



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

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

Summary record of the 1134th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 11 July 2013, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Ameline

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

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

Combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (CEDAW/C/COD/6-7; CEDAW/C/COD/Q/6-7 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo), introducing the State party's combined sixth and seventh periodic reports (CEDAW/C/COD/6-7), reiterated her Government's commitment to working closely with the United Nations treaty bodies, and particularly with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to ensure effective implementation of the Convention.
3. War had plunged the country into crisis on many levels. The Government's efforts to create peace had brought to the fore the importance of the gender perspective in conflict prevention and resolution. Since 2005 domestic legislation had been amended and laws adopted to better protect women and eliminate discrimination. It was not enough to adopt legislation and the Government was committed to achieving results, as required under the Convention, taking into account the local context and the constraints women faced.
4. Regarding education preference was often given to boys over their female siblings; a choice imposed on families because of poverty and the fact that boys would one day head a household. Education was a public asset and it was important to ensure its quality and that it was available for all. Measures to remove obstacles to access to education had been put in place and basic literacy levels had been improved. Measures and awareness-raising campaigns to combat discrimination and harassment and steps to encourage pregnant girls or young mothers to attend school had also been taken. Girls' school completion rates had also improved and a strategy had been devised to encourage girls to take up engineering studies.
5. Health interventions were aimed to reduce the prevalence of cancer, cardiovascular disease, HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Pregnant women received health care to improve maternal health and measures had been adopted to reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Steps were being taken to eradicate harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and national programmes had been introduced to improve maternal health, reproductive health and family well-being. The strategy also included education for men and boys on sharing responsibility for sexual and reproductive health and contraception and measures to strengthen the socioeconomic capacities of women at home.
6. Social protection had been extended to women and measures adopted to ensure that they had equal access to employment and commercial opportunities. Under the new Family Code many of the discriminatory provisions in existing legislation on gender equality would disappear. The main obstacle hindering government efforts was a lack of follow-up mechanisms and implementation of initiatives and policies to address gender equality, food security, poverty and equal access to new information technology. Microcredit schemes and other initiatives to increase women's access to economic activities had been introduced.
7. Regarding the participation of women in political life, the 2006 Constitution enshrined the principle of women's participation in politics, but much remained to be done. Focal points had been established within public bodies to promote higher female representation and legislation introduced to ensure that women were appointed to decision-making posts.

8. Violence against women was a serious problem in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where women had been used as weapons of war, and the restoration of the rule of law would serve as the basis for the elimination of such acts. As part of efforts to combat gender-based violence, the Government had created a national strategy and action plan and a steering committee for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The Government was working closely with development partners and civil society to address sexual violence aggravated by armed conflict and to provide comprehensive care for victims, including psychosocial care.

9. Despite financial and security constraints, combating all forms of discrimination against women was a government priority. While not every expected outcome had been achieved, progress had been made in the legislative area. Social and religious customs and traditions continued to hold women back; changing attitudes would take time and could not be brought about through law-making alone.

Articles 1 to 6

10. **Ms. Schulz** asked whether the State party envisaged withdrawing all discriminatory provisions from national legislation, whether a timetable had been set for the review of the Family Code, the reform of the justice system and the adoption of measures to increase financial and human resources to ensure that all citizens had access to justice. She also asked how many cases invoking the provisions of the Convention had been brought before the courts. What training had been provided for staff working in the customary justice system? She requested an update on the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. She enquired about measures adopted to guarantee the rights of and prevent multiple discrimination against women from indigenous pygmy communities. Were there plans to recognize the rights of indigenous women to their ancestral lands, adopt policies to ensure equality for minority groups and include provisions in legislation to protect and involve them in decision-making?

11. **Ms. Patten** (Country Rapporteur) asked whether the State party intended to draw up a national action plan, with a specific time frame, to implement the Committee's concluding observations and recommendations and whether it would seek technical assistance for such a plan. The Committee had received reports that the justice and security system reforms were being undermined by a lack of will to implement a zero-tolerance policy against individuals suspected of serious human rights violations. What steps were being taken to address impunity, what was the status of the bill on the creation of a fund to compensate victims of sexual violence, and what steps would be taken to establish a comprehensive and adequately resourced screening mechanism to verify the human rights records of combatants and commanders in the Congolese army?

12. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked whether there were plans to appoint counsellors to advise and protect women and whether they would be part of the new United Nations intervention brigade. She wondered whether cooperation with the International Criminal Court and the United Nations on efforts to prevent violence would be strengthened. Would greater resources be allocated to the military justice system? Were there plans to have a mixed court in the future and hold trials at locations outside the areas where violations had occurred to expedite cases? With regard to the Geneva Conventions, what immediate support and/or emergency services were provided to victims of human rights violations, for example the victims of the squadrons deployed to transmit HIV deliberately to certain groups of women?

13. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the review of the Family Code had begun in 2003 and the Government had given its assurance that the process would be expedited. The draft code was currently before parliament, which would not meet again until September 2013; therefore she could not give a precise timetable for

the review. A proposal had been put forward to remove all provisions from legislation that were discriminatory against women. Access to justice for all was a challenge in such a large country with a limited budget. Nevertheless, a plan of action and timetable for justice reform had been prepared for submission to the Government, which would be urged to give priority to the matter. Nationwide programmes had been launched to train more judges; there were currently 4,000 trained judges, 400 of whom were women, and continuing professional development programmes were provided for existing judges. The Convention took precedence over national legislation and could be invoked directly, but she had no statistics on how many cases had been brought before the courts. No time frame had been set for ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention, but the matter would be taken up by parliament in due course.

14. She was surprised at the comment about indigenous minority groups because the Democratic Republic of the Congo was not a single homogenous society. The whole population was indigenous and there were many minority groups, thus the pygmy community should not receive special attention. Dispossession of ancestral lands was an issue affecting all populations living in areas where there were natural resources that were subject to exploitation and development projects, not only the pygmy communities.

15. **Mr. Kudura Bin Issa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that all land was the exclusive and inalienable property of the State and therefore no person, or group of persons, could claim ownership. However, the pygmy community was entitled to community land. Legislation on forestry and land use and management was currently under review.

16. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that in recent years, considerable work had been done with development partners, particularly in the east of the country, to strengthen the military justice system and that the bulk of aid had been allocated for that purpose. However, since there had been at least one case, in Goma, where the military court had been pillaged by armed militias the military justice system clearly required further strengthening. Draft legislation on mixed courts and separate draft legislation on the implementation of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court were still under consideration by parliament. In addition, legislation on the organization of the judicial system that also covered humanitarian and war crimes had been promulgated. One major concern was whether the International Criminal Court was the best solution for tackling impunity since it raised issues of State sovereignty. It was considered that specialized courts would be preferable, not only because they would form part of the national justice system, enabling perpetrators of international crimes to be tried in the presence of their victims, but, above all, because they would avoid issues relating to State sovereignty. Cases would be dealt with by Congolese judges with the assistance of foreign judges, if necessary. However, since all the legislation in question covered the same issues, recently, it had been realized that it might be better to harmonize them and civil society had been involved in that process. Mobile court hearings were essential, as peace tribunals had not been established throughout the country. Although the hearings were not a permanent solution and were costly, they played an important part in clearing the backlog of cases, including those relating to sexual violence, and in expediting justice.

17. The difficulties encountered in responding to the needs of victims of sexual violence stemmed mainly from a lack financial resources; the budget available for compensation in general was very low. Moreover, very few requests for compensation were received from victims of sexual violence. The Ministry of Justice and Human Rights was working to raise awareness of the need for greater resources for compensation and assistance to victims of sexual violence. Discussions were under way regarding the establishment of a fund for victims of sexual violence, but there was disagreement among development partners, the various ministries concerned and other stakeholders over who should manage the fund.

Lastly, she said that any guidance on how to draft an action plan and better implement the Convention would be welcome.

18. **Ms. Haidar** said that although the State party had made progress during the reporting period, she was concerned about the time lapse between declarations of intent to act and the actual implementation. She asked whether the change to the name of the Ministry for Gender Issues, the Family and Children had reduced the focus on gender issues and how the Government approached the implementation of activities at the provincial level. She urged for greater synergy and cooperation between the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights and the Ministry for Gender Issues, the Family and Children, stressing the importance of a multi-sectoral approach to women's issues. She hoped that the Committee's recommendations concerning the need to mobilize additional resources and support would be used by the State party to bring greater pressure to bear on relevant bodies so as to ensure the effective implementation of strategies, programmes and policies. In that connection, while welcoming the establishment of the National Council of Women, she expressed concern that no resources appeared to have been allocated to it.

19. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the budgetary issues affected both the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights and the Ministry for Gender Issues, the Family and Children.

20. **Ms. Kenda Bakajika** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that one of the key challenges for the Ministry for Gender Issues, the Family and Children was to ensure that it was able to implement its policies and strategies. A strategy on collaboration with the international community and civil society had been devised and work was under way to ensure sufficient mobilization of resources to implement the National Policy on Gender Issues and the National Strategy against gender-based violence. Moreover, a gender audit had been carried out by the Government in cooperation with the European Union in order to assess how the National Policy on Gender Issues could be applied in all sectors and how to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry for Gender Issues. The Government had also taken account of the National Council of Women and the steering committee for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in its budgetary planning and allocation of resources.

21. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the name of a ministry was not important; what mattered was how the ministry in question was used to achieve its goals. The current Minister for Gender Issues, the Family and Children was extremely active and always promoted gender issues, particularly with regard to the better representation of women. Some progress had been made in that respect; for example, four women had been elected to the National Independent Electoral Commission.

22. Turning to the issue of impunity, she said that although there had been few prosecutions for cases of sexual violence, as was borne out by relevant statistics, the Government was committed to prosecuting the military personnel responsible for such acts. However, the situation posed many challenges, particularly with regard to the gathering and preserving of evidence, which was especially difficult as the majority of sexual violence occurred in regions outside the Government's control. The problems related to human rights and sexual violence were all linked to the war, and, in order to address those problems, lasting peace was needed in the country. The Republic would pursue its cooperation with the International Criminal Court and seek the assistance of the international community to ensure that perpetrators currently residing in States that did not recognize the Court's jurisdiction would be brought to justice. She assured the Committee that no sector of the population was exempt from prosecution for sexual violence.

23. **The Chairperson** suggested that the intervention brigade being set up by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo should include experts on gender issues.

24. **Ms. Patten** expressed concern about the discrimination faced by indigenous women, especially within the pygmy community. The Committee had received information according to which they suffered marginalization in terms of access to education, health care and employment, and that they continued to be subjected to mass rape. She asked what attention was paid to vulnerable groups of women, such as women with disabilities, the elderly, widows, women and children accused of witchcraft, and women and children living on the street. She enquired about the status of the bill on forced labour and sexual slavery in the context of armed conflict. She wished to know whether there were plans to strengthen the rules to regulate the arms trade and to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty.

25. **Ms. Schulz**, emphasizing the severity of multiple discrimination, asked whether the State party was in a position to implement the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), which, *inter alia*, required women to be kept in separate cells from men and to have contact with female prison personnel only. Were there any plans to improve both pretrial and post-trial detention conditions?

26. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the Government had an action plan on penal reform and endeavoured to implement the Bangkok Rules. In the prisons she had visited, in her capacity as Minister of Justice and Human Rights, the women had been detained in separate cells from the men; although in some cases, women and minors had shared the same yards. However, she could not categorically state that the situation was the same throughout the country, particularly for pretrial detention, although the Ministry was striving to improve the situation. She acknowledged that the prison conditions were not optimal, but said that poverty was a contributing factor.

27. The law establishing a human rights commission had been promulgated and parliament was in the process of discussing and appointing members to that commission, paying particular attention to avoiding conflicts of interest. She had written a letter to parliament urging it to expedite the process and believed that when it reconvened in September 2013, the matter would be taken up.

28. **Ms. Kenda Bakajika** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action, and National Solidarity ran programmes to support vulnerable women, including indigenous women, women with disabilities, women, children and young mothers living in the street and victims of prostitution. Strategic plans had also been drawn up to provide holistic support to such women, and a group of NGOs was working with the Government and received government funds to provide educational, medical and social care for them. There was also a group of organizations working with the Ministry on indigenous issues, including a university network whose aim was to carry out surveys on the treatment of indigenous women and pygmies, the results of which would be used by the Government. The situation of indigenous and pygmy women was a sensitive issue and affected many women in the Republic; numerous activities and strategies had been introduced to deal with the situation. Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention was under discussion and training had been dispensed to members of the National Council of Women to enable them to raise awareness of the Protocol's provisions.

29. **Ms. Schulz** said that the review of the Family Code, which was profoundly discriminatory, as well as the amendments to the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure referred to in the State party's report as coming under article 4 were not in fact temporary special measures; however, the measures described to support young women who had children out of wedlock did come under article 4. Acknowledging the information provided on measures, to ensure gender parity including legislation that had not yielded results, she asked whether there were plans to strengthen that legislation so as to ensure that 50 per cent of the seats in parliament were held by women. She also asked whether the State party envisaged introducing other temporary special measures, such as indicators and

a timetable to increase female representation in the judiciary, the police and the armed forces. Welcoming the progress already made, including the recruitment of female judges, she enquired whether there was a comprehensive system to promote gender parity in all State services at the national, provincial and local levels. Lastly, she wished to know whether any temporary special measures had been introduced to address the situation of indigenous women, particularly pygmy women, in the areas of education and health care, and to provide physical and mental support to women that were victims of sexual violence.

30. **Ms. Patten** asked whether consideration had been given to implementing the recommendations made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict regarding the abolition of fees for forensic medical certificates and the exemption from legal fees for women who had been victims of sexual violence. She expressed concern at the reported attitudes towards sexual violence in the courts of the province of South Kivu, which was indicative of the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators, and suggested that the law introduced in 2006 was not being properly applied. Had the suggestion that an investigating judge should be appointed specifically to deal with cases of sexual violence in each prosecutor's office been followed up?

31. Expressing concern about the proliferation of out-of-court settlements for cases of sexual violence and an increase in police and military involvement in judicial proceedings leading to such settlements, she asked what the Government was doing to remedy the problem, which was the result of underrepresentation of women in the judicial sphere, the predominantly patriarchal nature of society and a perceived tolerance of sexual violence. She expressed the hope that the revision of the Family Code would include article 444, since it stated that a wife owed her obedience to her husband, which contributed to the pervasive nature of domestic violence in the State party. Were there any plans to draft a specific law on domestic violence? Lastly, she wished to know how the Government was responding to reports that attacks by vigilantes against women accused of being witches were going unpunished.

32. **Ms. Šimonović** asked how many of the 100 peace tribunals planned had been established and were operational. She expressed concern that despite the appointment of 4,000 judges, the number of prosecutions compared with the number of complaints remained low and asked how the State party planned to tackle the problem of impunity in the long term taking into account the current structural issues. After acknowledging the explanation given by the State party in its replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/COD/6-7/Add.1) regarding the difficulties faced in collecting and verifying the data needed to produce the exceptional report on rape and violence against women in conflict requested by the Committee, she requested clarification on future plans for data collection. Lastly, she asked for the opinion of the delegation on the potential success of the intervention brigade established by the United Nations Security Council.

33. **Ms. Gabr** expressed concern about the statement in the report to the effect that trafficking was not a widespread phenomenon in the State party; trafficking was a phenomenon experienced by all countries and was exacerbated in those experiencing conflict. She hoped that the State party would acknowledge the existence of trafficking and would take legislative and other measures to remedy the situation. She acknowledged that the State party's plan to carry out a detailed study into trafficking in women and prostitution was hampered by a lack of resources, and asked whether it intended to approach the United Nations Children's Fund or the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for assistance. She asked whether it planned to ratify the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and to draft a national strategy and relevant legislation. Experts from the African Region would

be able to provide guidance in that connection and a dedicated national institution would be vital for coordinating efforts. However, any legislation drafted should adopt a human rights-based approach and should ensure respect for the rights of victims.

34. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that although there was trafficking in women in the Republic and it was a criminal offence, it was not an acute problem and was increasingly carried out by armed groups. A matter of concern, however, was that adoption was sometimes used as a means of trafficking children. Appropriate steps were being taken to remedy the situation and IOM was carrying out a study with a view to the amendment of the relevant legislation.

35. **Ms. Kenda Bakajika** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that one of the problems the Republic faced with regard to trafficking issues was the fact that it had borders with many other countries. More investigations were needed to understand the scale of human trafficking and to draft a strategy and policies with a view to ratifying relevant international instruments. National representatives had participated in African and international conferences on the subject. Children living on the street were indeed potential victims and measures were being put in place to protect them, in cooperation with NGOs.

36. **Mr. Mpinda Munuina** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that temporary special measures had been introduced, above all in the areas of women's health and education, although that had not been mentioned in the report. Various initiatives had been taken targeted specifically at women, covering, inter alia, food security, reproductive health, the reduction of neonatal and maternal mortality and HIV screening and antiretroviral drugs. In the field of education, measures adopted included reducing female illiteracy, providing support to vulnerable groups and increasing the number of girls enrolled in primary and secondary education.

37. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) expressed concern about the veracity of some statistics regarding sexual violence, in particular the figure of more than 1 million cases of sexual violence reported in 2009. There was a tendency for certain international organizations to inflate statistics, for their own purposes, thereby thwarting the authorities' efforts to tackle the real issues. It had also been difficult for the authorities to compile accurate statistics in areas of conflict, such as the province of North Kivu, where personnel could not work in safe conditions. She acknowledged that forensic medical certificates should be free for victims of rape; clinics for rape victims had been established, but more were needed and there were problems relating to gathering of evidence and testimony. As to legal fees, work was under way with lawyers and other State officials to assess how best to assist women who claimed damages in criminal proceedings, including ways to reduce costs. In any case, there were schemes to assist persons without sufficient means and, on the whole, legal fees in criminal proceedings were minimal.

38. **The Chairperson** suggested that the best way of dealing with the apparent discrepancy in the statistics would be for the State party to improve its own information system and take appropriate judicial action. Moreover, since the issue at stake was the seriousness of the sexual offences, she wondered whether they might not be considered under articles 6 and 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, given that they were tantamount to torture.

39. **Ms. Šimonović** said that the figure regarding sexual violence at issue appeared in the State party's report and recalled the need for clear and reliable statistics.

40. **Ms. Gabr** said that two additional factors to be considered in connection with trafficking were the scale of prostitution, in particular among young women, in the State party and forced labour.

41. **Ms. Schulz** said that the delegation had not answered her questions under article 4 of the Convention about strengthening existing legislation to ensure gender parity in parliament, the introduction of temporary special measures to increase the representation of women in all the State services, access to health and education services, especially for the pygmy community, and special support measures for women victims of sexual violence.

42. **Ms. Patten** asked how the Government was using the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region to end the cycle of violence. She also asked what was being done to combat gun violence and the proliferation of small arms, and whether the Arms Trade Treaty had been ratified.

43. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that there was an interministerial commission responsible for small arms that issued regular reports. There was also an institution that ran campaigns and provided incentives for the collection of small arms. The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework would provide an excellent opportunity to consider possible solutions for lasting peace. The President had scheduled national consultations for August 2013, where the representation of women was guaranteed. The law on gender parity had not yet been enacted but had been considered by the Senate. Originally it had established a 50 per cent quota for representation of women, but the Senate had reduced that quota to 30 per cent. A new bill stipulating a 50 per cent quota had still to be considered by the National Assembly, and it was hoped that it would be passed.

44. **Ms. Schulz** asked if there was a comprehensive plan to ensure a gradual increase in the representation of women in all State services; the State party's documentation was vague on that point.

45. **Ms. Kenda Bakajika** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that there was a comprehensive national gender policy that had been adopted at all levels, as well as an implementation plan for progressive equality. There was also a temporary special measure whereby at least one of the three candidates put forward by political parties must be a woman. In response to the concern expressed about prostitution among young women, she said that the child protection law prohibited child marriage, child prostitution and paedophilia and that the State party had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Several projects were already being rolled out to combat child prostitution, but poverty levels posed a challenge as many girls had no access to education. For that reason, the Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Vocational Education planned to build 1,000 schools in areas where access to education was difficult and to ensure that basic education was free of charge.

46. **Mr. Mpinda Munuina** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that there was no segregation in the Republic on racial, tribal or ethnic grounds. The pygmy community thus enjoyed the same social, economic and political rights as all citizens, including title to land under the relevant provisions of the Forestry Code. New schools and health centres were being planned for areas where the pygmy community lived.

47. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the difficulties experienced by the pygmy community stemmed mainly from their geographic isolation. Forced labour was prohibited and there was a unit at the Ministry of Employment dealing with the matter.

48. **The Chairperson** urged the delegation to ensure that the Government accorded priority to women's rights in the financial and judicial spheres.

Articles 7 and 8

49. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that, according to the statistics provided by the State party and alternative sources women were still poorly represented in public and political life and

asked what measures were being taken to remedy the situation. In particular, she asked for information on the national strategy for the participation of women in democratic governance, as well as on the gender parity bill. The fact that there were so few women in leadership roles in political parties meant that women's issues were not accorded priority. She asked how gender parity was being mainstreamed into political life, whether the legislation governing political parties provided for penalties, and, in that case, whether they had ever been applied. Noting the low participation of women in the peace negotiations, she asked whether the Government was taking account of women's post-conflict needs and what it was doing to ensure women's equal participation in decision-making on post-conflict reconstruction, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

50. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, underlined the importance of women's role in the peace and reconstruction process. In that connection she wondered how NGOs could be supported so as to enable the emergence of a new political class that was ready to stand for election and be elected. She asked how human rights in general and women's civil and political rights in particular were being promoted in the State party.

51. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said it was true that there were very few women in decision-making positions. The political will was there, but there were social and cultural factors to be considered. It was not so much a question of supporting NGOs but of supporting women, first and foremost through their education so as to combat deep-rooted cultural stereotypes. However, access to education for girls was limited by poverty, and when families had to make a choice regarding education they tended to favour boys. Free primary education went some way to resolving that problem, but the Government had to support women at all levels of education. By law, there was no discrimination against women in employment; however it was not the case in reality. The current President was promoting women, but the battle could not be waged alone and changing attitudes within society would take a long time. For example, the reference to obedience had been removed from article 444 of the proposed new Family Code submitted to parliament for consideration, but how the members of parliament would react to that proposal was another matter. For that reason women must demonstrate solidarity and be more proactive. It was precisely through the establishment of women's lobby groups that there were now women representatives in peacebuilding consultations.

52. **The Chairperson** said that the process of increasing the representation of women in political and public life could be accelerated by the introduction of laws establishing quotas; awaiting a change of attitudes or generation could take too long.

53. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that steps to accelerate the process had already been taken. The new Family Code represented a great leap forward compared with prevailing attitudes in Congolese society; similarly the bill on gender parity had yet to go through parliament, where women were in the minority. Education was of paramount importance. If women were better educated they could make their voices heard and bring pressure to bear in order to effect change.

54. **Ms. Patten**, while endorsing the delegation's comments on the need for women's groups to be more proactive, invited it to comment on the apparently worsening situation of human rights defenders.

55. **Ms. Mumba Matipa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that she would need examples of specific cases to be able to comment. However, it should be noted that there was a draft bill on the protection of human rights defenders which was due to be considered by parliament.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.