



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

Distr.: General
27 July 2001

Original: English

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

Summary record of the 474th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 19 June 2000, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. González

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

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

Fourth periodic report of Cuba
(CEDAW/C/CUB/4, CEDAW/PSWG/2000/II/
CRP.1/Add.2 and CRP.2/Add.1)

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

2. **Ms. Díaz** (Cuba) said that her Government was very proud that Cuba had been the first country to sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the second to ratify it. It had also taken the opportunity to sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention at the forty-third session of the Commission of the Status of Women. It was also significant that Cuba was presenting its periodic report only days after the successful conclusion of the special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The report included the results of the national evaluation process of the implementation of the Platform conducted in preparation for the special session.

3. The Government had adopted a series of measures for the period 1996-2000 intended to solve the remaining problems in implementing the Platform for Action. Their objectives in large part coincided with its medium and long-term goals and priorities in promoting full gender equality. The Federation of Cuban Women had been given the task of overseeing the implementation of the National Plan of Action for Follow-up of the Fourth World Conference on Women, which had the force of law.

4. The Plan included policies and actions in the areas of women's employment, access to management and decision-making positions, the image and treatment of women in the media, grass-roots work in education, health and social work, systematic review of relevant legislation, reproductive and sexual rights, and further development of gender statistics and research. The Plan took into account the fact that, while many of the targets and objectives laid down in Beijing had been met, the Platform could be adapted to a country's particular needs and strategic objectives. The National Plan of Action had thus been drawn up with input from a wide spectrum of Cuban society.

5. Owing to the gradual and sustained economic recovery taking place in Cuba, following the drastic changes at the beginning of the 1990s caused by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the changes in Eastern Europe, a great deal of progress had been made. The Cuban economy had grown by 6.2 per cent in 1999, allowing a sustained policy of increasing investment in social programmes in general and activities to benefit women and children in particular. For 2000, 70 per cent of the State budget was allocated to priority social sectors: education, public health, security and social services, housing and community services.

6. That modest economic recovery also coincided with improvements in the indicators for women's economic, political and social participation. Women's participation in the workforce had grown from 42.3 per cent in 1995 to 43.6 per cent at the end of 1999. Notable increases had been registered in the number of women in technical, professional and managerial positions. Cuban women had made a very important contribution to the country's recovery at all levels.

7. The Government's efforts to continue to promote the advancement of women and social progress in general had taken place in conditions of increasing adversity. The economic, trade and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America for the past 38 years, along with the recent Helms-Burton Act, represented the most difficult and dangerous obstacle to progress by Cuban women and children in the enjoyment of their rights. Although strictly speaking the blockade was not imposed from a gender perspective, its impact was more severe on women than on men.

8. While attitudes towards men's and women's roles had undergone a radical transformation, some traditional sexist patterns persisted. In many families, women still performed most of the household work and childcare, and thus shortages of food and basic necessities such as medicine, soap and fuel and the scarcity of household appliances would affect them most directly. For another example, women were still the majority in the teaching and medical professions, and thus the scarcity of school supplies, teaching materials and medical supplies had its most direct impact on them as well.

9. She also acknowledged the increase in international solidarity and material assistance in

recent years from Governments, non-governmental organizations and peoples around the world in support of the Cuban people. Two lawsuits had been filed in the civil court by the people of Cuba against the United States of America for damages. Her delegation requested the Committee to give them thorough consideration.

10. As an indication of its commitment and political will to continue improving the status of women in its society, the Government of Cuba had publicized the fourth periodic report widely and had made it available in advance to the Federation of Cuban Women and other non-governmental organizations. An additional indication of the Government's commitment to cooperation with United Nations mechanisms had been the invitation extended to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women of the Commission on Human Rights. During her visit, she had received full cooperation from the Government. Unfortunately, she had demonstrated partiality and subjectivity in the report that she had presented on that visit to the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on Human Rights.

11. **Ms. Regazzoli**, stressing the importance of the Family Code, which had served as a model for other countries in the region, asked what form of review of the Code was envisaged and what were the reasons for conducting the review in the first place. She was also curious to know how elections were conducted in a one-party State such as Cuba, and specifically, how the women comprising 27.6 per cent of the deputies to the People's National Assembly and other parliamentary groups were elected. How were political campaigns for women led and funded? In addition, the reporting State should explain the low representation of women in the joint cooperative sector.

12. **Ms. Khan** welcomed the steps taken by the Government of Cuba particularly with regard to its legislative framework for enhancing the implementation of the Convention. The progress made by women in terms of their contribution to the economy, and other social indicators was encouraging. She wished however to join Ms. Regazzoli in her query relating to the process for the election of women and she wondered whether special measures had been taken to ensure that women reached the decision-making level in all areas of management. Statistics on the participation of ethnic groups in positions of leadership had been excluded. Were there any legal provisions for proportionate representation of all such groups?

13. Turning to the question of stereotyping, she wondered whether teaching materials had been reviewed in order to ensure a positive portrayal of women. The issue was particularly important in view of the Government's increased emphasis on promoting tourism. She asked whether a code of ethics had been introduced to govern the depiction of women in the media.

14. Commenting on the low wages earned by women in technical and medical professions, she enquired whether there was a trend among professional women to switch to other jobs, for example, in tourism or the service sector. Similarly, the Committee would welcome further information on wage parity between men and women, and clarification as to whether childcare facilities were free or subsidized. The statistics on women engaged in own-account work had indicated that the majority of such women were not highly skilled. She therefore wished to know what prospects existed for qualified women to become entrepreneurs, and whether credit programmes were available to assist women with such aspirations.

15. **Ms. Taya** said that, in the interest of broadening understanding of the issues, the Government of Cuba should allow greater transparency with regard to the situation of prisoners of conscience and the independence of the judiciary. With reference to the parallel "dollar economy", she asked whether the Government had considered adopting measures, including those of a fiscal nature, to tackle the disparity between the segments of the population who derived benefits from their access to hard currency and those who had no such access. The Committee would also like further information on the problems confronting women seeking employment in the mixed and trading sectors as compared with employment in the public sector.

16. **Ms. Miranda** (Cuba), replying to the question on the review of the Family Code, said that when the Code had been adopted in the 1970s, the Spanish Civil Code dating from the nineteenth century had still been in effect. She gave a detailed review of various amendments made by Cuba since the adoption of the Family Code to ensure compatibility with all legislation affecting the family. However, past amendments had not affected the fundamental articles of the Code relating to conjugal relations, and it was envisaged that the impending review would elaborate new provisions to strengthen the legal framework

governing, among others, the rights and duties of partners in marriage.

17. **Ms. Cardoso** (Cuba) said that the Family Code and the Cuban Labour Code were based on the principle of equal pay for equal work. Differences in pay depended on the quality and quantity of work performed. There was no differentiation in the wages paid to men and women for the same work. Replying to the question on the “dollar economy”, she noted that the basic needs of all Cuban families were met by means of Cuban pesos. Workers paid very low rents in pesos. Indeed, legislation had been passed to enable all workers to own their own homes within 15 years of beginning work. Moreover, education and health care were free of charge. Utility bills were paid in pesos and the basic basket of family goods also enjoyed considerable State subsidies denominated in pesos. Any dollar consumption was in excess of basic necessities.

18. A decision had been taken some years previously to open up the rural markets, and adjustments had been made to legislation to make it more flexible in terms of supply and demand. In 1997, free market prices in Cuba had been 50 per cent below 1998 prices, and investments in the development of agriculture that year had reflected that trend. Prices were expected to be much lower than that figure by the end of the year 2000. Referring to questions concerning the limited access to the mixed sector, she noted that it was of great importance to the Cuban economy and was part of the country’s development plans.

19. Indeed, the Government gave priority to boosting its development as a major source of employment for women especially in managerial and administrative jobs. In the scientific sector, where there was little turnover, the Government was providing extra incentives in foreign exchange over and beyond the regular wages earned by the workers. Such incentives were paid twice a year. In other productive sectors such as agriculture, average wages had increased two or threefold. In the export production sectors, workers received a percentage of foreign exchange in addition to their wages.

20. **Mr. Reyes Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that his country’s one-party political system was a product of its own unique history and circumstances. The Communist Party was not an electoral party. However, there was secret voting in Cuba with universal suffrage.

Voting was not mandatory, although the electoral process was characterized by broad participation. Over 95 per cent of the population exercised its right to vote. Female candidates were appointed to office in the same manner as male candidates. Participation in elections was determined by residential criteria in electoral districts. All candidates had the same rights and received the same support. In Cuba, candidates were not allowed to receive financial contributions, except those from the State. Men and women had the same prospects of being elected. Election campaigns were based on merit.

21. Affirmative action quotas for women had been established. However, there were no racial minorities in Cuba. There was only one ethnic group in Cuba — the Cuban people, a melting pot of population groups of European, African and Asian descent. Indeed, because of the considerable racial integration in Cuba, statistics on the country’s racial composition were notoriously unreliable. It should be noted, however, that certain forms of racial discrimination persisted and that society as a whole deplored such behaviour.

22. As far as the participation of women in the mixed sector was concerned, there were problems including discrimination, since the foreign companies operating in that sector were governed by specific rules. The Cuban Government was implementing policies to address the issue and deal with all types of discrimination. A State enterprise had been established to ensure that women in that sector were hired on the basis of their qualifications and not the colour of their skin.

23. There were no prisoners of conscience in Cuba. There was no repression of people because of their beliefs. The Government encouraged freedom of expression and the State imposed restrictions only in the interest of national security. Such limitations had been imposed not just to counter the activities of those who sympathized with the United States embargo, but also to deal with terrorist acts and attacks on Cuba’s tourist industry, which had been condoned by the United States Government. The activities of those who collaborated with the United States of America and the persons who were manipulated by that country were brought before the courts and dealt with in an equitable manner. There was a very clear separation between the functions of the State and those of the judiciary, which guaranteed the right to defence counsel and to appeal.

24. **Ms. Arocha Dominguez** (Cuba), responding to questions concerning the role of women in the political system in Cuba, explained that there were municipal and provincial assemblies as well as the People's National Assembly. At the municipal level, all candidates were nominated democratically, had identical funding for their campaigns and were elected in a free and secret vote, upon receiving a majority of the ballots cast. Participation rates in elections were generally close to 98 per cent. Despite the continued prevalence of traditional attitudes at the local level, the number of women elected to the municipal assemblies had risen from 15 per cent in 1996 to 20.5 per cent in 2000.

25. Since the municipal assemblies were responsible for electing 50 per cent of the delegates to the provincial assemblies and 50 per cent of the deputies to the National Assembly, women continued to be under-represented in those bodies. That situation had been partially corrected, however, because the other 50 per cent of delegates to the provincial assemblies and deputies to the National Assembly were nominated by committees chaired by the Cuban Trade Union Federation and with representation from major organizations, including the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). The various organizations put forward the names of candidates nominated at their respective plenary meetings, and FMC, of course, put forward the names of as many women candidates as possible.

26. The lists of candidates were then submitted to the municipal assemblies for approval, after which a free and secret vote was held in which all citizens could participate. The general theme of elections was that the people should try to elect the best candidate possible, and FMC encouraged voters to vote for the women among the best candidates. As a result, increasing numbers of women were in fact being elected. Although still under-represented, some 27.6 per cent of deputies to the People's National Assembly were women, and Cuba was among the top 10 countries in the world in terms of women holding elected office. She stressed that efforts would continue to further improve the situation.

27. **Ms. Díaz** (Cuba) stressed that many measures and studies had been undertaken by various ministries to promote the role of women and guarantee women equal access to education, employment and the decision-making process. While stressing that the basic criterion for filling any position was to hire the best candidate,

male or female, she reassured the Committee that efforts to promote awareness of the importance of full implementation of the Convention and to ensure further improvement in the status of women would continue.

28. **Ms. Miranda** (Cuba) stressed, with regard to the legal system, that justice was always carried out in the name of the people and the Constitution, which had been approved by a popular referendum. No one could be convicted or jailed without due process of law, and all had the right to defend themselves against any accusations. No intimidation or pressure could be used to obtain a confession and, in any case, notwithstanding any confession, only a judge could make a final decision on the guilt of an accused party.

29. With regard to the so-called and self-proclaimed "prisoners of conscience" she said that such people only claimed the status of prisoner of conscience in order to flout the law with impunity. Like most States, Cuba had the right to punish any person who, in collusion with foreign interests, sought to undermine the independence and integrity of the State. She noted that the Helms-Burton Act authorized the United States Government to support such activities, and the self-proclaimed prisoners of conscience were therefore simply pawns for that country's policies.

30. **Ms. Beretervide** (Cuba), in response to Ms. Khan, referred to the temporary measures for affirmative action under article 4 described in the report (CEDAW/C/CUB/4, pp. 12-13) and noted that some 83 per cent of all women over 14 years old were involved in women's organizations. Elections provided an opportunity to raise awareness of women's issues and promote the advancement of women as part of a coherent national strategy to increase women's participation in the political, economic, social and cultural fields. Measures had also been undertaken to improve women's educational levels, guarantee equal access to education, culture and sports, reform school curriculum, ensure equal treatment of girls and boys in schools and change community and family attitudes.

31. In addition, programmes had been created to improve parenting skills, teacher-training programmes had been revised, more women university professors had been appointed, and FMC had developed counselling programmes for families and women. The underlying theme of such programmes and all relevant legislation was the fundamental equality of men and

women, as well as the important role that men must also play in the advancement of women.

32. Discrimination and inequality had not of course been eliminated and traditional attitudes persisted. Nevertheless, thanks to increased education and awareness, attitudes were changing, and the Government was doing its best to accelerate the process of change. With regard to school textbooks, she noted that content had been revised, but, unfortunately, as a result of the embargo, the Government did not always have the resources to print adequate quantities of books. Every effort was, therefore, being made to train teaching personnel in new methodologies in order to instil in students a critical attitude about stereotyping. The schools also worked with parents to make them more aware of stereotyping so that there would be no contradiction between what students learned at school and what they saw occurring in their families.

33. In the area of childcare for working mothers, programmes had in fact existed since the beginnings of the revolution, and over the ensuing years methodologies had been developed for childcare for children up to 5 years of age. Despite the economic difficulties created by the embargo at the end of the 1980s, the Government had refused to close any childcare facilities. Currently nearly 300,000 or some 30 per cent of children 5 years old and under were enrolled in childcare programmes.

34. Other, more informal, voluntary and community-based programmes were also available to prepare the remaining children for school. FMC, for example, had some 9,000 volunteers in communities across the country and, thanks to the solidarity shown by communities and families, children received at least the minimum necessary preparation for school. In addition, with the approval of the Ministries of Health and Education, temporary childcare facilities could be created locally, at the sectoral level, for example during the coffee or sugar harvest when many women were working. Childcare was not totally free of charge, but was based on the family's ability to pay, with no one paying more than 10 per cent of their income.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.