



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

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

Summary record of the 1971st meeting*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 9 May 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Peláez Narváez

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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

Fourth periodic report of Timor-Leste (CEDAW/C/TLS/4; CEDAW/C/TLS/Q/4; CEDAW/C/TLS/RQ/4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Timor-Leste joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste), introducing her country's fourth periodic report, said that Timor-Leste was strongly committed to ensuring that men and women were able to contribute to the country's development, side by side and on an equal footing. Her Government supported the Sustainable Development Goals and their emphasis on the cross-cutting goals of gender equality and inclusion, which held out the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind. The Secretariat of State for Equality and Inclusion worked closely with line ministries, development partners and civil society to adopt a gender mainstreaming approach and ensure the engagement of women and girls in the development of all government policies, laws, programmes and budgets. Significant progress had been made with respect to the definition of discrimination, the legislative framework, access to justice, violence against women, the national action plan on gender-based violence, policy on women and peace and security, the participation of women in politics and decision-making and equality in access to education and health.
3. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that the Government was not currently considering the adoption of a specific law on gender equality, which it viewed as a cross-cutting issue in all areas of development. However, it consistently mainstreamed gender equality in key legislation, such as the Law against Trafficking in Persons, the Law on the Creation of the Social Security Contributory Regime and the Law on the Special Regime for the Definition of Ownership of Immovable Property.
4. The mobile court system helped enhance access to formal justice in rural communities, including for women, in municipalities where fixed courts had not yet been established. The number of cases heard by mobile courts was rising every year, with women accounting for around one third of litigants. The Office of the Public Defender provided free legal aid in civil and criminal cases to needy citizens. Fourteen of the country's 34 judges and 35 of its 100 trained lawyers were women. A legal clinic programme being piloted in two rural judicial districts provided free legal information and consultation services.
5. In 2023, the annual budget of the Secretariat of State for Equality and Inclusion had been significantly increased to reinforce its role of coordinating and advocating for gender equality and inclusion in public policy and law, promoting gender equality and social inclusion, preventing and combating gender-based violence and empowering women economically and politically. Almost all line ministries had a gender working group, which participated in the regular meetings of the national group, and newly established institutions were encouraged to create one. Efforts to build the working groups' capacity to implement gender mainstreaming principles in budgeting and annual action plans were under way.
6. Faced with an increase in spousal sexual and other violence as a proportion of all violent crime, the Government had established a referral network to facilitate the reporting of incidents, investigations and judicial processes. In cooperation with partners, the Secretariat of State for Equality and Inclusion was conducting training to prevent gender-based violence. The increase in cases reported to the police was partly due to increased awareness of the process among women. The national police had established a gender unit to implement the national gender strategy. Progress had been made in the timely processing of incest cases by the courts and a working group had been established to review and propose amendments to the Penal Code and Law Against Domestic Violence to ensure that offences involving incest were covered and the sentences imposed for such offences were appropriate.
7. The country's third National Action Plan against Gender-based Violence 2022–2030 had been launched on the occasion of the 2022 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign and covered prevention and the provision of essential services and legal support to victims. The Secretary of State for Equality and Inclusion coordinated

implementation of the plan through an interministerial commission. As recorded in the Global Database on Violence against Women of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), progress had been made under the second national action plan in all areas, especially services for victims. Training and awareness-raising campaigns had led to increased knowledge among community leaders, teachers and students about reporting and referring cases of gender-based violence to the competent authorities. Training on gender-sensitive coverage had led to increased reporting of gender-based violence cases over the previous two years. Offenders in prison received anger management training and support for reintegration into the community. The Government was developing a second national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. Funding was still being provided for the previous plan, which had expired in 2020, and covered participation, prevention, protection and peacebuilding.

8. After the 2018 parliamentary elections, the 35 per cent minimum quota of women in the National Parliament had been surpassed for the third term in a row, reaching 40 per cent. However, women's participation at the executive level remained limited, amounting to between 16 per cent and 21 per cent during the reporting period, and was even lower at the local level, with women accounting for only 5 per cent of village heads. In cooperation with the female parliamentarian group and civil society organizations, the Government had approved a strategic framework to promote women's participation in politics, which involved the engagement of political parties and institutions in the process. Female representation in security and defence forces also remained low, with only 14 per cent of decision-making positions in the national police occupied by women.

9. School attendance rates had improved in recent years, with young persons staying in education for longer. The gender gap in access to education had narrowed or been eliminated in almost all regions and at all educational levels. The Government's inclusive education policy highlighted the right of pregnant girls to continue to attend school and a resolution on a re-entry policy would be submitted to the Council of Ministers. In the meantime, the Ministry of Education had issued a ministerial dispatch to all schools to allow girls to return to school after giving birth and made efforts to raise awareness among teachers, parents and local authorities of the need to overcome the negative attitudes and social stereotypes that prevented them from doing so.

10. During the reporting period, maternal, pregnancy-related and child mortality rates had decreased significantly. The aim of the national family health programme, implemented since 2015, was to bring a comprehensive service package of primary health care to households, providing home visits, clinical consultations, treatment and referrals.

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11. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she commended the State party on its efforts to advance equality for women and girls, particularly in post-conflict work, exemplified by the adoption of the National Action Plan on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325. The Committee looked forward to exploring ways for the Government to increase women's representation at the regional level to match the progress achieved in the National Parliament and learning about efforts to reduce gender-based violence, improve women's access to health care, family planning, education and justice and conduct a gender analysis of laws relating to women's land rights.

12. She would appreciate an explanation of the reasons why no action had been taken to amend article 141 of the Penal Code, relating to abortion. She would be interested in learning more about the country's high infant mortality rate, differences in access to medical care resulting from socioeconomic status and violence in school settings.

13. She would like to know whether the Government had completely ruled out adopting a specific and comprehensive law on gender equality, encompassing direct and indirect discrimination. Further data on complaints relating to gender discrimination submitted in the previous five years would be appreciated. She would like to hear about activities taken to ensure that women were aware of their rights under the Convention and the Optional Protocol and the way in which such information was disseminated.

14. It would be useful to hear the delegation's response to reports that the mobile court system was not always safe or appropriate, owing to its operating hours and locations, and to know whether the State party was considering contributing additional resources to the programme to ensure that the courts could work promptly and impartially. She wondered what progress had been made through the new law on traditional justice and what safeguards were in place to guarantee that the use of customary and non-customary dispute resolution mechanisms did not restrict women's access to judicial and other legal remedies.

15. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that Timor-Leste had ratified the Convention almost immediately upon regaining independence, and the principle of gender equality was enshrined in its Constitution. Previously, domestic violence cases could only be prosecuted on the basis of complaints and reporting rates were low. Since the entry into force of the Law against Domestic Violence, all witnesses to domestic violence were required to report it. In addition to the National Action Plan against Gender-based Violence, a federal referral network had been established throughout the country and facilitated the transfer of victims to safe accommodation to protect them during the investigation process and allow them to continue their education. Efforts were made in rural areas to ensure that women and girls knew how to report violence.

16. The Office of the Prosecutor General had branches in the municipalities of Lautém and Bobonaro. Mobile courts provided access to justice for women living in rural areas. The courts currently covered only a certain number of municipalities but it was hoped that that would change when more staff were recruited. Abortions were permitted for women who had a health condition that would make it unsafe for them to give birth. In any other circumstances, abortions were unlawful. No reports of unlawful abortions had been received in the past few years.

17. Customary law was considered valid under the Constitution. In a number of municipalities that had matrilineal systems, women had the right to own property and land. In municipalities with patrilineal systems, however, men inherited their family's land, although women were also entitled to a share of large estates.

18. It had not been considered necessary to establish a specific law prohibiting discrimination against women, as articles 16 and 17 of the Constitution guaranteed their access to education and health and their right to participate in the political life of the country. In 2018, the Ministry of Finance, acting on the recommendation of the Secretariat of State for Equality and Inclusion, had made it mandatory for ministries and municipal authorities to allocate funding for the promotion of gender equality and inclusion in their budget plans.

19. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she would appreciate further information on the measures taken by the State party to raise awareness of the Convention and the Optional Protocol among civil servants and the general public.

20. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that, after Timor-Leste had become a State party to the Convention, the Government had established a working group on its implementation and produced a booklet for dissemination among the staff of all line ministries. The concluding observations issued by the Committee after its first and second constructive dialogues with Timor-Leste had been summarized and disseminated among the staff of line ministries and the gender working group of the Ministry of Labour. The Government had established a complaints mechanism for reporting acts of sexual harassment committed by public servants, known as Chatbot Rosa.

21. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that she would welcome information on the follow-up given to the recommendations made by the Committee in its Views on communication No. 88/2015, *Maria Lourdes v. Timor Leste*, which concerned the State party's obligations under the Convention to adopt all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relationships. In that regard, the Committee had stressed that stereotypes affected women's right to impartial judicial processes and that the judiciary should not apply inflexible standards based on preconceived notions about what constituted domestic violence.

22. **Ms. Manalo** said that she wished to know what would be done to increase the number of women working in the justice system.

23. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that the author of communication No. 88/2015 had been tried for the murder of her partner and sentenced by a district court. She had filed an appeal but the Court of Appeal had upheld the decision of the lower court. It had been subsequently determined that she had been discriminated against in the case and had suffered torture by her partner. After she had been released from prison, the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion had been unable to provide her with due compensation, as she had not had a bank account. She had also lacked accommodation, despite having a small child in her care. In addition, her deceased partner's family had been exerting psychological pressure on her. She was currently employed by the shelter where she was staying, in accordance with an agreement established between the shelter and the Ministry. She and the family of the deceased had reached an agreement in the meantime and were now jointly looking after her son.

24. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that candidates for posts within the justice system were selected and recruited in accordance with established processes. Applications from men and women were treated equally. All recruits were given training and then assessed to determine whether they would be best suited to working as a judge, a prosecutor or a lawyer. A total of 14 of the 35 judges in Timor-Leste were women. Of the 4 judges working at the Court of Appeal, which was the highest court in the country, 2 were women. A total of 10 women judges were employed by the district courts. Equal numbers of men and women were currently enrolled at the Legal and Judicial Training Centre.

25. **Ms. Rana** said that she would welcome information on any plans in place to strengthen the human, technical and financial resources and the decision-making powers of the Secretariat of State for Equality and Inclusion. She wondered what measures were being taken to strengthen coordination between the Secretariat and other line ministries and agencies. The delegation might provide information on the training given to the staff of the interministerial gender working groups at all levels of government. It might also indicate whether the State party would increase the financial assistance provided by the Secretariat to the gender focal points in the municipalities. She would welcome information on the institutional mechanism responsible for implementing the Programme on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion and the budget allocated to the programme. It would also be interesting to know the outcome of the analysis of government institutions conducted in 2020 and whether any similar analysis had been conducted since 2020.

26. The Committee would be grateful to learn whether the National Ombudsman for Human Rights planned to formalize its working relations with civil society and whether the law governing that institution would be amended to strengthen the criteria used to select and dismiss its staff. She wondered whether the implementation of the National Action Plan on Security Council Resolution 1325 adopted in 2016 had been assessed. The delegation might provide information on the subsequent action plan. In particular, it would be interesting to know whether the plan would address the issue of reparation for women victims of conflict-related sexual violence and whether civil society would be involved in the implementation of the plan.

27. **Ms. Stott Despoja** asked whether the State party would consider applying further quotas or temporary special measures to local and municipal elections in order to increase the number of women in leadership positions in villages and towns. The Committee would welcome information on any temporary special measures being taken to accelerate de facto equality for marginalized women, including Indigenous women, women with disabilities, and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons. The delegation might provide up-to-date statistics on the number of women serving as chief executive officers or members of the board of publicly listed companies. She wondered whether the State Party would consider introducing quotas to increase the number of women board members and whether it would adopt temporary special measures to increase the number of women in paid employment.

28. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that the Secretariat of State for Equality and Inclusion had 70 permanent staff, more than 100 contractual staff and over 60 focal points. The Secretariat made cash transfers to over 330 beneficiary groups that were mostly comprised of women. The transfers were intended to reduce women's economic dependence on their partners, thereby reducing the risk of being subjected to domestic violence. The beneficiaries

used the cash transfers to raise chickens or pigs, to produce fabrics for sale and to launch or expand their businesses.

29. Women were being trained to stand as candidates in municipal and parliamentary elections. Timor-Leste had recently become a State party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Women who had experience of standing for election were being asked to encourage other women to do likewise, including women with disabilities. A quota had been established to ensure that women made up at least 40 per cent of parliamentarians. The quota also applied to the heads and deputy heads of parliamentary committees. The Law on Political Parties established the number of places on election lists that were set aside for women, which varied depending on whether a woman was the head of the political party in question. A woman had recently been elected as the President of the municipality of Dili.

30. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that the Government had been implementing a gender-sensitive budgeting system for a number of years. The line ministries were committed to implementing the Committee's recommendations on gender-based violence and the National Action Plan on Security Council Resolution 1325. The Government acknowledged that the gender working groups should be strengthened. It allocated funds to rural women's groups as part of its efforts to empower rural women.

31. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that the gender working group involving the various government ministries held meetings twice a year. A new budgeting system in 2023 placed emphasis on good governance, gender equality and inclusion. Funding had been provided with the aim of ensuring that all government ministries and all municipalities would incorporate gender-sensitive budgeting and support for gender mainstreaming activities.

32. A study recently carried out by the United Nations Development Programme had found that some ministries that had allocated resources using gender-sensitive budgeting had used those resources for other activities. The Government was working with development partners to monitor proper implementation, but government ministries lacked the proper resources and personnel to do so effectively. The Office of the National Ombudsman for Human Rights too lacked the resources to ensure effective implementation.

33. Talks were under way with groups of women parliamentarians and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a view to introducing quotas for the participation of women in the national legislature. It was not easy to convince women to stand for election, owing to cultural acceptance of the patriarchal system and a lack of confidence among prospective female candidates. Women often considered that, in order to run for office, they required the approval of traditional leaders.

34. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that the Chega! National Centre had been established as a publicly funded institution for the monitoring of implementation of the recommendations issued by the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation, including recommendations relating to reparation. Of the numerous recommendations issued since 2005, 90 per cent had been implemented by the Government. As early as 2008, the Government had called on NGOs to draft a law on reparations and another on the establishment of an institution for preserving national memory, but neither had been adopted by the National Parliament. It had been only in 2017 that the Government had approved the establishment of the Chega! National Centre as the memory institution of Timor-Leste, notwithstanding the lack of parliamentary approval.

35. The Chega! National Centre had since 2017 implemented interim reparation measures, in particular for women victims of the political conflict. Since 2019, it had provided 330 women victims of violence with cash payments of \$500; nearly 90 victims of sexual violence had received humanitarian aid, and some 50 were benefiting from mental health and medical assistance. The Centre had provided scholarships to 17 children of victims of sexual violence. The Centre had also assisted with the provision of birth certificates for children born to victims of sexual violence, thus helping to combat the stigma associated with their situation and helping them in their pursuit of education and careers.

36. **Ms. Tisheva**, noting the strength of traditional gender roles in the State party and the high incidence and even acceptance of gender-based and domestic violence, said that the Committee would like to know whether the Government intended to adopt a comprehensive

strategy to combat gender stereotypes and harmful practices and what types of measures were envisioned under the National Action Plan against Gender-based Violence. It would be useful to find out if the authorities had taken specific steps to reduce the prevalence of child marriage, for example by raising the legal age of marriage to 18, and if they had planned any measures to eliminate harmful traditions such as polygamy and the payment of bride prices. She would like to know when the authorities planned to amend the Penal Code to explicitly criminalize major forms of gender-based violence, including marital rape, and to introduce the concept of lack of consent in the definition of rape. The Committee would like to find out about steps taken to address the reluctance of women to report incidents of gender-based violence, for example through implementation of a witness protection law, improved access to justice, more effective training of members of the judiciary and a reduction in the use of alternative dispute resolution when cases of domestic violence were reported. It would like to find out whether the State party had plans to increase the number of shelters available to victims and to ensure that the services they offered were appropriate for women and girls with disabilities, members of minorities, older persons and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. She would also like the delegation to explain how the State party supported women's NGOs in combating violence against women and would appreciate it if the delegation would describe how all such challenges were addressed in the National Action Plan against Gender-based Violence.

37. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that she would like to know whether the National Commission to Combat Trafficking in Persons and the National Action Plan on Human Trafficking had been formally established, and what resources had been devoted to implementation of the National Action Plan. The Committee had received information that trafficking in persons occurred throughout Timor-Leste owing to a low level of awareness about the issue. It would like to hear about the State party's efforts to collect data to make trafficking more visible and traceable. She would appreciate it if the delegation would describe the awareness-raising measures implemented under the Plan. The Committee would also like to hear about the status of efforts to develop standard operating procedures for the identification of trafficking victims and to find out whether training was regularly dispensed to the police so that they were able to identify victims. She wished to know why there was such a low number of prosecutions and convictions for human trafficking and what efforts were being made to combat trafficking of children within Timor-Leste. She would also like to find out whether the eligibility requirements for residence permits for foreign nationals had been relaxed since 2019, whether there was a budget allocated for the care of trafficking victims at the shelters intended for victims of gender-based violence and if the authorities had any plans to create shelters for male victims of human trafficking.

38. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that the Law against Domestic Violence had been in force for over a decade and that its provisions relating to certain harmful practices were inadequate. For example, the law could punish crimes of incest more effectively and give judges less discretion over penalties. As the parliamentary elections were about to take place, it was not currently feasible to attempt to adopt new legislation, but she trusted that the incoming Government would place priority on updating the law.

39. Mindful of the fact that women were predominantly materially dependent on their spouses and that there was a need to reduce such dependency, the Government had established publicly financed programmes for the economic empowerment of women, with grants provided for certain groups working for that purpose or working with women with disabilities. The level of support for the specific programmes varied depending on their success in establishing businesses.

40. The implementation of the National Action Plan on Gender-based Violence was subject to an annual review. Support for safe houses and shelters for victims of gender-based violence was provided by NGOs, which received State funding. Victims sometimes remained in the shelters for prolonged periods while waiting for courts to rule on the matter, and they and their children often faced difficulties with reintegration into society. The State provided funding to allow them to continue their education while staying at the shelters and assisted them with finding accommodation. It also ensured that the children of women staying in the shelters were issued birth certificates.

41. During the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic the Government had initiated an assistance programme for needy families whereby small businesses were contracted for the distribution of food baskets.

42. The International Organization for Migration had worked with the Ministry of the Interior to draft standard operating procedures and guidelines for combating human trafficking and assisting victims. The Council of Ministers had assigned some of the relevant tasks to the Ministry of Justice for the coordination of such efforts, and that Ministry had established a committee to combat trafficking in persons, which had formulated a draft national action plan and draft standard operating procedures. Staff of that committee had recently taken part in an international training event in Bangkok and had devised guidelines for the training of law enforcement personnel. The training had already begun in two municipalities. The draft of the national action plan expected to be adopted by the incoming Government following the elections. While very few cases had been prosecuted in the past few years, a large backlog of trafficking cases had been identified by NGOs. Civil society organizations were actively involved in efforts to prevent human trafficking and cooperated closely with public agencies and government ministries.

43. The coordination of measures taken pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security was the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior. Unfortunately, owing to a lack of time, it had been impossible for the Office of the National Ombudsman for Human Rights to submit a proposal to the Council of Ministers for work aimed at countering gender stereotypes. However, consultation on a national action plan had been completed and the Office would call upon the incoming Government to take appropriate action.

44. Marital rape was criminalized under harmonized provisions of the Penal Code and the Law against Domestic Violence. No in-depth investigations had been conducted into cases of marital rape because victims were reluctant to report it. Often, domestic violence victims who had been raped were only willing to complain of physical assault.

45. In the municipality of Ermera, which had high rates of sexual violence, the Office of the Secretary of State for Equality and Inclusion had signed an agreement with UN-Women to open a new shelter for domestic violence survivors and their children. The Ministry of Social Solidarity had signed a contract for the operation of a shelter in the municipality of Baucau. The Government aimed to open more shelters in order to improve victims' access to services.

46. The decision to open a shelter in Ermera would also facilitate victims' access to justice through the mobile court system given that the municipality was far from the nearest district court. In rural areas, Vulnerable Persons Units provided victims with access to medical examinations. The European Union and the United Nations, through the Spotlight Initiative, had provided funding for the establishment of Vulnerable Persons Units in the municipalities of Bobonaro, Ermera and Viqueque. International funding through the Spotlight Initiative had also contributed to the opening in 2022 of safe spaces in five hospitals, which provided services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, abandonment and human trafficking. The NGO Psychological Recovery and Development in East Timor provided forensic medical examinations for victims – currently the only organization to do so. Training on forensic testing had been organized for midwives and in the near term would also be provided to doctors.

47. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that health professionals received training in the medical care of survivors, including persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Health, with the support of the United Nations Population Fund, had enrolled a doctor in a course of study on forensic medicine, which would allow the person in question to subsequently provide forensic medical examinations.

48. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports advocated for girls to be allowed to return to school after giving birth. Girls who wished to continue their education would be referred to a school near their place of residence. The Government had conducted research on the issue of early marriage and, based on the findings, had provided training for schools on its prevention. The Government had also expanded the Bolsa da Mãe cash transfer programme to reach pregnant women for the first time. With the

support of the Government of Australia, the expanded programme, known as Bolsa da Mãe – Jerasaun Foun (New Generation), had been rolled out in the municipalities of Aileu, Ermera and Oecusse. Pregnant women who registered as beneficiaries received an allowance of US\$ 15 per month, rising to US\$ 20 per month after the birth of the child. Mothers of children with disabilities received an additional amount. The Government planned to implement the expanded programme, which had already benefited 160,000 pregnant women, in other municipalities.

49. In some parts of Timor-Leste, notably the east, polygamy was considered a normal traditional practice. Husbands were responsible for supporting all their wives and children. Polygamy had been outlawed under the Civil Code, which had not reduced the number of reported cases. The Timor-Leste Defence Force had adopted a decision according to which members of the military who married a second wife would be automatically discharged.

50. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that it was regrettable that the National Action Plan on Human Trafficking had still not been adopted, six years after the adoption of the Law on Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking. She wondered how the State party would ensure the allocation of sufficient funds to effectively combat trafficking pending the adoption of the National Action Plan.

51. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she would appreciate clarification of whether the State party intended to amend the Civil Code to set the legal age for marriage at 18 years. She wished to know how the State party had addressed polygamy in laws and policies in order to eliminate the practice. Noting that the Law against Domestic Violence was harmonized with the Penal Code, she encouraged the State party to include an explicit definition of marital rape in its laws, in order to provide a clear path for prevention and prosecution.

52. **The Chair** said that she wished to know what steps the State party had taken to eliminate the payment of bride prices, and what support was provided for women's organizations that worked to protect women from violence.

53. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that her delegation acknowledged that the adoption of the National Action Plan on Human Trafficking had not been given immediate priority. However, the draft had been prepared and would be recommended to the Government that assumed power after the impending parliamentary elections. The budget for combating trafficking in persons had risen from approximately US\$ 300,000 in 2022 to US\$ 500,000 in 2023 and had been used to fund training for relevant entities.

54. Regarding the minimum legal age for marriage, it should be noted that the Constitution did not clearly establish the age of majority, although it conferred the right to vote from the age of 17 years. A bill on child protection had been submitted to the National Parliament and was currently at the committee stage. The members of the committee in question had differing perceptions about the age at which young people became adults and should no longer benefit from protection as children. Discussions regarding the appropriate age at which to grant certain rights, including the right to marry, were ongoing.

55. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that the Penal Code clearly provided for marital rape, since it referred to sexual offences, including rape, committed within the family. Moreover, the definition of domestic violence laid down in the Law against Domestic Violence included sexual violence even within a marriage.

56. Under Timorese law, the minimum legal age for marriage was 17 years, or 16 years with the consent of the parents or guardian. However, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Timor-Leste had ratified, held that persons under the age of 18 years were children and could not give their consent to marry.

57. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that the practice of *barlaque*, or the payment of bride prices, should not be seen as parents selling their daughters, but was an ancestral tradition that valued and protected women and strengthened the relationship between the families of the bride and the groom. According to the tradition, a woman who wished to marry had to ask permission from her parents; the groom's family then had to contribute money, gifts or animals with a certain value.

58. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that Timor-Leste was currently in the midst of a legislative reform process, which had included amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure. As part of that process, the Government, the National Parliament and the judiciary had held discussions about the concept of discrimination and the need for it to be clearly defined in law so that judges and prosecutors could perform their duties more effectively.

59. Trafficking in persons had been criminalized under both the Law on Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking and the Penal Code. Unfortunately, few prosecutions had been brought because the offence consisted of multiple elements and perpetrators were sometimes charged with other offences. It was essential to provide training to justice officials so that trafficking did not go unpunished.

Articles 7–9

60. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she would be interested to know how many Timorese women worked in leadership positions in the diplomatic service and international institutions. She would be grateful for statistics on women in leadership roles in peacekeeping, law enforcement, and defence and security. While the Committee welcomed the information that 40 per cent of judges were women, it would be interested to know what specific measures, such as statutory quotas and incentives, had been taken to increase the number of women in decision-making positions in the civil service.

61. The Committee was satisfied to note that women accounted for almost 40 per cent of parliamentarians, thanks to the minimum quota for women in the National Parliament. However, she wondered what was being done to address women's comparatively low representation in local government and in the executive branch and to increase the representation of Indigenous women, women with disabilities, and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons. What measures, apart from the quota system, had been taken to encourage women to participate in politics and public life? How did the State party combat patriarchal attitudes, and how did it protect and create safe spaces for women who wished to run for office?

62. **Ms. Bethel** said that the State party was to be commended for its efforts in the area of birth registration, notably the mobile registration campaigns that had been conducted in remote areas. She would be interested to know how many people had benefited from such campaigns, whether the Government planned to continue them, and whether they had been allocated sufficient financial, human and technical resources.

63. She would appreciate statistics on the number of stateless women and children currently living in Timor-Leste. It would be useful to know how the State party protected and ensured the rights of stateless women and girls and what support it provided so that they had access to public services in the areas of health, housing, employment and education.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.