



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Summary record of the 1868th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 18 February 2022, at 11 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Narain (Rapporteur)

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In the absence of Ms. Acosta Vargas, Ms. Narain (Rapporteur) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

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

Sixth periodic report of Lebanon (continued) (CEDAW/C/LBN/6;
CEDAW/C/LBN/Q/6; CEDAW/C/LBN/RQ/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Lebanon joined the meeting.*

Articles 1–6

2. **Ms. El Mohtar** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the Directorate General of the Internal Security Forces had established a general strategy for combating sexual abuse that was based on prevention, the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators, and the provision of support to victims. The Directorate General had provided training in detecting and preventing trafficking in persons to over 1,200 officers. It had also issued directives on the principles governing detention procedures and developed training courses on human rights that included modules on the protection of victims. In cooperation with civil society, the national human rights institution had conducted a study of the places available in women's shelters, which it had submitted to the authority responsible for combating trafficking in persons.

3. **Ms. Chedid** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the Aliens Act governed the entry into Lebanon of foreign women intending to work in nightclubs. Such women were required to obtain prior authorization from the Directorate General of General Security, which had issued several directives on measures to prevent migrant women from falling into prostitution or becoming victims of trafficking. Foreign women seeking to work in nightclubs were interviewed by the Directorate General, informed of their rights and issued with guidelines to reduce their risk of being exploited.

4. As part of an early warning system established to prevent trafficking, a hotline had been set up for women working in nightclubs who faced a risk of trafficking or exploitation, and inspections were conducted at their places of work. Places in shelters were available for them if they were subjected to violence or demands to provide sexual services to their clients. The authorities questioned nightclub owners whose staff were subjected to abuse and, in some cases, shut down their nightclubs. The Directorate General had issued directives on the protection of victims and the legal action to be taken against perpetrators.

5. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that she had recently met a group of foreign women who, after being ill-treated by their employers, had asked to be repatriated to their country. The *kafala* (sponsorship) system for monitoring migrant workers was intended to provide such workers with secure and decent living conditions. Investigations conducted by the authorities had determined that some women migrant workers were harassed by persons running prostitution networks, who were usually foreign nationals themselves. In some cases, migrant women left domestic employment and were subsequently exploited by prostitution networks. The authorities had worked with the International Organization for Migration to repatriate many women who were victims of exploitation.

Articles 7–9

6. **Mr. Safarov** said that he wished to know how many women were members of the Council of Ministers. He wondered what would be done to increase the access of women electoral candidates to funds, information, support and media coverage and what steps would be taken to increase women's representation in political parties, the Council of Ministers, the civil service, the diplomatic corps, local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), particularly at senior levels. It would be interesting to know how many women's NGOs had registered with the authorities, how many media outlets and sports federations were headed by women and how many lawyers and prosecutors were women. The delegation might describe any measures being taken to promote the access of women's NGOs to public funding.

7. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that government ministries and the National Commission for Lebanese Women cooperated with civil society organizations to develop and implement strategies and laws. For instance, the Commission had cooperated with the civil society organization KAFA (Enough Violence and Exploitation) to draft a bill on protecting women against gender-based violence.

8. **Mr. Ayman Ahmad** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that there were currently more women than men in the judiciary. A significant number of public prosecutors were also women.

9. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that a woman was currently the head of the bar association in northern Lebanon. The Government was intending to implement an action plan on increasing the number of women working in the public sector. In recent years, women had headed the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior.

10. **The Chair** said that she wished to know the current status of the bill intended to amend the law on nationality, which, when adopted, would allow Lebanese women to transfer their nationality to their children. She wondered what had been done to ensure that the bill did not contain any discriminatory elements, what obstacles had prevented the bill from being adopted and what the Government was doing to remove those obstacles. It would be interesting to know whether any campaigns had been conducted to broaden support for the changes in nationality law provided for in the bill and whether the Government intended to take any further measures towards that end. The State party might indicate whether it intended to withdraw its reservation to article 9 (2) of the Convention.

11. Given that the current nationality law left children at risk of becoming stateless, it would be interesting to learn how many people were currently stateless in Lebanon, what obstacles they faced in exercising inheritance rights and obtaining access to education and health care and how those obstacles were being addressed. Lastly, she wondered what steps were being taken to make it easier for women refugees to obtain residency rights and whether the State party would consider waiving the fees associated with residence permit applications to allow more women to obtain a permit and exercise their fundamental rights in Lebanon.

Articles 10–14

12. **Ms. Gabr** said that she wished to know what was being done to address the serious problems facing the health sector, which included a lack of medicines and medical supplies and the rising cost of medicines used to treat chronic illnesses. The Committee would be grateful to know what services were provided to victims of rape and whether those services included a free medical check-up. It would also be interested to hear whether abortion was considered unlawful in situations where the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest or posed a danger to the pregnant woman's life or health.

13. She asked what measures were being taken to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on rural women and ensure such women's economic empowerment as the Government strived to rebuild the economy. In that connection, the Committee would be interested to hear what measures were being taken to increase rural women's access to resources, including land and credit, and their participation in decision-making within their families and communities. The delegation might describe any steps being taken to implement the Committee's general recommendations No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women and No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change. It might also consider providing information on the outcome of the National Strategy for Older Persons in Lebanon 2020–2030.

14. Given that rates of pregnancy and early marriage were high among women and girl refugees, the delegation might describe any measures being taken to protect such refugees against violence, exploitation and pressure to enter marriage at a young age. The Committee wished to know what forms of assistance were provided to women on low incomes, including in rural areas, and whether, in the exceptional circumstances brought about by the pandemic, free public services might be afforded to such women and their children.

15. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she wished to commend the State party for its gender-sensitive educational planning policies, including the requirement that authors of textbooks should be familiar with international standards relating to the elimination of gender-based discrimination. However, the Committee would welcome the incorporation of gender equality material into all training curricula for teachers in public schools. She also welcomed the decision by the National Commission for Lebanese Women to encourage young men to become teachers in order to break the female monopoly and sex role stereotypes at the primary school level.

16. The statistics for the 2017/18 academic year provided in the State party's report concerning female enrolment in university faculties that were traditionally dominated by males, such as science, law, pharmacy, medical science and agriculture, were very impressive. Engineering and technology were the only areas with majority male enrolment. As the total number of female students was more than double that of men, she wondered what alternatives had been chosen by men and what impact that distinction had on women.

17. Alternative reports indicated that young men followed their fathers into business and politics, while young women were denied commensurate employment prospects and risked potential devaluation of their educational achievements and subservience to men. She wished to know what traditional stereotypes and structural barriers persisted.

18. The Committee was concerned about the impact of the economic crisis on education. For instance, children had been withdrawn from school to meet their families' basic needs, teachers had gone on strike and students had been unable to cover the costs of education. She asked whether the compensation package for public schoolteachers announced by the Minister of Education and Higher Education had been approved and whether similar packages might enable children to return to school. She wished to know whether steps had been taken to address the insufficiency of professionally trained teachers at all levels, including for children with disabilities, and to provide adequate public funding for schools. Noting with concern that many refugee children failed to attend school, she asked whether action had been taken to boost enrolment and reduce dropout rates, thereby also preventing child marriage.

19. Given the challenges stemming from the lack of electricity and its impact on education, she wished to know whether the State party was exploring alternative energy sources, such as solar energy.

20. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that the economic and financial crisis prevented the Government from providing basic services to the population, particularly internally displaced persons and refugees. The authorities were conducting campaigns, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to prevent early marriage, which had increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Syrian crisis.

21. The educational infrastructure was unable to accommodate all refugees and internally displaced persons. Special afternoon schools had been opened with a view to their enrolment. The Government appealed to the international community for assistance in providing them with humanitarian services.

22. **Ms. Halabi** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the Ministry of Education and Higher Education was implementing, in partnership with external stakeholders, an Education Strategy for the period 2020–2025. A comprehensive annual education programme was adopted each year for all categories of students, including children with disabilities, internally displaced children and children from deprived families. Gender-specific issues were addressed in all textbooks and the programme included literacy initiatives. The Centre for Educational Research and Development had launched a digital literacy and teacher training platform. It had also launched a data-gathering initiative in 2019, which demonstrated the high rate of participation of female students at all levels of education in both the private and public sectors. An increase in complaints of gender-based violence in secondary-level institutions was being addressed with the assistance of United Nations partners and civil society organizations. Action was being taken to ensure the accountability of perpetrators. The Ministry was determined to obtain the financial and human resources required to create a sound educational environment and to promote a culture of gender equality.

23. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that the United Nations Development Programme had recommended that a gender dimension should be included in the national strategy to combat climate change, and the National Commission for Lebanese Women had taken the necessary action. Citizens had begun to use solar panels to deal with the problem of recurring power cuts and solar energy was deemed to constitute a lasting solution. The ideal solution for internally displaced persons was to return to a peaceful life in their countries of origin.

24. **Ms. Akizuki** said that the Committee was concerned about the rejection by the State Shura Council of a new standard employment contract adopted by the Ministry of Labour that would have provided safeguards against forced labour and dismantled the *kafala* system.

25. The Committee noted that 90 per cent of the more than 250,000 migrant domestic workers in the State party were women and that 60 per cent of them had experienced sexual harassment. The Labour Code denied them the protection enjoyed by other workers, such as a minimum wage, overtime pay, compensation for unfair dismissal, social security and parental leave. The economic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic and the explosion in the port of Beirut had rendered their situation even more precarious. The Committee would therefore welcome information regarding efforts to guarantee legal protection for domestic workers by amending the Labour Code and reforming the *kafala* system. She asked whether the Government intended to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). She also wished to know what measures had been taken to ensure that migrant domestic workers had full access to fair, timely, affordable, effective and gender-responsive justice services and mechanisms.

26. While the Labour Code did not discriminate between men and women and provided for equal pay, she noted with concern that the Code was not enforced in some areas and that the Government failed to collect information on official or private discrimination in the area of employment. Unemployment, which had doubled in recent years, was as high as 40 per cent among women and 60 per cent among young people. She therefore wished to know what measures had been taken to improve the employment rate among women by 5 per cent, in accordance with the National Plan for Women's Economic Empowerment, to close the gender pay gap and to enforce the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. She also would like to know what action to address horizontal and vertical segregation, including by promoting equal participation of women in highly skilled jobs and senior management positions. She was interested in hearing about the impact of the "Women on Board" initiative, which had set the goal of 30 per cent female corporate board membership by 2025.

27. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that her Government was currently implementing a women's economic empowerment action plan with financial support from the World Bank Mashreq Gender Facility.

28. **Ms. Jounblat** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that Act No. 205 on sexual harassment prescribed a term of imprisonment of 1 to 5 years for gender-based violence. The Ministry of Justice had adopted an action plan and media campaigns had been launched on ways and means of protecting women. Discussions had been organized with judges and lawyers on procedures for enforcing the Act. A two-day meeting had been held with the International Commission of Jurists on evidentiary rules governing acts of gender-based violence and best practices in a number of countries.

29. **Ms. Attallah** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the standard labour contract established by the Ministry of Labour for foreign domestic workers provided guarantees against forced labour and mitigated negative aspects of the *kafala* system. The Ministry was currently engaged in negotiations with various authorities, civil society organizations and ILO on the drafting of a new contract for domestic workers that would provide them with the requisite legal protection. With regard to the non-applicability of certain provisions of the Labour Code to domestic workers, article 7 of the Code was currently being amended so that they would be covered by all provisions of the Code. The Ministry of Labour had circulated ILO Convention No. 189 to various authorities and was doing its utmost to ensure that it would be ratified in the near future.

30. The Ministry had set up a 24-hour hotline (1741) to receive complaints from domestic workers. The numerous complaints received from workers and their embassies were

addressed by the Ministry in cooperation with civil society organizations. Major difficulties had been encountered by domestic workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the dire economic situation. For instance, the families who hired them were sometimes unable to pay their wages.

31. The Labour Code did not discriminate between men and women and all complaints regarding the payment of lower wages to women were addressed. Given the current high unemployment rate, the Ministry of Labour was promoting the creation of employment opportunities for Lebanese citizens, particularly women, in areas such as health care, the provision of care for children and older persons, and domestic work. The Ministry was cooperating with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and Coursera in providing learning opportunities for 25,000 young people so that they could enter the labour market.

32. **Mr. Safarov** said that the empowerment of women could actually help to resolve the State party's current economic problems. He would therefore be interested in hearing about bank loans to support women's entrepreneurship, the role of women in bank management and relevant action plans.

33. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that the current banking crisis greatly impeded the availability of bank loans for entrepreneurial activities. The unemployed status of many women was in fact a matter of personal choice, and numerous women were active in the informal sector, which comprised many different professions. The authorities hoped to provide a wide range of incentives for women in the future.

34. **Ms. Attallah** (Lebanon) said that both the formal and informal sectors of the economy had been seriously undermined by the economic and currency crisis. Women's purchasing power had diminished and social security allocations had receded.

35. **Ms. Sidani** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the Ministry of Economy and Trade had drafted a bill on small and medium-sized enterprises that was gender-sensitive and provided support for women with entrepreneurial ambitions.

36. **Ms. Abou Haidar** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the services provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs were available to all women residents, whether or not they were Lebanese. Safe spaces, social and health services were provided free of charge to older persons, persons with disabilities and low-income families. Older women and women with disabilities received free rehabilitation care and younger women with disabilities could avail themselves of free education. There were also day centres for older persons and some 2,000 seniors were assisted by live-in care services. All those services were aimed at promoting women's social empowerment. In 2020, almost 400 women had participated in the arts and crafts courses offered as part of a programme to foster their economic empowerment that was being run by the Ministry with the support of Expertise France, the French public agency for international technical assistance. Although those services were essential, the number of beneficiaries was limited by the persistent lack of resources due to the current crisis. The authorities were doing all they could to provide quality social services to the citizens and residents of Lebanon, but the maintenance of those services depended on better funding.

37. **Ms. El Achi** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that gender equality was taken into account in all the pillars of the 2020–2025 strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture. Many of its projects targeted rural women. Ministry staff had received the relevant training for that purpose. Rural women were offered a variety of courses and transport to enable them to attend. The Ministry had taken a holistic approach including not only production chains but also the health and social services required by rural women, including advice on obtaining assistance in the event of domestic violence. Women were encouraged to form agricultural cooperatives. A register had been compiled of all women in the agricultural sector as a first step towards ensuring that they were covered by social security. The labour law was currently being amended to encompass all agricultural workers.

38. **Ms. Halabi** (Lebanon) said that afternoon classes had been introduced in secondary schools for pupils who were Syrian refugees. An intensive curriculum had been devised to meet internally displaced pupils' needs.

Articles 15 and 16

39. **Ms. Gabr** said that she had been surprised to hear that there had been no progress on the matters covered by articles 15 and 16. In its previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/LBN/CO/4-5) the Committee had recommended the adoption of an optional civil personal status law. She therefore wished to know what measures were being taken to bring the proposed legislation drawn up by the National Commission for Lebanese Women to the attention of the Parliamentary Committee on Women and Children. How could judicial proceedings be shortened, simplified and rendered more just for women? She was curious to know why civil marriage within the country was not possible if a civil marriage contracted elsewhere could be recognized in Lebanon. She failed to see why it could not be clearly specified that the minimum age for marriage of all young people was 18 in accordance with the Committee's own recommendations and those of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

40. **Ms. Hamdan** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that the law on personal status was governed by articles 9, 10 and 19 of the Constitution, which gave religious leaders full independence in matters of personal status. The Government and parliament were striving to overcome the numerous obstacles to the introduction of civil marriage, since there was wide grass-roots support for discussion of the issue. The Ministry of Justice had expressed the opinion that a Lebanese citizen who did not belong to any confession could contract a civil marriage before a notary public and that a couple had the right to choose the personal status code that would apply to them.

41. Progress had been made with raising the age of custody. The Sunni confession had altered it to 12 for girls and boys. The Catholics had adopted the age of 14 for both sexes.

42. It was true that the above-mentioned articles of the Constitution had not been amended. Although a number of laws had been drafted and meetings held with religious leaders in an attempt to find solutions that would guarantee Lebanese women's equality and enable them to exercise their rights, progress towards ending discrimination against women in personal status law and child marriage had been very slow.

43. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that, notwithstanding the lack of progress on the question of personal status, many initiatives had sought to address that issue. They included training for judges and lawyers to enable them to defend the rights of women in matters of personal status in accordance with international instruments.

44. **Ms. Zaghrini** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that, under article 9 of the Constitution, each confession could enact its own personal status laws, particularly in respect of family rights and the age of marriage. A bill aimed at prohibiting child marriage had garnered increasing support from members of parliament. The National Commission for Lebanese Women was working with women's associations and the relevant authorities to try to secure a debate of the bill as soon as possible. Nevertheless, the religious authorities believed that the personal status code was their preserve. The Commission had tried to persuade them to modify the age of custody and the age of marriage. The Druze had set the age of marriage at 17 for girls and 18 for boys and the Sunnis had set it at 18 for both sexes, save when a guardian allowed a girl to marry at the age of 15.

45. **Ms. Abou Haidar** (Lebanon) said that moves to alter personal status law required support at the cultural and social level. In an effort to curb child marriage, the Ministry of Social Affairs had adopted an action plan involving a variety of stakeholders that was aimed at reducing poverty and increasing resilience within Lebanese society. The plan was underpinned by a strategy that sought to change social attitudes and behaviour. Modern technology was being used to convey messages that warned against child marriage. Outreach campaigns on reproductive health had been launched to enable young people to protect their rights more effectively. Well over 4,000 young people had availed themselves of the safe spaces set up by the Ministry.

46. **Ms. Gabr** said that she wished to know if there were any other procedures, other than the adoption of new laws, that would permit swifter progress towards more equitable and affordable legal remedies for all women.

47. **Mr. Ayman Ahmad** (Lebanon) said that the Criminal Code and article 7 of the Constitution guaranteed everyone's right to seek a remedy before a court. The Criminal Code addressed the issue of legal aid to which every complainant was entitled if that person was unable to afford a lawyer. An agreement signed in 2019 with two United Nations agencies had for the first time made it possible to set up a legal aid mechanism at several judicial levels. As a result, the Ministry of Justice was trying first, to develop a common vision of legal aid and redress covering various local services and, secondly, to provide legal aid to the most marginalized groups.

48. **Ms. El Mohtar** (Lebanon) said that the Directorate General of the Internal Security Forces constantly strove to improve detention conditions. To that end, a decree that reaffirmed the need to respect prisoners' human rights made provision for granting legal aid to them.

49. **Mr. Baddoura** (Lebanon), speaking via video link, said that, despite the difficulties in which his country found itself, his Government would continue its efforts to comply with its international commitments. However, lasting progress in promoting human rights and the rights of women required adequate resources. He therefore called on the international community to support his Government's efforts to craft a comprehensive plan to provide the economic and human resources needed to improve the situation. He urged the international community to explore innovative solutions to allow internally displaced persons to return to their homes. Lebanon remained committed to its unique formula of coexistence between the various confessions in a liberal society that safeguarded all fundamental rights and freedoms. He trusted that the constructive dialogue with the Committee would create an impetus for improving the status of women in Lebanon.

50. **Ms. Aoun** (Lebanon) said that Lebanon was determined to continue its reforms in order to offer all women in Lebanon their full rights. Her delegation looked forward to receiving recommendations on ways of improving the situation of women in various walks of life.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.