



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

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

**Summary record of the 1420th meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 15 July 2016, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Hayashi

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(*continued*)

*Combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Mali (continued)*

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*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

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

*Combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Mali (continued)  
(CEDAW/C/MLI/6-7; CEDAW/C/MLI/Q/6-7 and Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Mali took places at the Committee table.*

*Articles 1 to 6 (continued)*

2. **Mr. Coulibaly** (Mali) said that an anti-trafficking law had been adopted and an associated action plan developed with the assistance of stakeholders working in the sphere of prevention of trafficking in persons. Members of the judiciary and law enforcement personnel had been trained on the provisions of the law in question, which had also been disseminated to consular officials. A public awareness-raising campaign on human trafficking was also under way. Other measures aimed at combating trafficking in persons included bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries, such as Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, while best practices were also shared among fellow members of the Economic Community of West African States.

3. **Ms. Ba** (Mali) said that much remained to be done in Mali not only to combat trafficking in persons but also arms and drug trafficking. Some progress had been made, however, and more and more cases were being reported to the authorities. As to a law on violence against women, it was hoped that a bill would be drafted by the end of 2016 or, failing that, that a timeline for its introduction would be devised.

*Articles 7 to 9*

4. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that, while the State party's efforts to increase women's participation in politics were commendable, she was concerned at the decline in the already low number of women in political and decision-making roles. Moreover, women continued to face numerous barriers to their participation in political and public life. Those included widespread illiteracy, a lack of autonomy and difficulty in obtaining the identification documents necessary for exercising their right to vote. For women with disabilities in particular, polling stations were often inaccessible and many were excluded by law from participating on the basis of their disability. She wished to know what measures the Government intended to take to improve the civil registry system to enable women to obtain the identification documents necessary for voting, what concrete activities had been carried out, or were envisaged, to address the lack of gender parity in political parties, what steps had been taken to ensure that all women with disabilities could exercise their right to vote and whether there were plans to establish a pool of women candidates for appointment to international bodies and the diplomatic service.

5. **Ms. Ba** (Mali) said that the Government recognized that women were underrepresented in political parties and decision-making posts. The situation was gradually improving, however, not least because women were becoming increasingly aware of the need to participate in political and public life in order to ensure that their views and needs were taken into account. The legislation establishing a quota for women's representation was already having an effect within the administration, and it was anticipated that it would soon have an impact on the make-up of political parties too. It was clear that efforts also needed to be made to address stereotypical attitudes towards women, and it was hoped that information and awareness-raising campaigns would help to change traditional gender roles.

6. The diplomatic service was not an easy career path for men or for women, since specialist knowledge and training were required. There were, however, plans to institute a school for young public servants, with the aim of providing further training to improve their prospects of becoming diplomats.

7. **Mr. Coulibaly** (Mali) said that all persons of voting age in Mali were entitled to vote, irrespective of gender. Regarding women in the diplomatic service, a woman ambassador had recently been appointed, demonstrating that some progress had indeed been made in that regard.

8. **Ms. Patten** said that she wished to know whether the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family was represented on the coordinating committee for the implementation of the peace agreement in Mali and whether the delegation could provide any specific information regarding the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

9. **Ms. Ba** (Mali) said that women had participated in the peace negotiations, and continued to do so. All government departments, including those in charge of social development, health, employment and youth, were represented on the committee responsible for coordinating the implementation of the peace agreement. They met regularly to discuss and report on the status of implementation of the agreement.

10. Although the Electoral Code did not specifically contain rules regarding persons with disabilities, its implementing decree did take account of persons with disabilities wishing to participate in the political system. It was true, however, that due consideration needed to be given to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoyed unfettered access to facilitate their participation.

*Articles 10 to 14*

11. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that the State party's positive achievements in the area of education were commendable in view of the recent internal conflict. The Committee was, however, concerned at women's low literacy levels, which the conflict had only exacerbated. She wished to know what had been done to increase the enrolment and retention rate of girls at all levels of education, what action had been taken to tackle the disparities between rural and urban areas in terms of the quality of teaching, access to technical courses and the availability of teachers and equipment, what security measures were in place to protect girls on their way to and from school and while in school and whether action was being taken to bring about a shift in societal attitudes towards women and girls.

12. Other areas of concern to the Committee included the school dropout rate in the State party and the hidden costs associated with children's education. In that regard, she would welcome information on the budget allocated to, and the implementation of, the Ministry of Education's plan to improve girls' education, on whether an impact assessment of the plan's efficacy had been conducted and on what measures had been taken to address the indirect costs of education, including the use of temporary special measures. She wondered whether appropriate measures were now in place to ensure that Koranic schools respected the national school curricula, as recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its previous concluding observations (CRC/C/MLI/CO/2), and whether action had been taken to reopen the schools closed in the north of the country owing to the conflict.

13. Lastly, the Committee would be grateful for data disaggregated by sex on enrolments in secondary, vocational and tertiary education, on the inclusion of children with disabilities in school and on the impact of non-formal education on the literacy rate, in particular among older people.

14. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez**, regarding article 11 of the Convention, said that she would welcome up-to-date information on the current situation of women in the labour force, particularly in relation to the five sectors in which, according to paragraph 77 of the State party report, women were most likely to be employed. Moreover, she wished to know how many women were working in the gold mining and cotton industries and what measures had been taken to address the poor working conditions and long working hours faced by women in those areas of activity. Information on the gender pay gap and, in particular, whether closing the gap was a national priority, would also be appreciated.

15. She asked whether the State party had taken concrete action to reduce the number of working children and, in particular, to protect girls from exploitative child labour, such as begging or domestic service, whether any specific training programmes had been established for women with disabilities to enhance their prospects of gaining employment, whether a monitoring mechanism had been set up to assess the effectiveness of policies that were aimed at improving the situation of vulnerable women and girls and, if so, what were their results. She would also be interested to hear what provisions were in place to ensure that women who had been internally displaced during the conflict could return home and resume their previous employment.

16. Turning to article 12 of the Convention, she said that the Committee would appreciate updated information on women's access to health in the State party. She drew the delegation's attention to paragraphs 17 to 19 of the list of issues (CEDAW/C/MLI/Q/6-7), to which the Committee had not yet received replies. In particular, she wished to know what measures the State party had taken to address the limited access to basic health-care services and essential obstetric care for women living in rural areas, to cut the maternal and infant mortality rates, to reduce the disproportionately high rate of HIV/AIDS among women involved in prostitution and to improve access to comprehensive age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights and to modern contraceptives and family planning services.

17. **Ms. Ba** (Mali) said that the State was endeavouring to increase its investment in education, which currently accounted for approximately 10 per cent of the general budget. Before the crisis, young people, including young women, had been motivated to study abroad because they could hope to get a job in the civil service on their return to Mali. Since the crisis, however, the fact that fewer civil service jobs were available had weakened young people's motivation to continue their studies. In addition, some students did not complete even secondary education and chose instead to seek employment in the private sector.

18. The problem of low school attendance was due to several factors, including the influx of internally displaced people from the northern part of the country, the lack of security, the fact that schools were fewer and more widely dispersed than prior to the crisis and the shortage of teachers, due in part to unattractive salaries. That situation had led to an increase in the rate of illiteracy in both urban and rural areas, but good results were being achieved through evening literacy classes for women and girls.

19. Disaggregated data on technical schools had not been compiled for many years and were unavailable; however, efforts were made in both urban and rural areas to encourage girls to attend technical training centres. The Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and Families carried out a project entitled "Female excellence" that awarded scholarships, computers and school supplies to girls from poor families as an incentive for them to complete their education and continue on to higher education, since many stopped after nine years of schooling in order to get a job or get married.

20. Lawmakers were in the process of drafting legislation on the protection of children that would address, inter alia, the problems of child beggars and abandoned children. The

number of abandoned children had risen owing to the fact that many teenagers abandoned their children in hospital after giving birth. A number of associations worked in cooperation with the State to provide services to persons with disabilities, and the civil service had been instructed to recruit such persons actively.

21. There were several mechanisms for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, including a national HIV/AIDS programme that was attached to the Office of the President of the Republic and the units set up in all health facilities that provided free medicines for persons living with the disease. Each year, a week was devoted to efforts to contain the spread of HIV/AIDS, and the various ministries organized a variety of activities around that objective. It was no longer considered a taboo to have HIV/AIDS; however, in the aftermath of the crisis, there had been an increase in mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, which required HIV-positive mothers to come forward in order to protect their children.

22. Sex education was not included in the academic curricula, but was taught during civic and moral education classes and through public information sessions at the community level. Reproductive health services were provided through programmes implemented by the Ministry of Health under the supervision of the First Lady of the Republic and the information and awareness-raising activities organized by civil society organizations.

23. **Ms. Gbedemah**, referring to the reopening of schools in the northern part of the country, asked what strategies had been developed in order to ensure a safe school environment that was free of harassment and physical violence. The delegation should provide information on the “parallel”, religiously based schools and their impact on girls’ education.

24. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said that she would appreciate updated statistical data on women’s employment in Mali, as it was important to compare such data over time, both qualitatively and quantitatively, in order to understand how the State party was implementing article 11 of the Convention. The needs of women engaged in prostitution who had HIV/AIDS should be attended to on an equal basis with other HIV/AIDS patients so as not to marginalize them further.

25. **Ms. Ba** (Mali) said that, although efforts had been made to reopen schools, after the signing of the peace agreements, no information on the number of those reopened was available. Where there was education, there was development; however, a great number of human, financial and material resources were needed in order to re-establish schools, and there could be no teachers or students without security. Mali could not accomplish such a feat of reconstruction on its own and relied on aid from its international partners and from civil society organizations.

26. The Government would transmit statistical data on women’s employment to the Committee within the next 48 hours. HIV/AIDS and prostitution were closely interrelated problems, and different strategies were used in each region in order to tackle them. Women who accepted help could access training that would enable them to learn a new occupation.

27. A national plan of action on the protection and promotion of children had just been adopted by the Government but had not yet been implemented. It would address, inter alia, the needs of abandoned children, children with HIV/AIDS and children with disabilities. Associations working with vulnerable children could apply for a grant from a State-subsidized fund for vulnerable women and children that was managed by the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and Families.

28. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that additional information was needed on: the national strategy for combating poverty; the participation of economically active women in the

development of multi-functional platforms for the period 2015-2019; the impact of the Decentralized Financial Systems on women's access to credit; and the impact of the action plan for the development of microfinance on female entrepreneurship. The delegation should give an evaluation of the strategic framework for women's empowerment as a means of escaping poverty. She asked what action the Government planned to take in the northern part of Mali, where the conflict had accentuated discrimination against women by means of the fundamentalist ban on women's employment. How were the competent ministries addressing the fact that women's submission to their husbands hindered economic initiative and slowed the nation's progress towards overcoming poverty?

29. Women in Mali were vulnerable to the deterioration of food security as a result of political and environmental crises. Women were present throughout the chain of agricultural production, but did not have the means necessary to increase their output or productivity. She asked whether the national sustainable food strategy for the period 2015-2025, which was managed by the Office of the Commissioner for Food Security, gave the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and Families an important role in planning, following up and monitoring the resources allocated to women and whether rural women and their organizations participated in local planning and development of measures to which those resources had been allocated.

30. **Ms. Gabr** asked how the Government planned to guarantee the rights of rural women and their full participation in the development of Mali and what kinds of social protection were available to help alleviate poverty among the poorest of them. Commending civil society organizations in Mali for their courage and perseverance in helping women with disabilities, she trusted that their work would have an impact on the disability bill currently under consideration by the National Assembly. The delegation should provide information on the status of that bill and comment on the situation of women in places of detention.

31. **Ms. Ba** (Mali) said that she was not certain she had understood the question about women's submission to their husbands. In Malian culture, it was believed that women should obey their husbands and that, in return, men should protect their wives. Upon their marriage, women were told by their family to be patient and accepting of their husbands. It was not a matter of submission, but rather of accepting problems in the marriage if they arose.

32. In recent years, women had become less willing to follow those customs, particularly in the north of the country. The cultural differences between the north and the south made it difficult to develop a comprehensive strategy. While various amendments had been made to the Family Code, her Government recognized that some gaps still remained, and it was working to develop new strategies to further improve the lives of women by helping them to achieve financial independence, receive an education and escape poverty.

33. Rural women fully participated in economic activities at the local, regional and national levels. Each year, the women themselves organized the Day of Rural Women, in which the Government participated by providing them with means of production and other materials they requested. She agreed that it would be very useful to conduct a census of women with disabilities, many of whom had learned to read and write and had established organizations and associations to assert their rights.

34. Previously, the situation in the prison in Bamako had been dire, as men, women and children had all been detained together in the same prison. Subsequently, however, separate prisons had been established for men, women and children. Women prisoners engaged in income-generating activities and received training while in prison. Efforts were being made to rehabilitate them with a view to reintegrating them into society upon their release.

35. **Ms. Thiam Diallo** (Mali) said that the decentralization of the financial system had been very beneficial for women, who had become more independent as a result of having access to microcredit. While progress had slowed during the financial crisis, her Government was confident that it could build on the solid foundation already established to increase the financial independence of women in both urban and rural areas.

*Articles 15 and 16*

36. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that a number of provisions of the Family Code were discriminatory against women, including provisions that restricted women's legal capacity and therefore violated the Convention. Women should have the freedom to choose their place of residence and domicile, but in Mali the husband, as the unquestioned head of the household, could decide unilaterally where the family would live. Widows were not entitled to any inheritance from their deceased husband. Other discriminatory provisions included the duty of women to obey their husband and the discrepancy in the minimum age for marriage for women and men.

37. She wished to know more about the campaign led by the First Lady to combat child marriage and about the results achieved through that campaign. Specifically, she asked whether the campaign was aimed at bringing the provisions in the Family Code on the minimum age for marriage into line with the Convention. Given that girls 16 years of age were permitted to marry under the law, she wondered how child marriage was defined in Mali.

38. While recognizing that attempts to reform laws and practices that were based on Islamic law were often met with resistance, the significant harm caused to women and families by discriminatory practices must be taken into consideration. The main issue at hand was whether or not there was the political will necessary in Mali to end discrimination against women.

39. Although the Agricultural Guidance Act had removed all legal barriers to women's access to land, the Act was not adequately enforced, and many people were unaware of it. She asked whether the Government was considering the possibility of harmonizing statutory, customary and religious law in the country, and she wished to know what steps the Government was taking to encourage open debate on the interpretation of Islamic law.

40. **Ms. Ba** (Mali) said that it was important to understand the role that religion played in the country. Nevertheless, religion must not constitute an impediment to the country's development or to the advancement of women. Religious leaders had been consulted when drafting the law on the advancement of women in appointed and elected posts and had affirmed that Islam did not contradict the rights of women.

41. Traditionally, a girl was deemed to be ready for marriage as soon as she reached puberty. However, the minimum age for marriage was now 18 years, and any marriage entered into by a girl under 18 years of age was considered to be a child marriage. People could not be forced to change their attitudes; they must instead be convinced. Awareness-raising campaigns and an open dialogue were thus essential to stamping out such harmful customary practices. The campaign led by the First Lady had included television and radio spots highlighting the ways in which early marriage was harmful to girls and to the country's development.

42. Her Government did plan to bring its legislation into line with the Convention gradually, but there was no set timeline for doing so. It was true that open and transparent debate was necessary, and in fact two intergenerational debates had already been held in 2016 to encourage families to change their behaviour and attitudes towards the education of children in general and the participation of women in public and political life. While

widows were required to respect a period of mourning lasting 4 months and 10 days, by law, they were entitled to a percentage of their deceased husband's inheritance.

43. **Ms. Patten** said that she fully agreed that not all the problems Mali was facing could be attributed to the conflict in the north of the country. Given that Mali had been a party to the Convention since 1985, it was unacceptable that in 2016 its legislation still contained so many discriminatory provisions. She wished to know the position of the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and Families on the discriminatory provisions in the Family Code.

44. She was concerned that the Government had rejected the recommendation made during the universal periodic review of Mali in 2013 to bring the Family Code into line with the Convention. Pursuant to article 2 of the Convention, Mali had an obligation to condemn discrimination against women in all its forms and agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women. While the delegation had stated that there was political will to take action on such matters, that did not seem to be reflected in the country's legislative framework. The Convention was aimed at ensuring both formal and substantive equality for women.

45. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that she appreciated the First Lady's efforts to raise awareness about early marriage. Awareness-raising alone was not enough, however. The Government needed to understand the commitment that it had made, by ratifying the Convention, to establish 18 years as the minimum age for marriage. There must be a way of reconciling the provisions of the Family Code with the State's international commitments.

46. **Ms. Ameline** said that she recognized that, not just in Mali but in all countries, family law was slow to change. She urged the Government to adopt a strategic vision for amending the fundamental aspects of the Family Code to which the Committee had drawn attention; otherwise years might pass before any change occurred.

47. **Ms. Ba** (Mali) said that it was true that the process of bringing national legislation into line with international instruments was a slow one. Nevertheless, a number of achievements had already been made in that regard since her country's independence, such as ensuring women's right to vote and to participate in elections. She agreed that a long-term vision was necessary.

48. The Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family had made great efforts to raise awareness of discrimination against women. Her Government did have the political will to make the necessary changes, though it sometimes ran up against opposition in the legislature. The Ministry would encourage other State bodies to promote the amendment of discriminatory legal provisions. She agreed that, until national legislation was brought into line with the Convention, problems of discrimination would persist.

49. She had gained a much better understanding of the Committee's work by participating in the interactive dialogue. She recognized that the Committee's frank questions and comments were intended to assist her Government in its efforts to improve the rights of women. During the dialogue, the Committee had focused on issues such as the need to improve the legislative and regulatory framework for the protection of the rights of women, to take into account the specific situation of women with disabilities when drafting a law on gender-based violence and to facilitate access to justice for women. Her delegation had taken careful note of all the issues raised and was grateful to the Committee for its proposals.

*The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.*