



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

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Eighty-fourth session

### Summary record of the 1954th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 15 February 2023, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Peláez Narváez

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*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

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

*Fourth periodic report of Mauritania (continued) (CEDAW/C/MRT/4; CEDAW/C/MRT/Q/4; CEDAW/C/MRT/RQ/4)*

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

*Articles 7–9*

2. **Ms. Morsy** said that she wished to know what capacity-building programmes had been introduced to increase women's participation in public, political and judicial life and in decision-making positions. She would appreciate more information about the steps taken to encourage women to vote and ensure the equal participation of women, especially those from rural areas, at all levels of government.

3. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she would be interested to hear what temporary special measures were being taken to close the gender gap in terms of representation in global and regional organizations, including the Group of Five for the Sahel; how the State party ensured that female judges were appointed to international tribunals; what leadership roles women played in efforts to address hunger and poverty, in North-South and South-South trade, and in climate negotiations; and how women engaged in the State party's steadily growing market for international investment. She wondered how women were involved in the national implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, including Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), and how a gender perspective was mainstreamed in national and regional security policy. She wished to know whether women were included in the Barcelona Process and the Mediterranean Dialogue of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); whether women played a leading role in the development of fisheries; and how Mauritania exerted its international influence to ensure that women were adequately represented in global and regional institutions and that all foreign policy initiatives contained a gender perspective. She wondered whether the State party sought to ensure that all systemic barriers were removed to enable women to participate equally with men in diplomatic and foreign affairs; how the State party ensured that women from minority groups such as the sub-Saharan African community were included as decision makers in global and regional organizations; whether women leaders and academics were involved in training the next generation of diplomats and foreign policy experts; and whether women in diplomacy were portrayed positively in the media to encourage women and girls to pursue a career in the diplomatic corps.

4. **Ms. Haidar** said that it would be helpful to know whether the State party intended to amend its Nationality Code to grant Mauritanian women the same right as men to pass their citizenship on to their children and their foreign spouses. She wondered how the State party ensured that stateless persons received adequate protection and prevent them from falling victim to trafficking in persons; what measures it intended to take to reduce statelessness among women; and whether it planned to accede to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

5. **A representative of Mauritania** said that Nationality Code provisions on the transmission of citizenship through marriage had been simplified, and men and women could now pass on Mauritanian nationality to their spouses under the same conditions, pursuant to chapter III of the Code. Children born abroad to Mauritanian mothers could obtain Mauritanian citizenship until they reached the age of majority since the prohibition on dual nationality had been lifted. Under article 6 of the Nationality Code, international treaties and conventions ratified by Mauritania took precedence over national law. Children who were stateless or who had been born in Mauritania to unknown parents were automatically granted Mauritanian nationality in accordance with the Personal Status Code. In May 2022, a national consultative commission had been established by government decree to ensure the protection of refugees and stateless persons.

6. **A representative of Mauritania** said that a national programme had been adopted to promote the participation of women in elections and provide them with training once elected.

A number of seats were reserved for female members of parliament, financial incentives had been introduced for political parties to increase the number of women candidates and a quota had been established requiring parties to field two candidates with disabilities in the 2023 legislative elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission was responsible for ensuring that the quotas were respected. Women were represented in the Constitutional Council, the Independent National Electoral Commission and the Economic, Social and Environmental Council. They held key positions in the administration of justice and most members of the national observatory on women's and girls' rights were women.

7. **Mr. Bal** (Mauritania) said that key diplomatic positions in the Mauritanian Government were held by women, although they were admittedly underrepresented.

8. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences had visited Mauritania and had called on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to report all known cases of slavery. Only two cases had been brought to his attention, which were currently under investigation by the courts. While the fact that there had been two cases was unacceptable, it was not indicative of a widespread problem. Nevertheless, he invited all interested parties, including NGOs, who so desired to visit the country. Under Act No. 2021-004 on associations, foundations and networks, a declarative system of regulating the activities of foreign NGOs had been introduced. Instead of having to apply for prior authorization, foreign NGOs that wished to operate in the country were required to file a declaration of establishment as an association with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, which rendered a decision within two months.

9. **Mr. Bal** (Mauritania) said that the Group of Five for the Sahel had been established in 2014 to promote development and security in the region. Women had little involvement in its military operations but played a vital role in programmes for development and resilience against transnational crimes, including terrorism.

10. **A representative of Mauritania** said that women occupied all types of decision-making positions, including in the policy force and the military, which had traditionally been reserved for men. Within the diplomatic corps, several ambassadors were women.

#### *Article 10–14*

11. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that the Committee commended the State party on the advances it had made in education, including training female students in areas that had traditionally been reserved for their male counterparts, such as hunting. She understood from the State party's report that the budget for education had been increased significantly but would be interested to know precisely how much it had increased, what percentage of the national budget was dedicated to education and whether any part of the budget for education was allocated specifically to reducing gender disparities. She would also be curious to learn about how, under recently adopted legislation on education, which made education compulsory from ages 6 to 15 years, the State party might be providing for the retention of girls, especially pregnant girls, in schools and thereby supporting efforts to combat child, early and forced marriage. She wondered whether the State party envisaged introducing temporary special measures to address the relatively high illiteracy rate among women and their limited participation in higher education. In addition, specific examples of how the State party was challenging gender stereotypes, such as in school textbooks, would be welcome.

12. The Committee welcomed the National Plan for the Development of the Education Sector, under which tutoring in core academic subjects for female national exam candidates was provided. She would be interested in learning about the retention rate of those candidates and the results of such tutoring in terms of their participation and attainment, in both higher education and employment, in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The Committee also welcomed the strategy for technical and vocational training and its connections with other parts of the education system. Specific information on how many women had taken up technical and vocational training, and in what areas, would be welcome. The Committee would be particularly interested to know the percentage of women pursuing engineering following the establishment of the Higher Schools of Engineering Preparatory Institute. Lastly, the delegation might provide information on the combined impact of the national plan and the strategy on bridging the gender gap.

13. She would welcome specific information about the impact of the initiatives taken by the State party on the enrolment and retention of rural girls in schools. She would also be curious to learn about how the State party would ensure the transition of rural girls from primary to lower-secondary education. She would also be interested to learn about any incentives provided for teachers to work in rural areas and the distribution of teachers by gender.

14. She would be interested to learn the percentage of girls involved in inclusive education; the effect of the installation of latrines, running water and bathroom facilities in schools on the issue of menstrual hygiene; and the percentage of schools in which age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights and responsible sexual behaviour had been introduced, in line with the Committee's previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/MRT/CO/2-3). It would also be useful to hear about the State party's efforts to protect girls from cyberbullying and online violence.

15. The Committee remained concerned about the education of refugees and minorities, an issue on which little information was provided in the State party's report. As such, she would be interested to know what steps were being taken by the State party to ensure that all children participated in national exams and to remove barriers to enrolment, such as documentation requirements.

16. **A representative of Mauritania** said that he wished to clarify that his Government had provided technical training for women not in hunting but in fishing, which was an important sector of the national economy. The Government considered that that sector should not remain the domain of men. Other fields in which women were employed included security, science, medicine, education and business. While figures might seem low – 23 women university professors, 18 women police officers and around 180 businesswomen – they were employed in sectors where efforts to promote women were only just beginning. Participation by women in public and political life was most apparent at the municipal level, where approximately 36 per cent of municipal council posts were held by women, compared to 21 per cent of ministerial posts and 20 per cent of parliamentary posts. The higher rate reflected the priority given by the Government to rural women. In addition, temporary special measures required political parties to put forward female candidates in national elections.

17. The education system had been recently reformed to narrow the divide that had grown between public and private schools. A new school programme, which had been launched at the beginning of the 2022/23 academic year, was designed to promote social solidarity, the rights of women and republican values, particularly among children, which would lay the foundations for breaking stereotypes.

18. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that the Government had initiated the construction of 1,930 low-income housing units in rural areas for village communities, thereby allowing families to live near a school, as part of efforts to increase the enrolment rate.

19. **A representative of Mauritania** said that statistics on enrolment rates for academic years since 2010 showed that enrolment tended to be higher among girls than boys. Regarding the installation of latrines, all schools were now equipped with regulation-standard latrines as part of the Government's new school programme, one goal of which was to restore public schools. Other improvements included better access to schools in rural areas, increased security, including higher fencing and additional lighting, and the provision of uniforms.

20. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that the budget for education had increased from around 4 billion to just over 7 billion ouguiyas.

21. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Government had launched a project to promote the enrolment and retention of girls in rural areas, which included the distribution of 30,000 leaflets and the production of 22 textbooks on the core subjects of Arabic, French and mathematics, the revision of curricula, the provision of tutoring, the creation of a position dedicated to monitoring girls' education, and oversight by a follow-up committee. As part of the project, 50 schools had been established in 115 communities supporting 4,125 girls, along with 131 school safe spaces supervised by qualified staff and 2,421 community safe spaces.

22. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that the Committee commended the State party for its efforts but remained concerned about reports that 47 per cent of girls did not go on from primary to

secondary education and that only around 20 per cent of women attended university. There was still considerable room for improvement in the areas of enforcement, monitoring, data collection and impact assessment.

23. **Ms. Akia** said that she would be interested to know whether the State party planned to make the provisions of decrees, such as those concerning family allowances, the minimum wage and the establishment of a national mechanism for the protection of women and girls, legally enforceable. She would also be interested to know what legal and practical steps the State party was taking to enforce existing legislation and measures on the elimination of forms of discrimination that restricted access to equal pay, credit, education, technical vocational training and job opportunities and denied women freedom from sexual harassment, including women with disabilities and pregnant women. She wondered whether the State party had data on the number of women who benefited from policy measures to facilitate their economic activities.

24. **Mr. Safarov** said that he would welcome statistical data on the status of implementation of Act No. 2017-025 on Reproductive Health and the National Reproductive Health Programme. He wondered whether there were any plans to draw up a new programme. The Committee welcomed the fact that the maternal mortality rate was falling but wondered whether the official rate included deaths occurring outside of medical establishments, such as in the home. He would be interested to know how common it was for women in Mauritania to undergo sex-selective abortions and whether the State party would consider adopting terminology in its criminal law to expressly cover such abortions. The delegation might also provide information on the legal status of abortion and on any plans to decriminalize it.

25. The Committee would be grateful to learn about the main strategies or policies established to reduce the maternal and infant mortality rates and any measures being taken to prevent forced sterilization. He would be interested to hear whether women, including pregnant women, had been denied access to primary health-care services as a result of measures imposed to curb the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

26. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the Government was currently implementing the National Health Development Plan 2021–2030, which addressed many of the issues raised by the Committee. A law on sexual and reproductive health had been established to protect current and future generations of women and girls against certain diseases. That law contained provisions relating to prenatal, infant and maternal health; vaccinations for newborns; family planning; menopause; sex education; and the fight against HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections and female genital mutilation. It established that all persons had the right to free reproductive health care throughout their lives and it prohibited discrimination against persons living with HIV/AIDS and all forms of sexual violence.

27. The maternal mortality rate had fallen from 687 per 100,000 live births in 2007 to 630 per 100,000 live births in 2015. The child and infant mortality rate had stood at 47 per cent in 2000, 43 per cent in 2015 and 33 per cent in 2020. The neonatal mortality rate, which concerned newborns aged up to 28 days, had stood at 29 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2015. A total of 24 per cent of women receiving prenatal care were seen by a doctor, while 58.8 per cent were seen by a nurse or a midwife. Only a small proportion of pregnant women, mainly in rural areas, were seen only by assistant midwives. In the region of Hodh ech Chargui, which was in the interior of the country, 54.7 per cent of births took place at home. In that region, the majority of births in health-care establishments took place in State-run facilities while a small proportion took place in private facilities. In Nouakchott Sud, however, only 2.6 per cent of births took place at home. In general terms, it was clear that the percentage of home births was much higher in rural areas than in urban areas. According to the demographic and health survey of 2019, 65 per cent of pregnant women had had at least four prenatal consultations. Rates of stunting for children under 5 years of age varied from 13 per cent in Nouadhibou to 37 per cent in Tagant. A total of 90 per cent of the population had received the bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine, while 75 per cent had received the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. Only 7 per cent of children in Mauritania had not received any vaccine.

28. When the COVID-19 pandemic had broken out in Mauritania, the Government had shut the borders, imposed a curfew, conducted awareness-raising campaigns, established a solidarity fund and purchased appropriate medical equipment and vaccines. Food, financial assistance and free water and electricity had been granted to poor households and municipal taxes and customs duty had been suspended.

29. Clinics had been opened in hospitals to increase access to medical care for pregnant young women. Neither selective abortion nor forced sterilization was practised in Mauritania. A total of 100,000 households, mainly in rural areas, had been provided with medical insurance, benefiting between 500,000 and 600,000 persons. A woman could undergo an abortion if a medical professional found that there were medical grounds for it. Such decisions were made on a case-by-case basis.

30. **Mr. Safarov** said that he wished to know whether the Government would take steps to prevent virginity tests from being performed on victims of rape. It might also take measures to ensure that doctors who carried out such tests were punished and that forensic tests performed on victims of rape were in compliance with the guidelines issued by the World Health Organization.

31. **A representative of Mauritania** said that, when the authorities received reports that persons had been raped, medical professionals performed tests on them to determine whether they were victims of that offence. Abortion was prohibited by law unless there were medical grounds for it. Virginity tests were not performed in Mauritania.

32. **Ms. Bethel** said that she wished to know what specific legal and policy measures existed to promote and protect women's social and economic rights in accordance with the principles established in the Convention. In view of the fact that gender inequality in the political, financial and social spheres had an adverse effect on the State party's economy, it would be interesting to know whether the Government would consider withdrawing the reservation made by Mauritania to article 13 of the Convention.

33. The Committee would be grateful to learn more about strategies to develop and maintain social protection schemes for vulnerable rural women, women working in the informal economy and women with disabilities. It would also welcome information on the State party's assessment of its poverty reduction strategy and any mechanisms in place to monitor and assess the effect of the strategy on women's social and economic empowerment, including their access to food. The delegation might describe any steps being taken to increase women's employment in core economic sectors such as fisheries and the blue economy.

34. Given the opportunities for economic empowerment afforded by trade, she wished to know what measures were being implemented to improve women's access to markets for their goods in urban and rural areas. It would be interesting to hear about any information and communication technology-enabled services established to provide women with advice on trade and commercially sustainable crops. She wondered what the Government was doing to facilitate women's access to pastoral and arable land and to train women entrepreneurs and inform them of their legal rights as farmers and traders. She was curious to know whether the State party had collected data on informal trade undertaken by women, particularly along the border with Senegal, in order to quantify their contribution to the economy and regional trade. How could the State party leverage the trade sector in order to generate structural transformation, sustainable growth and poverty reduction for the benefit of women, their families and the country?

35. **Ms. Akia** said that she wished to know whether an updated national action plan for rural women was being implemented and, if so, whether it provided for appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas and ensure their equal access to education, health care, credit, income-generating activities, technology, ownership of property and land, and decision-making positions. She would be interested to hear what role rural women played in agriculture, economic activities and unpaid care work and how many rural women were provided with credit and microfinance schemes. She would also be grateful to learn whether rural and disadvantaged women were given vocational training, apprenticeships and other opportunities to enhance their employment prospects and, if so, how many women had benefited from such opportunities.

36. The Committee would welcome information on the effects of climate change on women and girls, any policies adopted to address those effects, the level of funding allocated to implementing such policies, and any disaster risk management plans that increased women's resilience in the face of climate change. The Government might explain whether any assistance was provided to women climate change activists.

37. **A representative of Mauritania** said that a number of programmes provided for measures to maximize rural women's participation in the economy. The Government had restored more than 7,000 ha of pastoral land and established 42 communal farms for the benefit of rural women as part of the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative. A total of 5,800 women had received funding and over 500 girls had graduated from vocational training centres. The Government had established a project to offer young people employment opportunities and a project to promote entrepreneurship among women. A funding programme had made it possible for around 40,000 girls to receive scholarships, assistance with school transport and tutoring.

38. Several training sessions had been organized for women holding elective positions and campaigns had been conducted to raise awareness of women role models, including members of parliament, police commissioners and entrepreneurs. A national campaign had been implemented to increase women's employment in the security and justice sectors and training and equipment had been provided to 3,000 rural women. The capacity of training centres had been increased and, in the majority of centres, applications from women were prioritized.

39. The Government was implementing a national strategy for mainstreaming gender and had established gender units in a number of ministries. Funding had been provided to projects to extract and market sea salt. A shopping complex had been designed in Nouakchott that would provide employment to 1,000 women. Efforts had been made to promote women's access to decision-making positions, including within ministries and the parliament.

40. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the National Action Plan for Rural Women was still being implemented. The General Delegation for Solidarity and the Fight Against Exclusion had established an ambitious five-year plan to promote national solidarity and combat exclusion. Under the plan, over 1,700 income-generating activities had been created throughout the country. The national registry was being updated to include every household in Mauritania. Applications for microcredit could be submitted to a newly established online platform. To date, over 400 such applications had been approved.

41. **A representative of Mauritania** said that plans were in place to establish a new health insurance fund that would provide free access to health care for people working in the informal sector. Currently, only 30 per cent of the population were covered by the National Health Insurance Fund. Thanks to measures taken by the Government, women on maternity leave, and widowed women on leave during the period of mourning, continued to receive 100 per cent of their salaries. Family allowances had been increased to help parents see to it that their daughters were enrolled in school and the statutory minimum wage had been increased by 50 per cent.

42. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that an environmental police force had been set up to enhance monitoring of mining activities and the Environmental Commission had been strengthened in order to improve its ability to tackle the pollution caused by mining and other extractive operations. The General Delegation for Solidarity and the Fight Against Exclusion had launched a programme that supported over 450 cooperatives working in the areas of agriculture and fisheries. It also gave material assistance to cooperatives and offered social housing to persons living in poor neighbourhoods. Almost 2,000 social housing units would be built in different parts of the country.

#### *Articles 15 and 16*

43. **Ms. González Ferrer** said that she would welcome information on the current status of the reform of the Personal Status Code. In that connection, she wondered whether the amended provisions of the Code governing marriage consent forms applied equally to men and women. She would be grateful to know whether the Code provided that girls under the age of 18 years could marry with the authorization of their guardian and a judge.

44. Noting that women could file for divorce on the grounds that they had suffered harm, she asked what forms of harm were recognized in the Personal Status Code, how the courts determined whether such harm had been inflicted and whether domestic violence was recognized as a ground for seeking divorce. She would be interested to know how many women had filed for divorce on the grounds that they had suffered harm and how many of those applications had been granted. She asked how the national plan to combat domestic violence referred to in the State party report was currently being implemented and whether there were plans to update it.

45. With regard to the two-year action plan to combat child marriage, it would be interesting to learn whether the plan had brought about any discernible change in public attitudes towards child marriage and whether any further actions would be taken to tackle the problem after the completion of the plan. In particular, the Committee wondered whether steps would be taken to increase the people's knowledge about the legal reforms.

46. The delegation might describe any measures being taken to make birth registration mandatory for the entire population, thereby making it easier to check that women planning to marry were old enough to do so. It might also state whether the Government would consider withdrawing the reservation made by Mauritania to article 16 of the Convention.

47. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that the relevant experts would decide whether it was possible for Mauritania to withdraw its reservation to article 16. The Government was not against the idea in principle.

48. **A representative of Mauritania** said that the legal age of marriage was 18 years. However, guardians could allow girls younger than that age to marry if it was in the girls' interest. In divorce cases, a judge determined whether one of the parties had been subjected to harm. Although it was difficult for women to prove that they had suffered harm, the courts often found in their favour and granted them a divorce. Arbitrators were sometimes asked to settle disputes between divorcing couples.

49. **Mr. Sidi** (Mauritania) said that he was grateful to the Committee for the very interesting and productive dialogue. While it was true that Mauritania faced many challenges, it was also true that it had made great progress in recent years. The Government was committed to bringing about further positive change in the country and would take careful note of the Committee's recommendations as it endeavoured to do so.

*The meeting rose at 5 p.m.*