



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

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

Summary record of the 1858th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 11 February 2022, at 11 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Acosta Vargas

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The meeting was called to order at 11.02 a.m.

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

Combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Uganda (CEDAW/C/UGA/8-9; CEDAW/C/UGA/Q/8-9; and CEDAW/C/UGA/RQ/8-9)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Uganda joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Mutuuzo** (Uganda), speaking via video link and introducing her country's combined eighth and ninth periodic reports (CEDAW/C/UGA/8-9), said that her Government consistently pursued gender equality and the empowerment of women, in collaboration with development partners, civil society, the private sector, religious institutions and communities. In addition to ratifying the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, over the previous decade Uganda had enacted a number of gender-responsive laws and regulations in various fields.
3. The third national development plan and the related action plans had been revised to address the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Women leaders of key ministries, such as the ministries of education and health, had been represented on the national and district task forces established to enforce public health guidelines and had ensured that gender-specific issues were taken into account. Gender had also been mainstreamed into the national policy for disaster preparedness and management.
4. The Equal Opportunities Commission was responsible for addressing inequalities and discrimination. In 2015, the Commission had established a tribunal which had thus far heard more than 2,400 cases, of which 1,194 had been brought by women. The justice, law and order sector had developed a gender and equality mainstreaming strategy, and judicial officers received specialized training on gender-responsive law enforcement. As of December 2021, women had made up some 47 per cent of all judicial officers. Nine special courts had been established in various regions to hear cases of gender-based violence, including in closed-court sessions. While the enactment of the marriage and divorce bill had been delayed following its second reading in Parliament, the judiciary had taken a number of progressive decisions to protect the rights of married and cohabiting women, including a Supreme Court ruling establishing that women were entitled to half of the matrimonial property upon divorce.
5. The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development was responsible for designing and implementing national gender equality programmes and policies. The Government continued to strengthen the capacities of the Ministry in line with the Convention. The Ministry had increased its coordination with other ministries, departments and agencies through their dedicated gender focal points. It also led committees and working groups on gender-based violence, coordinated periodic reporting to international treaty bodies and mobilized and allocated resources for gender mainstreaming and programmes for women, including programmes to promote entrepreneurship. The number of women in leadership had increased.
6. To protect the rights of women human rights defenders, Uganda had acceded to several international and regional instruments and incorporated their provisions into its domestic law. Those rights were also protected in key national laws and policies, including laws on employment, sexual harassment, and data protection and privacy. A positive environment had been established to support the work of women human rights defenders.
7. The police, civil society organizations and community development workers collaborated in efforts to prevent gender-based violence. Community policing and surveillance supported the timely reporting of cases to the national gender-based violence database, which was used to inform annual programming. Civil society organizations managed a total of 18 shelters for victims of gender-based violence. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were also represented on sector-specific technical committees relating to gender-based violence and worked with the Government through a quarterly dialogue with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and through the sectoral framework on prevention and response for gender-based violence.

8. The Government had adopted a national strategy for engaging men in preventing gender-based violence. It also worked closely with religious and cultural institutions to promote positive social norms, which had led several institutions to make public announcements denouncing sexual and gender-based violence and promoting sexual and reproductive health. In 2018, the Government had adopted a sexual education framework for providing young women in educational settings with adequate, age-appropriate and skills-based information about sexuality, in accordance with national religious and cultural values. Several educational institutions offered courses on gender and development. The Government ensured the prevention of human trafficking and the prosecution of offenders through the enforcement of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act. It had established multisectoral national task forces at the national and local levels to combat human trafficking.

9. Temporary measures in the form of laws, policies and programmes had been adopted to advance substantive gender equality. In accordance with the gender mainstreaming strategy, all policies, budgets and activities must incorporate gender issues. Pursuant to the Public Finance Management Act 2015, all ministries, departments and agencies were obliged to develop and implement gender and equality compliance plans and budgets and to obtain a certificate of compliance from the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and the Equal Opportunities Commission every financial year. Progress had been made in producing sex-disaggregated data and statistics to inform policy planning and implementation and monitor progress towards gender equality.

10. In 2017, the Electoral Commission had organized elections to women's councils with a view to increasing women's representation and participation at all levels of government. The constitutional principle of affirmative action continued to be applied to increase women's representation on statutory and constitutional committees and boards and in elected public bodies.

11. A bill to amend the Succession Act had been adopted by Parliament and was awaiting presidential approval. The bill would bring the Succession Act into line with the provisions of the Constitution by prohibiting discrimination against women and girls, providing for gender equality and ensuring compliance with international human rights standards. In 2015, the Supreme Court had ruled that the custom of refunding bride price was unconstitutional.

12. In 2020, the Persons with Disabilities Act had been enacted to facilitate the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development processes. The Ministry of Education had taken numerous steps to ensure that girls with special needs had access to high quality education, including by developing an inclusive education policy, building teachers' capacities in the provision of equity-responsive education, raising awareness about special needs, providing assistive devices and developing specialized materials.

13. To combat cervical cancer, which accounted for a large proportion of cancer cases and deaths in Uganda, the Government had introduced human papillomavirus vaccination for girls. It provided training for health-care workers in screening for cervical cancer and had introduced routine screening in postnatal care. It had also taken steps to increase public awareness and support health-care facilities in improving case management and providing integrated outreach services.

14. A gender strategy had been adopted to guide the implementation of the national land policy, and several land laws were undergoing reform. The proportion of women who owned land had doubled since 2000, reaching 32 per cent. The Petroleum Authority of Uganda had adopted affirmative action measures to increase women's participation in the sector and encourage economic and social development.

15. Despite the progress made, however, the Government recognized that a number of challenges remained, such as gender inequality, poverty and gender-based violence, all of which had been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Articles 1–6

16. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that she welcomed the efforts made by the State party to strengthen laws protecting women. Nevertheless, she wished to know when the Government would fill remaining legal gaps by enacting the bills on marriage and divorce, employment, and sexual

offences. She would be grateful for information on any strategies in place to eliminate all gender-discriminatory laws, particularly in the light of the increased inequality faced by women during the COVID-19 pandemic. She would also be interested to know why the enactment of the bill on the oil industry had been delayed and what the expected timeline for its enactment was.

17. It would be useful if the delegation would describe any measures being taken to establish a special division of the High Court to handle cases of gender-based violence. The delegation might also provide information on the implementation of the third national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. The Committee noted that the State party had remained accepting of internally displaced persons, refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons and that the Government had partnered with civil society to develop district and local actions plans for the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) and the Goma Declaration on Eradicating Sexual Violence and Ending Impunity in the Great Lakes Region. It would be grateful for information on any steps taken to carry out those plans. Lastly, the Committee would be interested to learn how the State party promoted women's leadership, particularly at the district level.

18. **Ms. Mutuuzo** (Uganda) said that women occupied decision-making positions from the village level to the national level. In accordance with the Local Governments Act, women held leadership positions at the district level, and every sub-county was represented by at least one woman. The family courts and the Child and Family Protection Unit of the Uganda Police were responsible for addressing women's concerns and ensuring their access to justice. Hearings in family courts could be conducted in-camera to ensure the protection of women. Over 47 per cent of judges were women. Uganda had an open policy towards refugees and currently had one of the world's largest populations of refugees. Refugees had the same access to national resources as Ugandan citizens.

19. **Ms. Nakafeero** (Uganda), speaking via video link, said that the bill on marriage and divorce, the bill on sexual offences and other bills that concerned gender issues would be put before the newly constituted Parliament. It was hoped that those bills would shortly be submitted to the Cabinet for approval.

20. **Ms. Nadaraia**, commending the State party's progress in strengthening its national machinery for the advancement of women, said that she wished to know whether mechanisms for promoting gender equality were adequately funded and staffed and whether the staff concerned had the necessary technical skills. She wondered how the Government ensured that local and national government bodies had sufficient capacity to promote gender mainstreaming in planning and budgeting processes. The Committee would like to hear what measures were being taken to address the concerns raised by the Subcommittee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions about the Uganda Human Rights Commission, in particular with regard to appointment and dismissal procedures, funding and the establishment of regional offices.

21. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she would like to know whether the State party would consider adopting temporary special measures to enhance support for vulnerable women, including women with disabilities, women living in remote areas and women who belonged to ethnic minorities and to increase the participation of indigenous women, and women with disabilities in political and public life, particularly at senior levels. She would be interested in hearing about the impact of any temporary special measures implemented to prevent gender-based violence, especially in rural and isolated areas. In that connection, the Committee would welcome further information on the national gender-based violence database, shelters for victims of violence and the results achieved under the multisectoral framework on the prevention and response to gender-based violence.

22. With regard to the temporary special measures taken in relation to the Uganda People's Defence Forces, it would be interesting to learn how many women members of the Force were in leadership positions, what posts they occupied, what forms of support they received and how they were protected against discrimination. Noting that a low proportion of ambassadors and high commissioners were women, she enquired whether temporary special measures would be taken to increase the number of women in those roles. Lastly, she

asked whether temporary special measures would be introduced to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality.

23. **Ms. Mutuuzo** (Uganda) said that women accounted for 47 per cent of persons in leadership positions at the local government level. In line with the parish development budgeting model introduced by the Government, nine government agencies worked together to ensure that funding and services were distributed in a balanced manner. Of the funds streamed through the parish development model, 30 per cent were allocated to women, 30 per cent to men, 10 per cent to persons with disabilities and 10 per cent to older persons.

24. Every 10 years, the Government conducted a review of laws related to gender in order to fill any legal gaps and remove any discriminatory provisions. In the meantime, any instances of discrimination could be remedied by the courts, which were independent and had already ruled in favour of women in a number of cases concerning discrimination. The Government was following up on the recommendations made in respect of the Uganda Human Rights Commission. It had increased the number of regional offices and had also allocated funding to the Pan African Women's Organization, which was based in Uganda and recognized by the African Union. Capacity-building exercises were conducted for public officials as part of efforts to improve gender equality and promote gender mainstreaming.

25. The Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme had been established to empower women, with a focus on vulnerable groups, including single and teenage mothers and women living with HIV/AIDS. The Youth Livelihood Programme, which had been running for 10 years, provided funding to young women who wished to become entrepreneurs. Gender parity had been achieved in school enrolment and, in the previous three years, an almost equal number of women and men had graduated from university. In response to the rise in the adolescent pregnancy rate that had occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education had put in place special measures to ensure that pregnant girls could return to school after they had given birth.

26. The establishment of special quotas had led to seven older persons, including four women, being elected to Parliament in the most recent elections. Women with disabilities and young women, were also represented in Parliament. Following the introduction of a quota, at least one parliamentary seat in each district was occupied by a woman. Around 16 women members of Parliament had been elected after contesting an open seat. Nevertheless, the Government acknowledged the need for further effort, including higher quotas, to increase women's participation.

27. **Ms. Nakafeero** (Uganda) said that, as a result of concerted efforts made by a wide range of stakeholders, incidents of gender-based violence had fallen significantly between 2016 and 2022.

28. **Ms. Rana** said that she wished to know whether the Government would consider implementing a comprehensive strategy, including a review of existing laws, to eliminate traditional practices and stereotypes that discriminated against women. She would also like to know whether any plans were in place to strengthen the current legal framework and programmes on gender-based violence, particularly in the districts where such violence was most prevalent. She wondered whether the Government had assessed the impact of the National Policy and Action Plan on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence in Uganda. If so, it would be interesting to learn what challenges the assessment had identified and how the State party intended to address them. The Committee would welcome information on the impact of the National Male Involvement Strategy for the Prevention and Response to Gender-based Violence in Uganda and any significant behavioural changes that it had brought about. It would also be interested in hearing about what was being done to monitor and eradicate gender-discriminatory language and stereotypical representations of women in the media.

29. Although female genital mutilation had been declared unconstitutional, it was still practised in certain communities. It would be useful to know whether a multi-stakeholder plan had been established to combat the practice through engagement with parents, religious leaders, cultural leaders, representatives of local government, young persons and media professionals, and whether the Government had any plans to strengthen the enforcement of

the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act and ensure the prosecution of persons engaging in female genital mutilation.

30. She would like to know how many shelters for victims of gender-based violence there were, whether the Government had any plans to create and allocate funding for more shelters and whether shelters were accessible to women with disabilities. Lastly, she wondered whether the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence had been prioritized in the third national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and whether the plan was adequately funded.

31. **Ms. Leinarte** said that reports indicated that unlicensed employment agencies were continuing to recruit domestic workers to work abroad and that religious leaders sometimes helped to recruit young women in exchange for a fee. She wondered what was being done to shut down unlicensed agencies and tackle corrupt practices that led to trafficking in persons.

32. There had been allegations of police complicity in sex trafficking of refugee women and girls in exchange for various types of migration documents. She wished to know what action had been taken against officers involved in trafficking and what measures had been implemented to combat trafficking in refugee camps.

33. Children as young as 7 years old were allegedly victims of forced labour in agriculture, fishing, forestry and a wide variety of trades, and young girls were reportedly being exploited for prostitution. An international organization had estimated that between 7,000 and 12,000 children were involved in prostitution. Although prostitution was illegal in the State party, it appeared that, rather than punishing clients or pimps, the law punished women and girls who engaged in prostitution. If the Government wished to reduce prostitution, it should focus on the demand side rather than on women and girls working as prostitutes.

34. The Government continued to rely to a great extent on international organizations for the provision of services for victims of trafficking. She wondered whether any victims' shelters were financed by the Government. Ugandan law permitted foreign trafficking victims to remain in the country during the investigations and to apply for residence and work permits. It would be useful to know how many victims had applied for and received such benefits during the reporting period.

35. **Ms. Mutuuzo** (Uganda) said that a network of civil society organizations, governmental bodies and the Uganda chapter of the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA) were working to combat discrimination, gender-based violence and cultural stereotypes. Existing laws were being reviewed and consultations were being held with cultural institutions on all grey areas in which policies had failed to address stereotypes and gender-based violence. Cameras had been installed in many parts of the country to detect acts of violence against women and ensure that the perpetrators were prosecuted. Male activists had been highly supportive of efforts to bring perpetrators to justice.

36. There were a total of 18 shelters for victims of gender-based violence, and there were plans to open more shelters. The Government intended to allocate funding for that purpose and was also seeking support from civil society organizations. The shelters provided a range of services, including psychosocial, medical and legal support. Budgetary funds were allocated for action against gender-based violence under the parish development model, and a total of 49 new district courts had been established to ensure access to justice for victims.

37. With a view to protecting migrant workers, bilateral agreements had been concluded with countries that were not members of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and liaison offices had been set up to provide support for Ugandan women working abroad. Steps were taken to ensure that the contracts signed with their employers were translated into their local language and that they could end their employment and return home at any time.

38. Resolute action was being taken to prevent trafficking in persons, especially children. A cross-border task force ensured that all non-licensed companies were dissolved and that any company found to have engaged in trafficking was severely penalized. She had not heard of any cases of gender-based violence by police officers in refugee camps. Refugees were provided with the best possible protection and they had access to the courts without discrimination.

39. While children were permitted to work at home to help their families, child labour and forced labour were outlawed. The Government had been especially vigilant in preventing the employment of persons under the age of 18 on sugarcane plantations and in the mining industry. A number of companies had been prosecuted for forcing underage children to work.

40. As of 2019, the prevalence of female genital mutilation had been reduced to 0.3 per cent. However, in the face of the critical economic situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, some people had responded by preparing girls for early marriage, which had led to a resurgence in the practice of female genital mutilation. The Government was working to promote an alternative rite of passage developed by a Sabinu cultural institution. A meeting had been held in December 2021 with ministers responsible for gender-related issues in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and the United Republic of Tanzania with a view to enacting a law prohibiting the cross-border practice of female genital mutilation.

41. **Ms. Najjemba** (Uganda), speaking via video link, said that a tribunal which had recently been established to enforce the Leadership Code targeted corruption among public servants, including any officials who might have been involved in trafficking. The State House Anti-Corruption Unit supported various agencies in combating corruption. Ugandan law protected children from prostitution and established stringent penalties for offenders.

42. **Ms. Mutuuzo** (Uganda) said that the legislation on prostitution was not discriminatory in terms of the prosecution of buyers and sellers. Priority was currently being given to advocacy and support for the resettlement of street girls and women. Programmes had been set up to provide them with skills training in Kampala and other parts of the country.

Articles 7 to 9

43. **The Chair** said that, as had been agreed earlier with the delegation, the Committee's questions under article 9 and also articles 11 and 12 would be read out during the meeting and the delegation would be asked to provide written responses within 48 hours of the end of the constructive dialogue.

44. **Ms. Stott Despoja**, welcoming the increased participation by Ugandan women in the public and political spheres, said that, while 36 per cent of Government ministers and 44 per cent of High Court judges were women, their representation in other areas, including international organizations, remained low. There had been reports of discrimination against vulnerable groups of women, including women with disabilities and indigenous women. The Committee would appreciate comprehensive statistical data on the political participation of women, particularly those with disabilities and indigenous women. The State party had undertaken to achieve a 30 per cent quota for women in leadership positions, but the current number of women in Parliament exceeded that percentage. She wondered whether the Government was considering raising the quota to 50 per cent.

45. Elections had reportedly been marred by political instability and violence, a situation that deterred women from voting. She wished to know what measures were being taken to increase the number of women voters and guarantee their safety, and to ensure that women with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities were not denied the right to vote or to be elected to public office. Lack of funding reportedly prevented many women from engaging in politics. She wondered whether the State party had considered introducing electoral reforms to enhance women's participation by reducing nomination fees and limiting expenditure on campaigns.

46. The Non-Governmental Organizations Act of 2016 imposed high registration costs and complicated registration procedures, which had reportedly hindered the activities of some organizations, including refugee organizations led by women. She would like to know if there were plans to amend the Act in order to make registration easier and less expensive for women, and whether the Government had considered the possibility of providing training on how to register and operate an NGO.

47. **Ms. Mutuuzo** (Uganda) said that registration fees for NGOs amounted to less than 10 United States dollars, which was affordable even for local community organizations. It would take some time to eliminate cultural norms that had hindered women's political participation. The high cost of campaigning was not the only deterrent. The registration fee for candidates

was the same for women and men, and political parties provided financial support for all candidates, irrespective of sex.

48. The Government was taking vigorous action to support persons with disabilities and to address their concerns. They were provided, for instance, with annual grants, and financial support of up to 5 million Ugandan schillings was provided to groups with specific projects. Financial and other support, including scholarships and land grants, was also available to members of the country's numerous indigenous groups. Education was provided in local languages so that indigenous languages were not lost.

49. **Ms. Toe Bouda** said that the Committee had been informed that Ugandan nationality was derived from biological parents of Ugandan nationality and could be granted by naturalization to a person who had lived in the country for a specific period of time. It welcomed the fact that women could possess dual nationality and that the children of a foreign woman could acquire her nationality. The Committee would appreciate information concerning birth registration and the procedure for granting a foreign mother's nationality to her children and would also like to know what measures had been taken by the Ugandan authorities to reduce statelessness.

Articles 10 to 14

50. **Ms. Akizuki** said that the Committee was concerned that the State party was not enforcing the Employment Regulations owing to lack of funds and inspectors. Women's salaries were lower than those of men and they faced discrimination in recruitment and employment, which was also a concern, as was the fact that discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity was not prohibited by law. She would appreciate information regarding the measures being taken to monitor the effective implementation of the Regulations and ensure that they were fully enforced with a view to achieving substantive equality for women in employment. She would also like to know whether there was a timeline to amend the legislation governing employment in order to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

51. Over 95 per cent of women worked in the informal sector. She wished to know whether women in the informal sector had access to social security, maternity leave, paid annual leave and medical assistance and what support the State party provided to such women.

52. Under the Employment Regulations, employers were required to put in place measures to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace only if they employed 25 or more staff members. However, more than 70 per cent of businesses were micro-enterprises employing two to five persons. She would like to know whether there were plans to expand the application of the Regulations to cover small businesses. Lastly, she would be interested in hearing whether the State party had a specific timeline for the ratification of the ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) and the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No.190).

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.