 2000 and 2007.

36. While the high attrition rate in domestic violence cases could not be denied, it was a problem that also affected other European countries. During its presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2012, Cyprus had launched a project on attrition, which had led to the drafting of a police handbook and drawn attention to the problem at European level, thereby increasing awareness and promoting the dissemination of good practices.

37. The exploitation of domestic workers was a matter of concern. Labour exploitation cases were duly investigated, and the State party had provided statistics on victims and cases in its responses to the list of issues.

38. With regard to the repatriation of trafficking victims, he stressed that, irrespective of whether they cooperated with the authorities or not, such persons were never deported. A voluntary repatriation scheme existed, whereby victims could be sent back to their countries of origin – with their agreement and in cooperation with the authorities in the country of origin. However, trafficking victims could also be granted permission to remain in Cyprus on humanitarian grounds.

39. **Mr. Michaelides** (Cyprus) said that new legislation had been introduced to regulate the activities of private employment agencies, which provided the only means for migrant workers from outside the European Union — a particularly vulnerable group — to find employment in Cyprus. The new legislation included provisions on the information required by the Ministry of Labour, and provided for administrative fines in case of non-compliance.

40. The new policy on visas for performing artists had been approved by the Council of Ministers. Visa applications would be examined by a committee chaired by the Department of Labour. The regulations on performing artists, including cabaret dancers, had been tightened and more information was now required from both the dancers themselves, such as details of previous experience and dance qualifications, and from potential employers, including proof of relevant licences and tax registration. The onus was placed on employers to demonstrate that dancers were being recruited legitimately. As a result, far fewer establishments currently employed foreign dancers.

41. **Ms. Azina-Chronides** (Cyprus) said that the Ministry of Health viewed violence against women as a public health issue, and that awareness-raising campaigns were conducted in schools; in addition, cooperation work was undertaken with NGOs and the World Health Organization (WHO) to tackle the problem. The protocol for handling

victims of rape also included a gender perspective. Female doctors and nurses provided care to victims and specific medical protocols existed on the treatment provided and interview techniques used, based on a non-judgemental approach. Such measures had been welcomed by WHO.

42. **Mr. Veis** (Cyprus) said that prostitution was not a criminal offence in Cyprus, if there was no element of coercion involved. However, procurement, living on earnings of prostitution or owning a brothel were classified as offences. The provision of sexual services had moved away from cabarets and nightclubs into private apartments, smaller establishments or massage parlours. The police had responded to those changes by stepping up their operations and increasing the number of raids carried out. Such measures had resulted in a slight fall in the number of trafficking victims. The police aimed to establish whether prostitutes were working in the sex industry of their own volition, and investigated cases in a sensitive manner.

43. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, said that stereotypes frequently resulted from conservative cultural patterns, and had contributed to slowing down the implementation of the Convention. Temporary special measures, in the absence of consensus, would help to accelerate the process.

44. **Ms. Jahan** said that while the new legislation on performing artists might well have resulted in fewer non-European migrants entering Cyprus, it might not have made any real impact on the problem of trafficking. With trafficked women being held in different establishments, the problem might simply have become more difficult to detect. Moreover, women who previously would have been able to file complaints as trafficking victims might instead become involved in disputes relating to labour exploitation.

45. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) endorsed Ms. Jahan's concerns, and said that the authorities were monitoring the situation to see whether the new provisions would give rise to other problems.

46. **Mr. Veis** (Cyprus) agreed that, the majority of women currently entering Cyprus on visas for performing artists came from European Union countries, rather than from third countries, as had been the case previously. It was indeed a matter of concern. A review of the new system was planned, and the police had expanded their operations in that field. He stressed, however, that the jurisdiction of the law enforcement authorities extended to the new kinds of establishments mentioned, and that measures were taken to verify whether women working in the sex industry did so voluntarily or under coercion.

47. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked for information on current provisions governing the right of asylum, particularly with regard to female asylum seekers. International reports on the issue, including from Amnesty International, had alleged that the way in which female asylum seekers were treated was not in accordance with international standards.

48. **Ms. Neubauer** said that although progress had been made in the last 27 years, the State party's efforts with regard to its obligations under the Convention, particularly concerning women in elected office, had been insufficient. She asked whether the Government planned to develop an effective policy to address those shortcomings. She stressed that action in that field required not only quotas, but also legislation on political parties and their funding.

49. **Ms. Pires** said that the State party had an obligation to ensure equal opportunities. Recalling the recommendations made by a range of bodies, including those made in connection with the universal periodic review process and the Committee's concluding observations on the previous periodic report of Cyprus, she asked what framework the Government had created to ensure that women were included in peace talks. Did an action

plan exist? In 2010, the Secretary-General of the United Nations had encouraged the participation of women in the peace process and the work of the Gender Advisory Team, comprising women from both Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. She requested information on measures taken to follow up on those recommendations, including the work of the Gender Advisory Team. She wondered whether the Government saw the imminent resumption of peace talks as an opportunity to rethink the participation of women in the peace process.

50. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** stressed the need for further action, in order to ensure real equality in all spheres of life, including the political arena. She suggested that legislation to promote female candidates would be helpful in that regard, and encouraged the delegation to hold a press conference on their return to Cyprus to highlight the issues raised.

51. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that the State party had made a great deal of progress, with more women in political posts and in the judiciary. The balance was slowly shifting, although concerns remained regarding the number of women in elected posts. Admittedly, positive measures were needed, as women were still poorly represented in politics, but the situation had definitely improved in the last 27 years.

52. **Ms. Varnavidou** (Cyprus) said that while some progress had been made, with greater support for women in politics and more female candidates in the 2006 elections, it was a struggle to increase the visibility of such women. In order to bring about change, the support of NGOs and of society as a whole was required.

53. **Ms. Schulz**, requesting information on the status of gender quotas, asked how the Government planned to move from a general acceptance of the concept of quotas to their actual introduction.

54. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that there was political support for quotas in general, but that there was a need to persuade the political parties to accept gender quotas. She agreed that more work was needed to bring about change.

55. **The Chairperson**, summing up, reminded the State party that it was not always possible, or advisable, to wait for consensus before implementing temporary special measures. There were times when legislation was needed to change society, rather than waiting for the situation to change itself. She encouraged the State party to take the relevant measures to ensure that such progress was achieved.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.