



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Seventy-second session

Summary record of the 1663rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 20 February 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Gbedemah

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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 fourth to seventh periodic reports of Antigua and Barbuda
([CEDAW/C/ATG/4-7](#); [CEDAW/C/ATG/Q/4-7](#), [CEDAW/C/ATG/Q/4-7/Add.1](#) and [CEDAW/C/ATG/Q/4-7/Add.2](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Ms. Marshall** (Antigua and Barbuda), introducing the combined fourth to seventh periodic reports of Antigua and Barbuda ([CEDAW/C/ATG/4-7](#)), announced that Antigua and Barbuda had accepted the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention.
3. She said that, though the Convention had yet to be cited in the national courts, it formed the basis for policy directives on women's rights and for programmes to prevent discrimination against women. Overarching guarantees were provided for in the Antigua and Barbuda Constitution Order (1981). The lack of specific legislation on the Convention had never prevented any interested party from seeking redress before the law. The principle of equality of men and women and the prohibition of discrimination based on sex were embodied in the Constitution and legislative instruments had been enacted to give effect to the provisions of the Convention.
4. As a result of the 2012 review of all legislation related to gender-based and sexual violence, the Domestic Violence Act had been passed. It clearly defined acts of domestic violence and required police officers to inform a victim or complainant of their rights under the Act. Efforts were under way to implement other recommendations emerging from the review, including revision of the Sexual Offences Act and of outdated legislation setting 14 as the legal age of marriage.
5. Legislation was being drafted to address sexual harassment, on the basis of models provided by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. A national policy on workplace discrimination and harassment in the public service was also in the pipeline. With the support of international agencies, her Government was developing the country's first national gender action plan and policy with a view to ensuring that gender was mainstreamed in all development plans, policies, legislation and initiatives.
6. In 2016, with assistance from the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the UN-Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean, the Support and Referral Centre (SARC) had been created as a one-stop centre to ensure access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence. The first of its kind in the Caribbean region, it provided a timely, gender-responsive and coordinated response to sexual assault, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Its work had led to the development of intersectoral protocols with an intersectional, intercultural, gender and human-rights-based approach to ensure adequate service standards. Inter-agency mechanisms for handling sexual offences had also been put in place, targeting specific groups, such as men and boys, and with sufficient financial resources to ensure implementation. SARC had also introduced the country's first gender-sensitive system for the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data using input from Government and civil society. It offered victims a consultation room, counselling, child-friendly space, medical examinations and showers. District doctors provided care and treatment using an agreed coordinated approach and protocols.
7. An on-site police Special Victims Support Unit had been established at this centre to provide immediate medical assessment and treatment, medication, counselling services, clothing and other subsistence items, police referral and reporting and therapeutic services and programmes at no charge. There was a 24-hour hotline and victims' advocates system. Though its primary focus was on sexual offences, SARC sometimes received referrals related to domestic violence, sexual harassment, trafficking and child abuse.
8. In January 2019, with the support of the judicial reform and institutional strengthening project, Antigua and Barbuda had launched the Sexual Offences Model Court, the first of its

kind in the region, with the aim of introducing specialized procedures to remedy the deficiencies in judicial handling of sexual offences. Its main objectives were to provide a timely, gender-responsive and coordinated response to plaintiffs in sexual assault cases, ensure greater coordination between the courts and agencies providing victim services, improve the monitoring and evaluation of sexual offences using evidence-based approaches and prevent re-victimization. SARC had facilities enabling vulnerable witnesses of sexual assault to give evidence remotely.

9. On the question of women's political participation and participation in public life, she said that the 2009 general election had seen the highest number of female candidates from both major political parties in the country's history. In the 2014 general election, one woman had been elected to the House of Representatives; two had been elected in 2018. Two of the smaller political parties had women leaders. Half the members of the Senate, including the President of the Senate, were women.

10. The overall literacy rate was high, standing at 99 per cent in 2011, the rate for females being 99.4 per cent and for males 98.4 per cent. Gender stereotyping still influenced subject choices in school, although measures were being taken to address stereotyping in education. In the past, girls who became pregnant had been excluded from education but, in 2012, the Ministry of Education had established a policy to ensure that they had the opportunity to complete their schooling.

11. Turning to employment, she said that her Government intended to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), later in the year. Persons engaging primarily in household duties were still deemed "economically inactive": in the 2011 census, women had accounted for 90.4 per cent of those identified as economically inactive due to household duties and for 83.9 per cent of those stating that they had not worked in the previous year for "family reasons". The fact that there was no provision for measuring the contribution of household duties or work in the home to gross domestic product had had a significant impact on women's autonomy and economic empowerment.

12. The Labour Code was under review in an attempt to take account of those realities. While paid breaks for nursing mothers were not required by law, the Government was currently discussing the issue and working to promote childcare at the workplace to support women's active participation in the labour force. It was also seeking to alleviate their burden of care for vulnerable groups such as older persons and persons with disabilities.

13. The national gender machinery spearheading the Government's efforts to address persistent forms of gender inequality was the Directorate of Gender Affairs, a body whose mandate and scope had gradually expanded over the years to address issues impacting both women and men who were most vulnerable to various forms of gender-based oppression. Funding and staffing levels were adequate to allow it to fulfil its mandate, which it did by addressing discriminatory gender stereotypes, promoting gender mainstreaming and running campaigns and behavioural change initiatives, some of which targeted harmful masculinity traits in men and boys. The Directorate also worked with the national statistical machinery to promote the development of evidence-based policies through the use of the CARICOM gender-equality indicators and other social development indicators to monitor and advance the rights of women and promote gender equality.

14. Turning to disaster risk reduction, she said that the National Office of Disaster Services of the Ministry of Social Transformation, Human Resource Development, Youth and Gender Affairs was responsible for disaster management and disaster risk reduction, in which women's participation was so important. Women had been involved in decision-making processes and in developing prevention and response strategies, as well as being trained as shelter managers and shelter workers as part of the emergency response mechanism. All response workers and shelter managers had received training dealing with gender-based violence, the risk of which could increase during disasters.

Articles 1 to 6

15. **Ms. Bethel** said that it was regrettable that the State party's legislation still did not contain a definition of discrimination in accordance with article 1 of the Convention,

particularly as a constitutional reform committee had made a recommendation to that effect in 1999. Noting that a new constitutional reform committee had recently been set up and had expressed concern at the State's failure to incorporate the Convention into national legislation, she asked whether the State party was ready to resume the dialogue with women's organizations in order to make the necessary amendments to its constitutional and legal framework. She would like to know how many of the reform committee's members were women and whether they were advocates of the article 1 definition. She would like to know how the State party planned to incorporate the principle of equality between women and men into the national legislation and define and prohibit all forms of discrimination against women, including direct and indirect discrimination by State and non-State actors in both public and private spheres.

16. She commended the State party for its ratification of the Optional Protocol in 2006, but, given that the Committee had received no submissions in respect of the State party under the Optional Protocol, she wondered whether women, men and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were aware of the complaints and enquiry procedure as a means of access to justice. She would like to know what measures had been taken to disseminate the Optional Protocol and how the State party intended to improve awareness of women's rights under the Convention and the Optional Protocol.

17. She would like to know what steps the State party had taken to harmonize its domestic legislation on matters that affected women, for example in respect of marital rape or sexual harassment, with the Convention. She also wished to know whether the State party intended to decriminalize same-sex relationships, which were still a punishable offence under the Sexual Offences Act even though the relevant provision was effectively no longer applied.

18. She would appreciate the delegation's comments on the current status of the bill on the status of children, the model bill on sexual harassment and the bill on national social protection. She wondered what the timeline was for the enactment of the disabilities and equal opportunities bill of 2017 and whether it contained gender-responsive provisions covering women and girls with disabilities and their right to health, education and employment.

19. Bearing in mind the definition of access to justice given in the Committee's general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women's access to justice, what steps had the State party taken to ensure that vulnerable women did not face discrimination based on gender stereotypes, or other barriers to access to justice? She would like to know what links existed between the Legal Aid and Advice Centre of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs and the Sexual Offences Model Court. Were there plans for this centre to provide low-cost legal aid in criminal matters involving women in particular? She would also like to know what the relationship was between SARC and the Court. She was concerned about whether the human and financial resource allocations to the Sexual Offences Model Court were sufficient to support its structure and operation, as alternative sources reported procedural delays in magistrates' courts, problems with police investigations and costly DNA tests.

20. **Ms. Marshall** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that there was a close nexus between SARC and the Sexual Offences Model Court. SARC had been established in part to give victims of rape or other sexual offences improved access to justice. Victims were now provided with a wider and more readily available range of services than in the past.

21. An oversight body was in place to ensure that SARC and the Court could provide the necessary services and recommend ways of filling any gaps identified. Under regulations that were expected to be in force by late February 2019, cases of sexual offences involving minors would have to be heard within 12 months, while those involving adults would have to be heard within 18 months. Persons providing legal aid to victims of sexual offences and all members of the bar had been made aware of the importance of handling sexual offence cases appropriately. Judicial personnel had been given comprehensive training and were well aware of the need to preserve confidentiality and deal with sexual assault cases with the urgency they deserved.

22. The country's legislation on domestic violence had been modernized, most recently in 2015. The Status of Children Act had also been adopted in 2015. The Prime Minister and the Attorney General had indicated that the model bill on sexual harassment should be

enacted into law by the end of 2019. In anticipation of its adoption, the Directorate of Gender Affairs had begun providing information on the kinds of workplace behaviour that amounted to sexual harassment.

23. The Disabilities and Equal Opportunities Act had recently entered into force. Responsibility for disability affairs had been shifted, in line with a social rather than medical approach, from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Social Transformation, Human Resource Development and Youth and Gender Affairs. The Government was currently considering recommendations on possible ways of amending the Act to ensure that it mainstreamed gender perspectives and afforded protection to all vulnerable persons.

24. The decriminalization of same-sex sexual acts had been a recent topic of discussion in the country. Plans had been made to continue those discussions, and the authorities were aware of relevant case law in neighbouring countries. It was possible that, at its next appearance before the Committee, Antigua and Barbuda would be able to report greater progress on that front.

25. Amendments to legislation to criminalize marital rape were on the 2019 legislative agenda. The Attorney General's Office was studying a number of amendments to laws on sexual offences that had been proposed as part of the process of setting up the Sexual Offences Model Court. The Attorney General had stated publicly that he wished to deal with the issue of marital rape by the end of 2019.

26. The Directorate of Gender Affairs had informed the people of the country of their rights under the Optional Protocol to the Convention. The authorities had held workshops with NGO partners to ensure that they were aware not only of the rights under the Optional Protocol but also of the ways in which they could assist prospective complainants in exercising those rights. A committee had been formed in December 2018 to help address the absence of laws specifically criminalizing discrimination against women.

27. **Ms. Bethel** said that, despite the obstacles to obtaining a popular mandate for constitutional amendments, the State party should continue making efforts to include a definition of discrimination either in its Constitution or in national law. With regard to the Sexual Offences Model Court, she wondered how the State party dealt with the high cost of DNA tests. She also wondered whether the scope of the bill on sexual harassment extended beyond the workplace. In addition, she wished to know whether the Disabilities and Equal Opportunities Act responded to the requirements of women and girls with disabilities.

28. **Ms. Marshall** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that, although it would be difficult to amend the Constitution, specific steps could be taken to enshrine gender equity in the law. DNA testing, free for victims, would be done domestically, as the Government had approved the establishment of a forensic laboratory. Monies had been set aside to build the laboratory, and it was expected to begin operations by mid-2020. The bill on sexual harassment was comprehensive and did not cover the workplace alone. Outreach efforts, focusing mostly on the public sector, had been made in preparation for the adoption of the bill.

29. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she wished to know what the State party was doing to fulfil its legal obligations under the Convention in areas other than combating gender-based violence, such as women's economic empowerment, health and political participation. She asked what legal, policy and social protection measures were taken to promote and protect women's rights across all sectors and whether the resources allocated to the Directorate of Gender Affairs were sufficient for it to perform its work effectively.

30. She wondered whether gender focal points had been established in every area of activity and what results had been achieved in tackling inequalities. She would welcome an explanation of the reasons for not creating a ministry for women's affairs or core programmes to harness the potential of women and girls for national development. She would also appreciate additional information on the structure and mandate of the Directorate of Gender Affairs. It would be particularly interesting to know what contribution the Directorate made to coordinating multisectoral efforts to bridge gender gaps, what targets it had achieved and what oversight functions it exercised. An indication of a timeline for the development of a national gender policy would also be welcome.

31. She would be grateful for further information on the training programmes available to lawyers and justice officials and on the results of the National Strategic Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence (2013–2018). Did the State party intend to extend the plan? She also asked whether the Gender-based Violence Crisis Centre that had begun operating in 2016 was still open, whether the review of all legislation and policies pertaining to gender that had begun in 2015 was complete and, if so, what the outcome had been.

32. In addition, she wished to know what impact the gender-based violence database and High-level Task Force on Sexual Violence and Assault had had on the rate of violence against women in the State party and whether legal, social, cultural and religious distinctions had been made in the recording of such violence. She also wished to know what measures had been put in place to ensure the sustainability of the initiatives undertaken by the State party, in particular the Trust Fund Project to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls.

33. **Ms. Jacobs** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that, because of the prevalence of gender-based violence, combating such violence had been the focus of many of the early efforts made by the Directorate of Gender Affairs. Currently, however, the focus was shifting, and issues that intersected with gender-based violence were being addressed. For example, the factors that contributed to such violence, including women's lack of economic empowerment, had been looked into as part of the National Strategic Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence. In addition, empowerment services had been streamlined, and SARC offered women, life-skills training, career advice and job placement and other useful services, not merely services for female victims of violence.

34. Measures were being taken to make the institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming more robust. Gender focal points had been designated throughout the public sector, and training sessions had been held to ensure that the country's development plans were compatible with its international commitments. The focal points and other officials were given training on introducing a gender perspective in their respective areas in preparation for the adoption of a national gender policy. It was not always easy, however, for a person in a ministry ostensibly unrelated to women's affairs to understand what gender had to do with his or her work. In the Caribbean, gender policies not preceded by considerable capacity-building and training were often ineffective. A gender equality action plan should be in place by mid-year.

35. The Directorate focused mainly on two areas: training for SARC staff members; and the more technical work of gender mainstreaming. Significant strides had been made in almost all priority areas. More work needed to be done to promote women's assumption of leadership roles, however. Methods of measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals were being developed. The gender equality indicators developed by the CARICOM also informed the Directorate's work.

36. Although the National Strategic Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence had been in place during the previous five-year period, the intention of the Government was to include measures to combat gender-based violence in the forthcoming national gender policy and gender equality action plan. Collecting disaggregated data had long been a challenge in the Caribbean region, so a database into which all relevant organizations and agencies, from the police to NGOs, could enter data had been set up. The database, which would shortly allow users to track reports of gender-based violence, had been underused. Additional training was therefore planned. A mechanism to ensure the sustainability of the Directorate's initiatives would be provided for in the national gender policy and gender equality action plan.

37. **Ms. Reddock** said that she wished to know whether steps had been taken to ensure that data on domestic and other violence could always be disaggregated by gender.

38. **Ms. Manalo** asked what was holding the State party back from adopting a law or policy that would call for the equal participation of women in positions of power, leadership and decision-making.

39. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she wondered what steps were taken to avoid the stigma carried by victims of gender-based violence; in particular, it was unclear how the privacy of those who turned to SARC, where a wide range of other services were offered to women, was safeguarded. In addition, she would welcome an indication of the measures that

were taken to ensure that officials at the highest levels of decision-making had taken ownership of matters related to the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming.

40. **Ms. Jacobs** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that data had been broken down by gender and other relevant categories since 2017. The issue of stigma had been discussed before the establishment of SARC, which was a multi-use centre; it would not be easy for an outside observer to know who was using the services of the centre and for what purposes. Confidentiality protocols were in place, and discretion was the rule.

41. Efforts were being made to develop action plans and policies on gender equality. Strategic priority areas – such as access to justice, national disaster risk reduction and climate change resilience – had been identified in line with CARICOM gender equality policies and programmes and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. A significant amount of time had been spent, however, on training and awareness-raising; in general, knowledge of gender issues was sorely lacking in the region.

42. **Ms. Marshall** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that, since the concept of gender equality was still in its infancy in Antigua and Barbuda, the Government's preferred approach was to educate and train personnel before developing and introducing the requisite legislation and policies. In so doing, it was hoped that the likelihood of those subsequent laws being implemented fully and effectively would be increased. The main entry point for training on gender equality was the issue of gender-based violence.

43. Within the Ministry of Social Transformation, Human Resource Development, Youth and Gender, the Directorate of Gender Affairs managed a range of services for women and vulnerable groups. For instance, a financial empowerment centre had been established to provide advice and assistance to individuals in financial difficulty, many of whom were single mothers.

44. **Ms. Nadaraia**, referring to article 4 of the Convention, said that temporary special measures were aimed at accelerating the achievement of de facto equality between men and women. It was therefore regrettable that, despite the recommendations made by the Committee in its previous concluding observations ([A/52/38/Rev.1](#)), the State party had failed to introduce any temporary special measures to increase women's participation in public and political life. She wished to know whether the State party planned to adopt any temporary special measures to improve women's political representation and to promote equal opportunities and de facto equality in other areas of economic and social life, including in fields in which women were particularly underrepresented, disadvantaged or faced significant discrimination. It would also be useful to know whether any temporary special measures were envisaged to ensure equal opportunities for vulnerable groups of women, including women with disabilities and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women.

45. **Ms. Marshall** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that legislation had not yet been introduced to facilitate the use of temporary special measures. The Directorate of Gender Affairs was scheduled to meet with political parties in order to press upon them the importance of women's political empowerment and the need for them to encourage and support women to run for elected office. Women's low participation in political life was linked to outdated cultural views of women. Those attitudes were slowly changing and, once political parties had been made aware of the issue, the Government would then be able to consider formulating legislation. In other areas of life, the Government was committed to women's economic empowerment. To that end, it had developed an entrepreneurial fund specifically for women, who often faced challenges when it came to gaining financial backing for new and existing business ventures. Lastly, it was worth pointing out that women occupied the majority of leadership roles in the public sector and that gender parity had been all but achieved in statutory corporations.

46. **Ms. Manalo** said that she had been interested to hear about the Government's preference for training and education before introducing legislation. Regarding temporary special measures, she asked whether any public funding was available for their implementation if it was requested.

47. **Ms. Bethel** said that she wondered whether the Government might consider turning the entrepreneurial fund for women into a temporary special measure with specific, time-bound targets.

48. **Ms. Marshall** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that she welcomed the suggestion to turn the entrepreneurial fund into a temporary special measure and would relay it to her Government. As for the budget, the Government had shown a greater understanding of the agenda of the Ministry of Social Transformation, Human Resource Development, Youth and Gender and the resources needed to achieve it. Moreover, submissions could be made in the future for additional funding if it was needed.

49. **Ms. Rana** said that the State party's efforts to address persistent gender stereotypes through a variety of campaigns, programmes and workshops were highly commendable. She wished to know whether any monitoring mechanisms had been established to assess the impact of those programmes and, if not, whether there were plans to do so, what sectors of the population had so far been reached and whether resources had been allocated and plans developed to ensure the sustainability of those initiatives. She wondered whether there were any plans to amend the newly drafted Education Sector Plan to include a specific reference to gender equality principles and strategies in order to dismantle traditional gender stereotypes in schools. She would also be grateful to receive data on the number of women who had successfully taken up a trade after having participated in the measures introduced by the State party to encourage women to pursue careers in non-traditional fields of employment.

50. While commending the establishment of SARC and the crisis hotline, she noted that the State party lacked shelters for victims of gender-based violence and thus had to resort to using hotels as emergency accommodation, which was not ideal for victims needing security, long-term shelter and counselling. She would therefore like to know whether there were any plans to establish shelters and whether disaggregated data on the types of cases and persons dealt with by SARC. Lastly, she would appreciate information on the State party's plans to initiate outreach with the lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex community, including the timeline, mechanisms and budget envisaged for that purpose.

51. **Ms. Chalal**, while commending the State party's efforts to combat trafficking in persons, which included the amendment of the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention) Act and the creation of the Trafficking in Persons Prevention Secretariat, said that the Committee was concerned by the lack of prosecutions and convictions in trafficking cases and the prevalence of trafficking of women for the purposes of sexual exploitation or forced labour in domestic service. She wished to know why no traffickers had been successfully convicted, what measures had been taken to ensure the effective implementation of anti-trafficking legislation, whether allegations of the complicity of immigration officials had been investigated and, if so, what the outcome of those inquiries had been. She wondered whether penalties for trafficking offences were fixed and commensurate with the gravity of the offence and whether law enforcement officials and judges received training on how to handle trafficking cases and identify potential victims.

52. She invited the delegation to comment on the concerns raised by the United States Department of State in its 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report, in particular that the legislation allowed for the levying of fines rather imprisonment for traffickers and that police officers complicit in trafficking offences faced only administrative sanctions. She wondered whether there were plans for a follow-up to the 2016–2018 national action plan to combat human trafficking, what criteria victims of trafficking had to meet in order to benefit from the full range of victim support services, how many victims had gained access to those services and whether they were automatically issued with residency permits.

53. Regarding prostitution, she noted that no legislative steps had been taken by the State party to decriminalize prostitution or reduce demand. She asked whether there were any programmes for women who wished to leave prostitution and, if so, how they were funded, how many women had enrolled and whether those women were exempted from prosecution.

54. **Ms. Jacobs** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that mechanisms had been established to monitor the various programmes and campaigns introduced to tackle gender stereotypes and record data such as the number of persons those campaigns had reached. Assessing the direct

impact had proved more difficult to track; indeed, it might be years before any change in behaviours or attitudes was noted. Many of the campaigns were co-financed by international organizations for a specific period, after which the Government had pledged to increase their funding to ensure their sustainability. Private and public media organizations had also pledged to continue broadcasting public service adverts and print campaign materials.

55. The Ministry of Education was committed to strengthening the Education Sector Plan, including by making explicit reference to the promotion of gender equality. Projects funded by international donors – such as a child-friendly initiative jointly funded by the United Nations Children’s Fund and the Government – provided strategic opportunities for cooperation on gender issues between the Directorate of Gender Affairs and the Ministry.

56. The Government was committed to establishing a shelter for victims of gender-based violence. A one-stop centre and a specialized court had already been established; a shelter was the next logical step. In the meantime, in cases where the immediate removal of a victim was necessary, the use of hotels was the only, if not entirely ideal, solution.

57. A review of the legal framework had identified additional areas for strengthening anti-trafficking legislation. The Trafficking in Persons Prevention Committee had developed screening tools and strategies for the identification of potential victims. Other than being a victim of trafficking, there were no specific criteria for gaining access to victim support services. Arrangements were made to return individuals to their country of origin or issue them with residency permits, depending on their preference. Lastly, concerted efforts were being made to address the lack of convictions for trafficking offences. For example, the authorities were working with the International Organization for Migration to ensure that the necessary standards were in place and training on investigative techniques was being provided to police investigators.

58. **Ms. Chalal** said that the Committee had been informed that economically vulnerable parents occasionally induced their daughters to become prostitutes. She asked whether such parents were prosecuted and whether shelters were provided for girls who were at risk in their homes. She asked whether the State party intended to ratify the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

59. **Ms. Bethel** asked whether the State party’s media combated or promoted stereotypes and cultural prejudice. What action was taken in that regard by the Directorate of Gender Affairs? She enquired about measures taken against police officers who failed to comply with their statutory obligations under the Domestic Violence Act of 2015. She would appreciate clarification of reports that traffickers were liable only to payment of a fine and that police officers who were complicit in trafficking were liable only to administrative sanctions.

60. **Ms. Paláez Narváez** noted that the Committee on the Rights of the Child had expressed concern in 2017 ([CRC/C/ATG/CO/2-4](#)) about reports of men in the State party having sexual relations with girls as young as 8 years of age, the stigmatization of child victims and the low rate of prosecution of offenders. She asked whether mechanisms, procedures and guidelines had been established to ensure mandatory reporting of such cases, whether action had been taken to combat the stigmatization of victims, whether accessible and confidential reporting channels had been established, and whether programmes and policies had been developed for the prevention of sexual abuse and the social reintegration of child victims. She wished to know whether shelters, especially for victims of gender-based violence, were accessible to all girls and women, particularly those with disabilities.

61. **Ms. Marshall** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that the existing legislation required all buildings to be accessible for persons with disabilities. The Development Control Authority had established a special committee to conduct assessments of buildings and to make recommendations.

62. Vigilant action was being taken to address the concerns raised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Following the establishment of SARC and the Sexual Offences Model Court, the Directorate of Gender Affairs had established a video conferencing system so that victims could provide evidence without entering the courtroom. Police were also being trained to prevent intimidation of female minors and to enable them to deliver their statements freely. If a parent had been negligent or was guilty of abuse, the child could be immediately

removed and placed in a safe home. There were currently no State-run homes for children who had been exposed to abuse or the risk of abuse, but steps were being taken to remedy the situation. There were also plans to amend the Sexual Offences Act in order to prescribe harsher sentences, including for marital rape.

63. Prostitution was illegal, and the police and immigration authorities held continuous training courses to address trafficking issues involving both adults and minors and to ensure that perpetrators were successfully prosecuted. The Sexual Offences Model Court could also be mandated to hear cases concerning trafficking offences.

64. The Directorate of Gender Affairs had raised the problem of stereotyping with the media. For instance, the media had used male rather than female pronouns when referring to a transgender woman who had been murdered by her partner. The media could actually help in due course to raise public awareness of the problem of stereotyping.

65. **Ms. Jacobs** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that no data were available on the prevalence of prostitution. Persons who sought access to social protection services were not required to admit that they had engaged in prostitution and they would not be prosecuted. The services were provided without stigmatization or discrimination.

66. She wished to draw attention to the work of the Adoption Committee, which was involved in the removal of children from their parents to safer homes where it was necessary to protect them from the risk of serious harm.

67. With regard to the role of the media, guidelines for reporting gender-based violence incidents were being drafted and would be forwarded to the media. There were also plans to hold training sessions for media outlets.

68. SARC had established a procedure whereby victims of gender-based violence could provide immediate feedback on the response of police officers and other authorities. Officers could be referred to the Police Service Commission for disciplinary action. The Sexual Offences Model Court had developed investigation guidelines for police and prosecutors. The Royal Police Force and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions were currently cooperating in support of joint investigations.

Articles 7 to 9

69. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that she would like to commend the State party on the increase in the number of women members of the Senate, from 5 in 2014 to 9 out of 17 members in 2018. However, only 2 of the 15 members of the Cabinet and 2 of the 17 members of the House of Representatives were women.

70. The Committee had been informed that cultural barriers and stigma hindered women from entering into public and political life, and that women who did so were subjected to harassment by politicians, political commentators and the media. Women were also underrepresented in the foreign service, overseas offices, and delegations to regional and international institutions. She asked whether the State party had sought diverse ways and means of increasing women's domestic and international representation. For instance, how many positions were occupied by women in inter-ministerial committees and directorates, and how many women served as ambassadors and heads of missions? She also wished to know how many women had been elected or appointed to international or regional organizations.

71. **Mr. Bergby** said that, according to the State party's report, the law granted non-national women the opportunity to become nationals upon marriage. He asked whether the same provision was applicable to non-national men. A non-citizen child became a citizen from the date of an adoption order if the male adopter was a citizen. He asked whether the child also became a citizen if the adopter was a woman. In the case of single parents, the mother's consent was required to obtain a child's passport. He asked whether her consent was also required if the child was living with the father. The Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness recognized the right of all persons to a nationality and sought to prevent statelessness at birth and later in life. He asked whether the State party intended to accede to the Convention.

72. **Ms. Marshall** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that the law granted non-national men married to women citizens of Antigua and Barbuda the right to citizenship. A child adopted by a citizen was not automatically issued with a passport but was required to submit an application showing the adoption record. Where parents were unwed and the child resided with the father, the mother's consent was required if, for example, the father applied for a passport so that he could travel alone with the child. A similar procedure was required if the child resided with the mother. However, if the father or mother had a sole custody order, consent was not required in either case.

73. As she was unaware of the authorities' current position regarding the ratification of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, she would discuss the matter with the Attorney General and the Prime Minister. Antigua and Barbuda was an open and welcoming country, and no issues pertaining to statelessness had arisen, as far as she knew, in recent times. Persons who met the legal conditions were granted citizenship. In fact, non-nationals who had been convicted of an offence were asked, on serving their prison sentence, whether they wished to return to their country of origin or to remain in Antigua and Barbuda.

74. Although there were very few women members of the Cabinet and the House of Representatives, an upward trend had been discernible. The President of the Senate, who was a woman, had launched a training programme on the parliamentary system for young female leaders in the 15 to 16 age group so that they would consider taking steps to increase the number of women in the House of Representatives with a view to achieving gender parity in the political system. Admittedly, there was a lack of women leaders in the foreign service and very few women served in international organizations. However, she assured the Committee that action would be taken to remedy the situation. On the other hand, women constituted the majority of civil service staff at all levels.

75. **Ms. Jacobs** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that, according to data for 2015, 5 of the country's 33 ambassadors and 2 of the 6 heads of overseas missions and consulates were women. A woman had also served as Permanent Representative to the United Nations. With regard to the civil service, 70 per cent of permanent secretaries and 48 per cent of heads of departments were women in 2015. The Committee would be provided with data in due course concerning women serving with international and regional organizations.

76. **Ms. Manalo** asked whether there was a procedure for encouraging young women to join the diplomatic corps with a view to achieving parity at the ambassadorial level.

77. **Ms. Reddock**, referring to the statement that prostitution was illegal, asked whether the offender was the person who purchased such services or the person who provided them.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.