



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

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

Summary record of the 1925th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 20 October 2022, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Acosta Vargas

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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)*

Sixth periodic report of the Gambia (CEDAW/C/GMB/6; CEDAW/C/GMB/Q/6; CEDAW/C/GMB/RQ/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Gambia joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Kinteh** (Gambia), introducing her country's sixth periodic report (CEDAW/C/GMB/6), said that the document had been prepared in broad consultation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations and United Nations agencies, taking account of diverse views.
3. The Government's firm commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment was illustrated by the establishment, in 2019, of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, and the subsequent development and implementation of a series of strategies and action plans. Those included: the National Strategy and Policy on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting 2021–2030; the National Action Plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security; the Disability Act 2020; the Women Enterprise Fund Act 2020; and the National Investment Plan (2021–2025). The National Gender and Women Empowerment Policy 2023–2033 and the National Children's Policy were currently being amended to address sexual and gender-based violence, including female genital mutilation, and child marriage. Combating female genital mutilation had also been prioritized in the revised National Development Plan.
4. Details of the systems of law applicable in the Gambia were set out in paragraph 38 of the periodic report while the implications for the applicability of constitutional provisions and other laws were described in paragraph 40. In the period 2019 to 2021, steps had been taken to review and harmonize all existing laws, with particular focus on provisions that stifled freedom of expression or discriminated against women and children. A considerable number of national laws related to issues that also fell within the purview of customary and Sharia law, such as marriage, property rights and other personal law matters. The Constitution Promulgation Bill 2020 had been rejected by the National Assembly and would be resubmitted in 2023.
5. Although legislation was in place to prohibit sexual and gender-based violence and punish the perpetrators, enforcement remained a major challenge. Female genital mutilation was rarely reported and, when it was, there was usually insufficient evidence to prosecute and punish the perpetrators.
6. The original target of the Women Enterprise Fund – to provide low-interest loans to strengthen the capacity of 10,000 women entrepreneurs – had been exceeded by far. From December 2020 to date, 38,550 women from 257 groups across the country had been awarded microcredits amounting to a total of 23 million dalasis (D). The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had dealt a major blow to the country's economy, its development agenda and women's economic empowerment. Measures taken to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods were reflected in paragraphs 10 and 11 of the periodic report while specific actions aimed at improving working conditions in fisheries were set out in paragraph 74 of the replies of the Gambia to the list of issues and questions in relation to the sixth periodic report (CEDAW/C/GMB/RQ/6).
7. Sexual and gender-based violence was a major and growing concern. Efforts to enhance access to justice included the forthcoming establishment of a national forensic laboratory and the creation of courts specializing in gender-based violence to address the backlog of cases. The Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education and relevant United Nations agencies would be collaborating to support efforts to tackle sexual and gender-based violence in the Gambia. Awareness-raising activities had been conducted by NGOs, civil society organizations and government institutions to sensitize local populations, including in hard-to-reach communities.
8. An electronic gender-information management system was currently being developed to generate key indicators on gender-based violence. The system would be

linked to a recently refurbished shelter for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Psychological support and counselling services were delivered through a specialized unit within the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare. A project to expand the gender-information management system was being developed by a task force comprising government representatives, civil society actors and experts. The Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission had paid particular attention to human rights violations involving all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

9. The Disability Act 2020 granted women and girls with disabilities effective access to inclusive education, health care, justice, employment and participation in political and public life, among other things. A disability advisory council had been established within the Ministry of Gender and a range of activities had been carried out to raise awareness of disability issues.

10. The sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls were a government priority. A task force had been set up to deal with the issue of obstetric fistula, which was a widespread yet underreported health condition affecting women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa. An obstetric fistula capacity-building and rehabilitation centre was currently being set up to treat survivors, provide them with training in livelihood skills, and combat the stigma and marginalization associated with the condition.

11. Women's empowerment had been placed at the centre of the country's development strategy. A paper containing proposals for the establishment of a cabinet gender committee, a technical gender committee, a network of gender focal points, and a parliamentary gender caucus had been submitted to Cabinet for endorsement. If approved, key sectoral policies and programmes would be reviewed in order to mainstream gender and ensure the implementation of gender-responsive programming and budgeting across sectors.

12. Expressing deep sympathy to the families of the 70 children who had died from acute kidney injury, she said that a commission of inquiry had been set up and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare was engaging with partners with a view to providing psychosocial support to the families.

13. The Government would continue to invest in women's empowerment as a critical enabler for sustainable development. A number of projects were in the pipeline, including projects to promote further investment in services; establish women's empowerment centres across the country; and expand support services for victims of sexual and gender-based violence. The protection and promotion of women's rights were key elements of the National Development Plan for the period 2023–2026.

14. **A representative of the National Human Rights Commission of the Gambia** said that the Commission welcomed the measures taken to build the capacities of law enforcement personnel, prosecutors and judges in regard to trafficking offences, but was concerned about the inadequacy of implementation mechanisms. The Government should step up its financial and technical support to the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons; align national efforts with regional and international action to address trafficking as a transnational organized crime; and review the Trafficking in Persons Act 2007 to include provisions on people smuggling.

15. While the measures taken by the Government to alleviate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic were commendable, not all children had been able to access remote learning platforms owing to lack of electricity, television, radio and Internet connectivity. Moreover, the focus of the health services on the COVID-19 response had hindered women's access to sexual and reproductive health services. The Government must guarantee uninterrupted health-care services for women and girls during public emergencies, provide adequate support to the sexual and gender-based violence hotline, and promote its use nationwide.

16. While some progress had been made in increasing women's participation in political and public life, only 3 out of 21 cabinet members and 5 out of 58 parliamentarians were women. Legislation was needed to introduce a 30 per cent quota for women in politics.

17. Although the legal and institutional framework for combating sexual and gender-based violence had been strengthened, such offences were rarely prosecuted, and few employers had policies on sexual harassment in the workplace. The Sexual Offences Act

2013 should be amended to prohibit marital rape and communities should be involved in efforts to raise awareness of sexual and gender-based violence.

18. The recognition of customary law and Sharia law gave rise to certain discriminatory practices and was inconsistent with the principles of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in the Constitution. It would be useful to emulate the successful practices of countries with similar systems. Additional resources should be allocated to the National Agency for Legal Aid to enhance its capacity to support victims of sexual and gender-based violence, including child victims.

Articles 1–6

19. **Ms. Ameline** said that it was gratifying to note that the State party had introduced a legal prohibition of female genital mutilation and child marriage, established the Network against Gender Based Violence, undertaken judicial reform, adopted the Domestic Violence Act, and established the Ministry on Gender, Children and Social Welfare. Still, the current legislative framework failed to protect and advance women's rights effectively in the public and private spheres and it was disappointing that the adoption of the new Constitution had been postponed.

20. She asked how the State party intended to disseminate the Convention more broadly and implement the Committee's concluding observations, and whether there were any plans to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention. She wondered how the role and status of NGOs could be strengthened and what mechanisms were in place to enable their meaningful participation in rebuilding the country's legal, political and economic infrastructure.

21. She wished to know whether the mandate of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, whose report had been published in 2021, had been discharged comprehensively. It would be useful to know the timeline for prosecuting perpetrators of human rights violations. It was unclear whether the two requirements – accountability and reconciliation – would be given equal weight. The Committee welcomed the fact that the National Human Rights Commission enjoyed category A status and had far-reaching powers.

22. The State party's recognition of Sharia law and customary law prevented the effective implementation of the universally agreed principles underlying the Convention. Article 33 (5) of the Constitution limited the applicability of the Convention, which the State party had ratified without reservations. The Government might consider engaging with religious leaders to discuss women's fundamental human rights, as envisaged in the Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights, and amend those legal provisions that conflicted with the Convention.

23. She wished to know whether constitutional provisions affecting women's rights had been thoroughly reviewed as part of the constitutional review process; what steps the State party was taking to address the various types of discrimination that existed in the country, including discrimination based on caste or sexual orientation; whether the State party was planning to set up special women's rights divisions in its courts; and whether any efforts had been made to harmonize the procedures followed by religious tribunals, develop legal aid centres for women and increase the number of women working in the justice system.

24. **Ms. Kinteh** (Gambia), responding to the questions on the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, the constitutional review process, the application of customary and sharia law and the visibility of the Convention, said that she wished to draw the Committee's attention to the information provided in paragraphs 33, 34 and 38 of the sixth periodic report and paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 of the replies of the Gambia to the list of issues. During the constitutional review process, special consultations had been held with women and girls around the country.

25. NGOs were represented on the committees established by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare to address sexual and gender-based violence and had played a major role in developing the National Strategy and Policy on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting and preparing the sixth periodic report. They had also helped to raise

public awareness of policies and laws affecting women. Efforts to reduce the role of caste systems through awareness-raising had had a positive impact, as evidenced by the marriages now taking place between members of different castes. The rights of all individuals were respected in the Gambia, and there was no discrimination against members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

26. **Ms. Akizuki** said that she wished to know how the State party planned to bring domestic personal law, including customary and sharia law, into line with its Convention obligation to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise, including in the context of personal relationships.

27. **Ms. Ameline** said that it was important to ensure that the positive legislation being adopted was effectively implemented in practice and that legal protections against discrimination encompassed all forms of discrimination.

28. **Ms. Kinteh** (Gambia) said that the Government had initiated reviews of certain laws containing discriminatory provisions and had already submitted draft amendments addressing some of those provisions to the National Assembly.

29. **Ms. Bethel** said that she wished to find out whether the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare had set up any interministerial committees; whether the budget allocated to the Ministry, which amounted to 0.3 per cent of the national budget in 2022, was sufficient to fund the Ministry's gender-related activities; what the principle findings of the 2017 review of the National Gender and Women Empowerment Policy 2010–2020 had been; whether those findings had informed the drafting of the new gender policy being prepared for the period 2021–2030; and what the main elements of the new policy would be.

30. She would also appreciate information on any national action plan or strategy for women or intersectoral or inter-institutional agreements in place and any mechanisms for setting and monitoring targets relating to women's issues. It would be helpful to have information on the Ministry's staff and the training they received. She wished to learn about the Ministry's outreach efforts in rural areas and its use of the media to raise awareness of its policies and programmes.

31. The Committee would welcome information on the regulations that governed shelters, counselling centres and other services for women and on any guidelines available to support gender mainstreaming efforts. She wished to know what steps the State party had taken to ensure that women human rights defenders could carry out their work freely, whether women could file complaints regarding rights violations with the National Human Rights Commission and whether the Government was bound by the Commission's recommendations.

32. **Ms. Kinteh** (Gambia) said that the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare had developed an organization chart that was structured around thematic areas. It set out all the staff positions required for the Ministry to function effectively and the responsibilities associated with each position. The hiring process had begun but was not yet finished. The Ministry had assessed the training requirements of new staff members and developed the necessary training plans. The number of officers responsible for gender issues in the regions had been increased, and the staffing needs of the various units of the Directorate of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, including a unit on sexual and gender-based violence, were also being addressed. The resources for hiring and training staff would come from the Government, donor partners and international organizations.

33. Shortcomings identified during the 2017 review of the previous gender policy were being addressed in the development of the new policy, which would be broader in scope than the previous one and would cover a number of thematic areas, including sexual and reproductive health, education, climate change, economic empowerment and gender, and information and communications technology. It would be accompanied by an action plan with time-bound goals and objectives. Once completed, the new gender policy would serve as a model for the sector-specific gender policies that the Ministry was encouraging various institutions to adopt. The National Water and Electricity Company of the Gambia would

reassess the gender policy that it had already adopted in the light of the one being prepared by the Ministry.

34. In connection with its gender mainstreaming efforts, the Ministry planned to set up a committee comprising all government ministers, which would meet twice a year; a technical committee comprising the permanent secretaries of all ministries, which would meet quarterly; and a network of gender focal points at all the ministries. The Ministry also promoted gender mainstreaming in the private sector. The National Assembly had recently established a committee on gender, children and social welfare, and the Ministry was encouraging it to set up a parliamentary gender caucus.

35. The National Human Rights Commission played a significant role in preventing and responding to gender-based violence and sexual harassment at both the national and local levels and had developed a policy on sexual harassment in the workplace and in public institutions. Women could submit complaints to the Commission. The Ministry worked closely with the media to publicize its work.

36. **Ms. Akizuki** said that she wished to learn about the obstacles that the State party faced in implementing temporary special measures, including those called for under the Women's Act; any such measures that it planned to institute in the fields of education, employment and health; and the steps that it was taking to increase women's representation in the national and local legislatures to 30 per cent.

37. **Ms. Kinteh** (Gambia) said that temporary special measures were crucial for addressing gender gaps, and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare would continue to call for affirmative action legislation in all areas. The country had seen the positive impact that such measures could have when girls' primary and secondary school enrolment rates had risen after education at those levels had been made free for them.

38. **Ms. Rana** said that the measures taken by the State party to combat sexual and gender-based violence were to be commended. However, concerns remained over the enforcement of those measures, the absence of effective reporting mechanisms, the low rate of prosecutions for such offences, and the insufficient support available for victims of sexual violence.

39. The State party appeared to be predominantly dependent on external support and the work of NGOs in providing services such as help centres for victims of gender-based violence. It would be useful to know details of any plans to increase the Government's internal budget for such services and to expand or establish similar services in the near future. She wondered whether the State party would consider establishing a mechanism to provide a safe space for reporting sexual and gender-based violence or establishing a special victim support fund.

40. She would welcome information on the key findings of the study conducted in 2021 with a view to developing the National Strategy and Policy on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting and the Plan of Action for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation. The delegation might describe the current status of both instruments. She wondered what measures were being taken to promote understanding of the criminal nature of female genital mutilation, especially among medical professionals, parents, and community and religious leaders, and to tackle cross-border female genital mutilation.

41. Given that the rate of domestic violence had been high during the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be useful to know whether a multi-sectoral approach would be taken to tackle the problem and address the various other setbacks resulting from the pandemic. It would be interesting to know how the COVID-19 recovery strategy ensured access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, for women and girls.

42. The Committee would like to know how the State party planned to strengthen partnerships with civil society and human rights defenders in order to tackle gender stereotypes and gender-based violence. She wondered how the media participated in campaigns against gender stereotypes and whether those campaigns were targeted at all groups of society, including men, women, and religious and community leaders. She asked whether the State party would consider developing guidelines for courts on taking a gender-sensitive approach in cases of gender-based violence. Lastly, she wondered what measures

were taken to ensure that Gambian members of United Nations peacekeeping forces did not engage in sexual exploitation and abuse.

43. **Ms. Kinteh** said that the underreporting of sexual and gender-based violence was due to a lack of confidence in the police and fears that cases would be dismissed as personal affairs. Training on gender-based violence had therefore been included in the curriculum of the police training school, a manual on dealing with gender-based violence had been developed for the police, and a gender unit had been established within the police training school. Those initiatives, and other community outreach programmes, had resulted in a higher number of victims submitting reports of gender-based violence. Prosecution rates had been affected by witnesses withdrawing from cases due to their lengthy processing times. The establishment of a special court for gender-based violence had reduced the duration of proceedings to two weeks and had been complemented by the opening of a new forensic laboratory. Thanks to police training programmes, there had been no reported cases of sexual violence being committed by police officers who had later become United Nations peacekeepers.

44. A sensitization programme had led to greater awareness of the criminal nature of female genital mutilation and the penalties that it carried. However, underreporting continued to be a problem, including in cases involving the death of children or cross-border female genital mutilation. The Government therefore offered the public assurances that the identities of persons who reported such offences would not be disclosed. Religious leaders had participated in sensitization initiatives, but some still continued to practise female genital mutilation. The topic was becoming less taboo, which had resulted in a slight decrease in the proportion of girls who had been victims, although numbers were still high.

45. Shelters were available for victims of gender-based violence, including a newly established drop-in centre. A hotline for victims had also been established. Funding from the United Nations Population Fund would be used to protect children affected by sexual and gender-based violence and further funding would be requested from the Government with the aim of establishing a victim support fund.

46. As part of the country's COVID-19 recovery plan, a high proportion of the population, including families with vulnerable children, had received food aid or cash transfers. The recommendations issued in connection with a study by the United Nations Population Fund would be used to produce an action plan to address the rise in female genital mutilation, child marriage and gender-based violence during the pandemic.

47. **Ms. Rana** said that she wished to know what plans the State party had to increase funding from internal sources and ensure the long-term sustainability of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, given that just 0.3 per cent of the national budget was currently allocated to it. It would be useful to know what protection was in place for witnesses in cases of female genital mutilation and whether the State party planned to evaluate the impact of its sensitization programmes.

48. **Ms. Kinteh** said that the Government would work closely with civil society to assess the impact of sensitization campaigns. A recent gender position paper had indicated that 3 per cent of the upcoming national budget should be allocated to gender programming across all ministries and sectors. The proposal would be discussed in Cabinet.

49. **Ms. Gabr** said that she wished to know whether the State party had plans to amend the Trafficking in Persons Act 2007 to align it with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol). She would welcome further details of the national action plan on trafficking in persons for 2021–2025, including its goals, programmes, financing and training activities, and whether the State party planned to study the root causes of trafficking and collect data on cases of trafficking. She would also be interested to hear whether law enforcement officials were trained to distinguish between trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants, whether rehabilitation was provided for victims of trafficking in persons, whether training was provided for first aid and social workers, and whether a hotline was available for victims in rural areas.

50. Following a visit to the Gambia by the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material in 2019, the Special rapporteur had issued recommendations relating to child sex tourism, the complicity of officials in trafficking in persons and the inadequacy of child protection mechanisms. It would be helpful to know how the State party planned to implement those recommendations. She wondered whether the State party planned to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). The delegation might describe any measures being taken to rehabilitate and reintegrate victims of exploitation in prostitution. She would be interested to know how the State party ensured that female victims of trafficking and exploitation in prostitution were not arrested and prosecuted as a consequence of being trafficked, given that no such protection was provided for in the Trafficking in Persons Act 2007.

51. **Ms. Kinteh** said that progress was being made towards the ratification of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). A national task force of civil society organizations and NGOs supported government efforts to combat trafficking. A memorandum of understanding had been signed with Sierra Leone and Nigeria and measures were being taken to identify victims, who were taken to shelters. Efforts were being made to streamline the process for repatriating victims. However, improvements needed to be made to the State party's capacity for prosecuting offenders of trafficking offences.

52. In cases where people were trafficked out of the Gambia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and receiving States worked together to facilitate their repatriation. The Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry for Foreign affairs and the International Organization for Migration supported young female victims in their efforts to reintegrate into society.

53. Services for victims, including a hotline, were provided in compliance with the Palermo Protocol. A programme to address paedophilia, including sensitization initiatives, would help to address child sex tourism, but cases were still underreported.

54. **Ms. Gabr** said that answers were still pending to the questions on the national action plan on trafficking and a study of the root causes of trafficking, but responses could be provided in writing.

Articles 7–9

55. **Ms. Manalo** said that it would be useful to know what percentage of the candidates in the most recent election had been women. She wondered what steps were being taken to improve the participation of women in public services, given that they were underrepresented in that area. She would also like to know what percentage of the staff working in international relations, the armed forces and the civil service were women, what percentage of persons involved in high-level decision-making in those areas were women, and what percentage of judges were women.

56. **Ms. Kinteh** said that, despite awareness-raising initiatives to encourage women to stand in the elections to the National Assembly, there had been few female candidates and only three had won seats. After consultation with the United Nations Development Programme and different political parties, a survey would be carried out to establish why women were not standing in elections. The results of the survey would be used to develop a programme to increase the number of women candidates. Any women who successfully stood in the upcoming local elections would be held up as role models and would undergo formal training.

57. There were fewer women than men in Cabinet and in decision-making positions. However, some government institutions now had female deputy directors for the first time in history. There were fewer female than male judges in courts of all types and the heads of all district tribunals were male. However, it was notable that female judges had been appointed to the qadi courts for the first time in the country's history.

58. **Ms. Bethel**, speaking on behalf of **Ms. Narain**, said that the Gambia Nationality and Citizenship Act did not provide for nationality to be granted to children born in the State party who would otherwise be stateless. In the light of such gaps in the legislation and of

reports of arbitrary deprivation of nationality and restrictive practices in relation to the issuance of citizenship documents, she would appreciate information on the situation of stateless persons in the Gambia. She also wished to know how the State party ensured adequate protection for stateless persons and whether it had aligned its domestic legislation with the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The Committee also wished to know how the Action Plan of the Gambia Against Statelessness, adopted in 2015, helped the State party to address the problem and whether the Government intended to take any further measures, such as amending its nationality legislation, in order to reduce statelessness.

59. It would be useful to know what proportion of children born to refugees in the State party remained unregistered and undocumented and whether the State party had taken any steps to prevent them from becoming stateless. She would appreciate an update on any measures taken during the reporting period to destigmatize children born out of wedlock and their mothers. Information on the effectiveness of campaigns conducted in rural areas to raise awareness of the importance of birth registration and the penalty attached to late registration would be useful. Given that children's birth certificates were normally issued in the father's name, she wondered whether children whose birth certificates were issued in their mother's name suffered any disadvantages and how the State party resolved paternity disputes arising from such situations.

60. **Ms. Kinteh** (Gambia) said that paternity disputes were resolved by means of DNA tests. Birth registration was mandatory for all qualifying children and took place upon receipt of the required information about their parents. The Government was conducting a nationwide campaign to register all citizens using an electronic system, thereby ensuring their access to the National Health Insurance Scheme. The campaign was complete in urban areas and was ongoing in rural areas. Members of the public were responding positively to the campaign and bringing their children for registration. Since the Government did not wish to see children becoming stateless, registering all children born to refugee parents in the Gambia was a priority. Such registrations were free of charge for all children under 5 years of age, regardless of the parents' country of origin.

61. **Ms. Akizuki** said that, while she welcomed the Government's efforts to increase women's participation in politics, she would appreciate further information on concrete measures taken to increase the number of public and elected officials who were women. Such measures might include programmes to enhance political leadership and campaigning skills, or the provision of campaign funding for women candidates.

62. **Ms. Kinteh** (Gambia) said that the Mayor of Banjul was a woman but all other mayors in the country were men. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare would collaborate with civil society organizations and United Nations agencies to help political parties and women candidates to prepare for the upcoming local elections. Despite the Ministry's extensive efforts to encourage women candidates to stand in the recent National Assembly elections, very few had applied. There was a cultural preference within the country for voting for men. The Ministry was also planning legislative reform, but the draft new constitution, which would have provided for increased political representation of women and persons with disabilities, had been rejected by the National Assembly.

Articles 10–14

63. **Ms. Haidar** said that she was concerned to note that, owing to the prevalence of child marriage, far more girls than boys received no schooling at all or were illiterate. The State party might consider what measures it could take to discourage girls from dropping out of school, including girls who had married or become mothers, and to prevent their stigmatization upon return to school. In addition, it would be helpful to know whether the Government had contemplated offering more scholarships to girls, providing them with safe transport to schools and identifying methods for combating the harassment of girls in school. Noting that a minimum of 50 per cent of school places were reserved for girls, she wondered how the State party monitored girls' enrolment in school and what factors discouraged them from enrolling.

64. She would like to know when the Government was planning to adopt the Basic and Secondary Education Amendment Bill, under which the discriminatory provisions of the Basic and Secondary Education Act would be reviewed and repealed. She would be interested to know whether the Government would introduce secondary school materials that challenged gender stereotypes and changed students' understanding of gender roles and their limitations. She wondered what was being done to reduce illiteracy rates among women and girls, assess measures for combating illiteracy and identify any shortcomings in those measures. She wished to know what, if anything, the State party was doing to encourage girls to study traditionally male-dominated subjects, such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics and information and communications technology. Lastly, she would like to know how the State party ensured access to education for rural women, women living in poverty and women with disabilities.

65. **Ms. Kinteh** (Gambia) said that, thanks to the Government's particular focus on girls' education, more girls than boys now completed each school year from grade 6 up to grade 12. Scholarships had been offered for girls, but that had led to a reduction in boys' enrolment, so the Government had started offering scholarships for children of both genders. The Ministry for Basic and Secondary Education had established a policy to reduce and eventually eliminate sexual harassment of girls in schools. When a girl dropped out of school owing to pregnancy, she could resume her education at another school when her child was 6 months old. The Ministry for Basic and Secondary Education, supported by the United Nations Population Fund, had implemented a compulsory sex education curriculum that covered child marriage, gender-based violence and female genital mutilation, among other subjects. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare encouraged girls to study science and engineering by offering them support and small scholarships. The Ministry hoped to start offering such scholarships for information and communications technology. Other branches of the Government offered scholarships for science, technology, engineering and mathematics to both boys and girls.

66. **Ms. Manalo** said that she would be interested to hear about any programmes in place to ensure that women who participated in politics were properly equipped to be effective public servants and administrators.

67. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she wondered whether the Government might consider the fact that the high rate of child marriage could mean that the larger numbers of girls completing grade 9, for instance, would not necessarily translate into more girls going to university. While the policy of allowing young mothers to return to school was commendable, she wondered whether the Government had reflected on the arguably punitive effect of preventing them from returning for six months and forcing them to move to a different school of potentially inferior quality. In addition, she was unsure whether girls in mixed-sex schools had the opportunity to play significant leadership roles within their school.

68. **Ms. Kinteh** (Gambia) said that young mothers were allowed to return to school at any point after giving birth but were encouraged to do so after six months so that they could breastfeed their children during that six-month period. It was the mothers themselves who preferred to move to a different school, out of fear of being stigmatized by their peers. In order to ensure that women who participated in politics were properly equipped to serve, any women elected during the local elections in 2023 would receive formal training and would be mentored by women already serving as elected officials.

69. **Ms. Xia** said that she wished to know whether the Government would establish clear targets, indicators and initiatives in relation to women's economic participation and employment as part of the planned comprehensive transitional reform process mentioned in the report. The delegation might describe any measures being taken to combat sexual harassment in the workplace, which had been criminalized in 2013. The Committee also wished to know who was responsible for proving that an act of sexual harassment had been committed and whether victims had access to an effective, independent and confidential complaint procedure. If such a procedure had been established, the Committee would welcome data on its implementation and effectiveness.

70. She wished to know what initiatives had been implemented to promote women's economic participation and equal employment. She wondered whether there were plans to introduce vocational skills training, in particular for rural women and married women, whether any such training plans were funded and how effective they had been. She would be grateful for details of any measures taken to protect women employed in the informal sector against the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. She would like to know whether there was a requirement for young women to be proportionally represented in the Youth Empowerment Project and what share of those actually participating in it were women. Lastly, it would be interesting to know whether stable and long-term human and financial resources would be allocated to ensure the Project's sustainability.

71. **Ms. Kinteh** (Gambia) said that the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare was implementing the Women Enterprise Fund to enhance women's economic capacities in small-scale and microenterprises. As of October 2022, a total of D53 million in loans, at an interest rate of 5 per cent, had been distributed among 38,550 women. Training in entrepreneurship and financial literacy was given to those women before the loans were granted to them. The Fund had improved the lives and employability of a large number of women.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.