



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

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

Summary record of the 839th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 8 July 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Šimonović

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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*)

Fifth and sixth periodic reports of Iceland
(CEDAW/C/ICE/5 and 6, CEDAW/C/ICE/Q/6 and Add. 1)

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

2. **Ms. Gunnsteinsdottir** (Iceland), introducing the fifth and sixth periodic reports of Iceland (CEDAW/C/ICE/5 and 6), said that the country's economic growth had been continuous since 2003. Unemployment was very low, but the rate was slightly higher for women than men. In 2006, to celebrate 30 years since the approval of the first comprehensive legislation on gender equality, a broad-based committee had been appointed to review recent legislation on the issue. After consulting with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social partners, the committee had drawn up a draft bill which had been submitted to the general public for comments. The bill, introducing firmer provisions regarding the rights and obligations of those responsible for implementing gender equality, had been finally adopted in February 2008 as the Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, or the new Gender Equality Act.

3. The Act established specific powers for the Centre for Gender Equality, the Gender Equality Council and the Complaints Committee on Gender Equality. The State party had answered the Committee's questions about the roles and relations of those bodies in its responses to item 3 on the list of issues (CEDAW/C/ICE/Q/6 and Add.1). Among its most important functions, the Centre for Gender Equality was expected to provide monitoring, information and consultation services for a wide range of entities. She described the process by which the Centre exercised its supervisory mandate and the measures that it could take if its requests were not complied with, including referring the matter to the Complaints Committee. The latter was an independent administrative committee and its new powers, including the delivering of binding decisions, were described in the responses to item 4 on the list of issues. The Gender Equality Council would continue to

work as an administrative committee, but under the new Act, the number of members had been increased from nine to eleven.

4. Each ministry was henceforth required to appoint a specialist in gender equality issues to mainstream gender equality within the ministry and the institutions that worked under its auspices. The new legislation also provided that gender mainstreaming must be respected in all policymaking and planning carried out on behalf of ministries and public bodies. In the education sector, a special adviser must monitor the implementation of the law stipulating that students at all levels of schooling must receive education on gender equality issues, with special emphasis on the equal participation of both genders in the community.

5. One of the mandates of the Gender Equality Council was to advise the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security and the Director of the Centre for Gender Equality on relevant policymaking, placing special emphasis on the equal status of men and women in the labour market and the coordination of family life and working life. The Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security remained responsible for introducing a motion for Parliament to approve the four-year gender equality action plan; the next action plan would be introduced in the autumn. Local authorities would continue to appoint gender equality committees, and the latter also prepared four-year gender equality policies and action plans and reported to the Centre for Gender Equality every two years.

6. The new Act stipulated that the Centre for Gender Equality should seek to change traditional gender images and eliminate negative stereotyping, a task that was considered vital for achieving gender equality. The Centre was also given the task of organizing a biennial gender equality forum, open to all, to encourage a more vigorous debate on the issue between representatives of both the public and the private sectors, and to provide ideas and suggestions for the country's gender equality action plan. The Gender Equality Act prohibited all discrimination on the grounds of gender and contained a definition of direct and indirect discrimination. Although the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security had proposed the definition of direct discrimination contained in the Convention, Parliament had preferred the definition set forth in the European Union Directives on gender equality.

7. The Act on Maternity/Paternity Leave and Parental Leave had been amended recently to change the conditions and the reference period for calculation of payments from the Maternity/Paternity Leave Fund in favour of parents. Implementation of the new law would be closely monitored in order to make any necessary adjustments. The Gender Equality Act contained new provisions to combat gender-based violence, which was specifically defined in the text. The Act stated that one of the tasks of the Centre for Gender Equality was to focus on that area, because it had long been understood that such violence significantly hindered women from enjoying equal rights and opportunities.

8. The Government had recently decided to establish an action plan to combat human trafficking in Iceland. Under the plan, the scope of the problem would be examined, and proposals made on preventive actions and on educating the public. The plan would also include measures to ensure the protection of victims and the prosecution of perpetrators. A consultation committee had been appointed to prepare the plan, and it was anticipated that a draft would be submitted to the Government before the end of 2008.

9. The Gender Equality Act specifically required gender mainstreaming in all educational policies and plans and provided that students should receive instruction on gender equality issues. A developmental project had been initiated addressing gender equality education in nursery schools and primary schools with the collaboration of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, the Centre for Gender Equality, and five local authorities. The project was a response to the importance of increasing education and discussion of equality issues among young people.

10. Employers were not allowed to discriminate between their employees on any grounds. Both employers and trade unions were expected to work systematically to equalize the position of women and men in the labour market, while increasing the proportion of women in management and decision-making positions; in addition, entities with more than 25 employees were required to draw up gender-equality policies. Implementation of such provisions needed to be monitored and, under the new Act, the Centre for Gender Equality was empowered to request a report on the measures taken, make recommendations and even impose fines for non-compliance.

11. The Gender Equality Act stipulated that employees were no longer prohibited from disclosing their salaries to a third party, a provision designed to combat the chronic problem of gender-based wage discrimination and increase transparency. Several committees had also been established to propose measures to bridge the wage gap, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security would oversee the development of a certification system for both the public and the private sector on the implementation of equal pay and equal rights policies with regard to recruitment and termination of employment. Standards for the implementation of equal-pay and equal-opportunity policies, including professional development, would be developed.

12. The struggle for gender equality in Iceland had been long and arduous; nevertheless, full equality between men and women had not yet been attained. The primary focus was to achieve equality in the labour market and, above all, eliminate gender-based wage differences. The need to educate the young on the importance of gender equality, in both public and private life, was also a matter of great importance. Iceland strongly supported Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security and had recently adopted a national action plan to implement it. Also, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had signed an agreement with the University of Iceland for cooperation on gender issues, and an international centre on gender equality research and education would be established at the University before the end of the year.

Articles 1 to 6

13. **Mr. Flinterman** said that the Committee had been informed that Iceland had not domesticated the Convention and, also, that the Government as a whole had not been involved in formally adopting the periodic reports. He therefore wanted to know how visible the Convention was in the domestic legal order of Iceland. The adoption of the new Gender Equality Act was a very encouraging measure, but it was disturbing that the definition of discrimination had been taken from European Union Directives and not from the Convention. Consequently, it would be useful to know to what extent the new Act incorporated the Convention; for example, whether it included provisions on temporary special measures or gender stereotypes. He also asked whether the preamble to the

new Act specifically referred to the Convention, to ensure that, when applying the Act, the judiciary would do so in light of Iceland's obligations under it, and taking into account that the Convention was a dynamic instrument that had evolved over the past 25 years.

14. An important aspect of the new Act was that the Gender Equality Complaints Committee could give binding rulings, and that the Gender Equality Centre had the mandate to implement such rulings. He would appreciate further information on the lessons learned in that regard over the past six months. Since the Centre could file actions before the courts of Iceland, it would be useful to know whether it had already done so and, in that case, whether it had invoked not only the Act, but also the Convention. The Committee would also appreciate examples of complaints submitted by the Centre on its own initiative and would like to know whether such complaints made reference to the Convention.

15. It was very disappointing that, in its response to item 30 on the list of issues and questions raised by the Committee, the reporting State had indicated that no measures had been planned or were in place to raise awareness about the Optional Protocol and encourage its use, particularly because the reply was incompatible with Iceland's obligations under the Optional Protocol. Under article 13 of the Protocol, each State party undertook to make widely known and give publicity to the Convention and the Protocol. He suggested that the Government might have overlooked that important obligation and that use of the Optional Protocol would make the Convention more visible within Iceland's domestic legal order.

16. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, asked whether Iceland had made use of the concluding observations on the previous report when preparing its new legislation on gender equality. It would be interesting to know how much of the Convention had already been incorporated into the national legal system through the new Gender Equality Act, what definition of discrimination had been used and whether it included provisions for all the areas covered by article 1 of the Convention. The reporting process did not seem sufficiently visible at the national level, as Iceland did not submit its periodic reports to Parliament. All treaty bodies in the past few years had recommended that such reports should be widely circulated.

17. **Ms. Gunnsteinsdottir** (Iceland) said that the Convention had the same status as other international instruments ratified by Iceland, which were taken into account but not referred to directly by Icelandic courts in their judgements. It was not the Government's policy to incorporate such instruments directly into domestic law but it did do so indirectly. For example the Gender Equality Act reflected the provisions of the Convention and included a clause on temporary special measures. There were also provisions to combat gender violence, promote gender equality in the labour market and help reconcile family life and work as well as provisions on education and schooling. The Children's Act ensured equality between parents in terms of custody of children. One of the tasks of the Centre for Gender Equality was to work against stereotyping and negative views of women.

18. The reports had been prepared in conjunction with other ministries and, as in the case of other international instruments, the ministry with main responsibility for the area of work had finalized the reports and the minister had approved them. Although they had not been submitted to Parliament, that possibility could be considered for the future. The committee that had reviewed the Act in 2006 was well aware of the Convention and had proposed a definition of direct discrimination for inclusion in the Act, but Parliament had not accepted that proposal.

19. **Ms. Jonsdottir** (Iceland) said that the main Parliamentary debate on gender equality took place every two years when the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security submitted a report on the status of gender equality and progress on the current government action plan or a draft for the new action plan. The report currently being prepared would refer to the present discussion and could include a proposal for enhancing the visibility of the Convention if that was found to be necessary.

20. **Ms. Astgeirsdottir** (Iceland) said that there was quite a high level of awareness of the Convention and other United Nations conventions and resolutions. Iceland's first comprehensive legislation on the equal rights of women and men had been adopted after the First World Conference on Women. Subsequent revisions to that legislation had included references to the women's conferences, the Convention and the recommendations of United Nations bodies.

21. There had been new legislation at the beginning of March regarding the Centre for Gender Equality, and the new Complaints Committee had recently begun its work. The implications of the changes introduced, including the addition of the word “binding”, was not yet clear. An initiative taken by the Centre had led to a court case regarding a position at the University of Iceland.

22. **Ms. Neubauer** said that it seemed that the previous Gender Equality Act and national gender equality action plans had not been fully implemented. She wondered if the main obstacles had been identified and what measures had been taken or were planned to ensure full implementation of the new Act and action plan. The Committee also wished to know whether the gender equality bodies had sufficient human and financial resources and political support and authority to function effectively and in a timely manner.

23. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that she was concerned about immigrant women, as foreign citizens currently accounted for 6 per cent of Iceland’s population. According to information from civil society sources, up to 40 per cent of women in the Reykjavik shelter were immigrants. That high percentage reflected the particular vulnerability of those women who were often dependent on their husbands for residence rights. Although the authorities sometimes renewed residence permits for women who left their husbands because of domestic violence, the law had not been amended and therefore still deterred the reporting of such violence. Moreover, women were not always aware of their rights. She requested information on how their situation and needs were being addressed and whether there were plans for surveys and other measures in the new action plan.

24. The report did not give full information with regard to Iceland’s commitments under article 5. Despite the measures taken for reconciliation of work and family life, maternity and paternity leave, equality plans in firms, and efforts to diversify academic and professional choices, there were still widespread stereotypes concerning the roles and values of women and men. The incidence of domestic violence and rape was increasing, but the prosecution rates for such offences remained low. In the labour market, women had little access to senior posts, there was a persistent wage gap and increasing numbers of women were in part-time work. Although women accounted for 40 per cent of board members in the public sector, the figure

for the private sector was apparently only 19 per cent. Awareness-raising campaigns should be extended to the general public, and she hoped that efforts to change traditional stereotypes would be a strong component of the new action plan.

25. **Ms. Hayashi** said that she hoped that Iceland would take advantage of its high rate of GDP growth in the previous year, which could not have been achieved without women’s contributions, to enhance gender equality as effectively as possible. She requested more information on the temporary special measures provision included in the new legislation of 2008 and wondered how they were defined in the law and whether such provisions were stronger under the new law.

26. According to information provided by NGOs, there had been a Supreme Court decision under the former Gender Equality Act whereby, in the case of two equally qualified job applicants of different sex, the appointment should go to the representative of whichever sex was a minority in the profession in question. She asked for more details of the case and whether the outcome had been incorporated into the new 2008 legislation and also wondered whether the court had referred to the Convention. Most of the temporary special measures referred to in the report could be described as awareness-raising activities. It would be useful to know whether temporary special measures were planned to increase the number of women in male-dominated areas.

27. **Ms. Shin** said that the Committee had high expectations of Iceland, yet domestic violence remained a concern. It was surprising that the police could lift restraining orders when only the courts could issue them. Surely the courts should be the final authority in that regard and also needed to be informed for the purposes of monitoring and statistics. The number of such orders issued each year seemed low compared to the number of women and children in shelters.

28. **Ms. Begum** said that, although the Gender Equality Act contained new provisions to counteract gender-based violence, it was difficult to see how women could achieve equal rights when prostitution had been legalized, despite the advocacy of NGOs for criminalizing the buying of sex. More and more women were engaged in selling sex and trafficking, and exploitation of foreign women was increasing. The

numbers of victims seeking assistance from NGOs were rising steadily, but the numbers reported to the authorities and convictions for sexual violence against women remained the same. Most foreign victims did not wish for a trial, for fear of deportation. The State party should indicate whether it planned to adopt legal measures to combat trafficking and to establish victim and witness protection programmes.

29. Although a 2006 amendment to the Penal Code had included harsher penalties for rapists, the courts had been slow in applying them and the current system of restraining orders also seemed ineffective. She asked whether there was a gender-based training programme for law enforcement agencies and the judiciary and whether there was any communication or agreement with sending countries to address trafficking issues. Information was also needed on support services for trafficking victims, especially unaccompanied minors and immigrant women.

30. **Ms. Shin** said that strip dancers from other countries were receiving visas and work permits to work in clubs in Iceland. She asked how many such clubs existed and whether a dance club owner would be prosecuted for receiving payments from a dancer who engaged in prostitution and also wondered how such illicit profits could be detected. It would be useful to receive information on working conditions and on inspections of such premises and on how human rights violations could be detected. Unfortunately, there was no law concerning the demand side, which seemed related to the prevalent attitude to domestic violence. As there were no specific penalties for such violence, perpetrators could escape punishment by requesting treatment. The delegation should indicate what measures the Government planned to take in relation to those issues.

31. **Ms. Chutikul** noted that no information had been provided concerning the forms of violence that had led women and children to take refuge in shelters, although the report mentioned that incest was increasing and that existing special counselling services were insufficient. She asked what plans and preventive measures were in place in that regard. The Committee wished to know whether there had been any cases of violation of the prohibition on corporal punishment at home or at school and whether the booklet to be published on the subject of corporal punishment would refer to positive discipline techniques and would be made available to both teachers and parents. It was

important that the Ministry of Education should be involved.

32. The concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic report, considered in 2002, had recommended that international cooperation with regard to trafficking should be increased. Iceland had previously worked with the Nordic-Baltic Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings, and was currently active in the Council of Baltic Sea States. More information was requested on the work of that group and whether it had had any impact on efforts to combat trafficking. The State party should also explain why ratification of the Protocol to the Palermo Convention had been delayed.

33. She wondered whether the 2003 act that criminalized trafficking covered trafficking for purposes other than prostitution and what measures had been taken for victim protection and recovery and also wished to know whether there were any special provisions for children and immigrant women victims and whether Iceland was aware of the 2002 OHCHR Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking and used them in its efforts to combat trafficking. Intervention in cases of forced prostitution had been fragmented and some authorities probably ignored the problems. Lastly, she asked whether pornography, including pornography using girl children, was legal and also enquired about its distribution through the print or electronic media and whether those issues were covered by the plan of action.

34. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, stressed the need for extensive data collection in order to ascertain the proportion of women affected by gender-based violence. She asked whether there was an observatory with responsibility in that area or a body studying such cases, particularly in order to determine the effect of preventive measures. Fuller information would also be appreciated about the period of application of restraining orders, the number of shelters available to women victims of violence and financial and other support for the establishment of helplines.

35. **Ms. Gunnsteinsdottir** (Iceland) said that the new Gender Equality Act and the related action plan had not yet been brought fully into effect, but they had strong political support from the Government. It was hoped that further legislation would be introduced to

empower public bodies to take all necessary measures. After some discussion about the financing of the new Act, the Government had approved a 50 per cent increase in the funding of the Centre for Gender Equality, and allocations had been made for the first time to enable the various ministries to appoint gender equality experts.

36. There were currently more women immigrants than ever before in Iceland, but the majority of immigrants continued to be men. Such women were particularly vulnerable, and the Ministry of Social Affairs had included special measures for them in its action plan on domestic and sexual violence. In addition, Parliament had recently adopted a resolution on an action plan for immigrants, both male and female, and a special survey had been undertaken to collect more information about the immigrant population.

37. As for the number of children said in the sixth periodic report to have been admitted into the Women's Refuge, it should be understood that those children were there with their mothers and were not direct victims of domestic violence. Lastly, corporal punishment had never been allowed in Iceland, and concerns about violence to children were fully addressed by the Child Protection Act.

38. **Ms. Jonsdottir** (Iceland) said that the requirement of 40 per cent participation by women concerned only the public sector. The Norwegian experience had been discussed at length but no final conclusion had yet been reached on the best way to ensure the same level of representation for women in the private sector, whether by force of law or other means.

39. With regard to prostitution, while it had recently increased in Iceland, it remained a hidden phenomenon. As for trafficking in persons, no such case had come before the courts and, under the Penal Code as amended in 2003, it was banned, although attempts were made to use Iceland as a transit country between Europe and the United States. Information on the subject was provided essentially by NGOs. In the recent past, there had been only one reported victim of trafficking. However, the phenomenon did indeed exist, as did that of organized crime, and work was for that reason under way to prepare a first action plan and to determine the measures needed to ratify the Palermo Protocol and European Union conventions on the

subject. The plan was expected to be ready by autumn 2008. The strip club phenomenon had peaked in Iceland 10 years previously and had been strenuously combated, particularly by local government. They were banned under a new law, but one club still remained in operation, by virtue of an exemption, and was closely monitored by the police.

40. **Ms. Astgeirsdottir** (Iceland) said that a special committee had been established to follow up the action plan on domestic and sexual violence; it had undertaken a wide survey on violence in close relationships and was compiling and scrutinizing all relevant data, obtained from a variety of sources, including police, teachers and shelters, and was expected to submit its report in 2009. As for prostitution, upon completion in the near future of a Nordic study on the subject, the Government would have a clearer idea of how to combat it. In response to the concern about immigrant women, she said that the Centre for Gender Equality was preparing information sheets to inform such women of their human rights, and also of their civil and property rights.

41. The Gender Equality Act provided in its article 2 for special measures to improve gender equality. Some had already been taken, leading to increased numbers of women studying engineering and computer science at the University of Iceland; others were to be proposed by the Centre for Gender Equality. There was a need to study and change female stereotypes, particularly in regard to types of work and education, which were largely attributable to the large number of women currently working in such fields as teaching and nursing.

42. **Ms. Jonsdottir** (Iceland) said that the employment rate was very high in Iceland, including among immigrant women, who consequently did not suffer from exclusion. Under a new action plan for the integration of immigrants, employers were given financial incentives to offer courses in Icelandic for foreigners, including rights-related content. Pornography was banned in the country but, in the absence of a generally accepted definition, magazines that might well be so regarded continued to be on sale. However, concrete action had been taken against pornography on the Internet, in cooperation with the European Union and through dedicated telephone lines, and a number of users had been identified.

43. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** regretted that the State party's reports had not involved all branches of Government nor been submitted for Government approval. She enquired whether the two-yearly report to Parliament on gender issues included the concluding observations of the Committee and whether there was a gender equality committee in Parliament.

44. **Ms. Gunnsteinsdottir** (Iceland) said that the Committee's recommendations in 2002 had indeed been informally discussed in Parliament, which had a special committee on social affairs and social security responsible for studying gender equality issues. Moreover, all members could and did put questions on the subject to ministers.

45. **Ms. Shin** reiterated her concern about restraining orders. She also wished to know what effective measures could be taken by the police against a club owner who allowed strip dancing.

46. **Ms. Simms** noted that the State party had legalized prostitution, which in Iceland was largely invisible as the women concerned were of the same racial type. The authorities should be asking themselves why men had resource to prostitutes, thereby endangering family life, and what could be done to stem that demand.

47. **Ms. Gunnsteinsdottir** (Iceland) said that the action plan on domestic and sexual violence included a special project on the disputed question of allowing the police to decide on restraining orders and not the courts, but she could not provide any further information for the time being. Other measures were also planned for the protection of both victims and witnesses and were being considered by the Ministry of Justice. A helpline had been established, operated by the Red Cross.

48. **Ms. Jonsdottir** (Iceland) said that the Committee could rest assured that the authorities in her country would continue their already largely successful fight against strip clubs. Measures had been taken to develop police awareness, particularly with a view to identifying victims. Just recently, Norwegian experts had come to the country to improve police training, and police methods were being strengthened accordingly. Ever more concrete and effective action could be expected.

49. **Ms. Astgeirsdottir** (Iceland) said that she would like to emphasize that non-governmental organizations

(NGOs) had played a significant role as specialists in addressing all issues related to prostitution. The one shelter in Iceland was very visible and accessible, and was operated with cooperation by NGOs and local and state governments.

50. **Mr. Flinterman** said that he would like information on whether the Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men (Gender Equality Act) clearly stated that the Convention was an important source for gender legislation and should therefore be used in the interpretation and application of the Act. He would like to learn how the judiciary, the legal profession and the Gender Equality Committee were trained on the evolving nature of the interpretation of the obligations of the States parties under the Convention, for specific interpretation of the Gender Equality Act.

51. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that she would like to know whether the Convention was treated the same as all United Nations and European Union treaties.

52. **Ms. Dairiam** said that it was unclear how visible the Convention was and would like information on those who had intimate knowledge of the application of the Convention, as well as on who was responsible for its application.

53. **Ms. Gunnsteinsdottir** (Iceland) said that the Convention enjoyed the same status as all other treaties, with the exception of the European Convention on Human Rights. Turning to training on the Convention, as schools were not monitored in their curriculum implementation, she did not have specific information though there were courses on international law that covered all treaties. As with law in general, lawyers were the most familiar with the Convention. International instruments were not incorporated into national law, but rather they were implemented through acts such as the Gender Equality Act, which reflected the Convention.

54. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that, while it was clear that the State party intended to implement the Convention, it was not clear how it would do so.

Articles 7 to 9

55. **Ms. Zou Xiaqiao** said that women continued to be underrepresented in decision-making posts. She

would like to learn about measures that the Government had taken to increase the participation of women. The Committee was concerned about the participation of rural women and welcomed information on the role of the Gender Equality Committee with respect to rural women. In particular, it would be interesting to know whether there were policies to increase women's participation in the agriculture sector and whether there were studies addressing rural women's participation.

56. **Ms. Neubauer** said that she would welcome information on efforts to comply with previous recommendations of the Committee in respect of temporary special measures to increase the number of women in decision-making posts, in particular in political and academic life. It would be interesting to know why gender balance had not been achieved, whether there were plans of action in place to achieve it, and whether the Government had taken into account general recommendations of the Committee.

57. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** said that Iceland had vast resources that should be used to focus on academic life and posts at the local level. She welcomed data on women in the judiciary and wondered whether the political party composed entirely of women still existed. The Government should make it clear that, while it may not directly apply the Convention, it must be applied, even in the private sector. Finally, she hoped that Iceland could be an example for other countries to follow.

58. **Ms. Astgeirsdottir** (Iceland) said that agriculture was a small, shrinking sector. There were fewer women farmers than men, and recent studies showed that most who did farm did so part-time. While women in agriculture were in practice equal owners of the business, they faced obstacles including issues related to pensions and the fact that they could not provide for their families by farming alone. Turning to the number of women in decision-making posts, she noted that the website of the Government of Iceland had posted recent data on women in decision-making posts. It was a challenge to increase their participation in political life owing to a number of changes to constituency and local government systems.

59. Though the number of women in local governments had increased somewhat, overall the changes were reflected in fewer seats available and greater competition from men, resulting in few women

in political posts. The Government would address the issue in its action plan, and political parties were being encouraged to reassess failed measures intended to increase women's participation. The party composed entirely of women no longer existed; however, former members of the party had moved to other political posts, many of which were at high levels of government.

60. **Ms. Gunnsteinsdottir** (Iceland) said that, while each political party was free to decide how it would address the issue, the Government had taken a number of measures to encourage gender equality policies through the Ministry of Social Affairs, including the establishment of a committee representing all parties to discuss gender equality, the distribution to all parties of a letter encouraging them to incorporate a policy for 50/50 participation of women and men in their obligation to address gender equality, and the organization of a seminar by and for women in Parliament to encourage increased women's participation. After the 2006 municipal elections, the Ministry had sent all elected members of Parliament a brochure on how to implement gender equality in their municipalities. Finally, the Ministry was discussing the reasons that women tended not to run for political posts, including their greater responsibility for family life with respect to men. No solution had yet been found.

Article 10

61. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that there seemed to be a pattern of high levels of women's participation at lower levels of academia and low levels of participation at high levels of academia. She would welcome information on the outcome of the University of Iceland's action plan to increase women's participation in university management. It would also be helpful to know the outcome of the Ministry of Education's plan for gender equality in the sciences. Affirmative action measures might be helpful in increasing women's participation.

62. **Ms. Astgeirsdottir** (Iceland) said that the rector of the University of Iceland, the country's largest university, was a woman, which reflected the University's success in achieving equality in management positions. It had also been successful in bridging the pay gap. The University of Iceland and the Iceland University of Education were merging, and the action plan for gender equality was under revision to

reflect the change. The report of the committee on women in science showed that there was slow progress in increasing the number of women professors. In general, once a professor met certain requirements, he or she was automatically promoted. Lastly, there was no Government affirmative action, although recently approximately 100 women had publicly announced that they were ready and qualified to assume positions of management in the private sector. While the numbers had increased, they were still few.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.