



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

Distr.: General
9 June 2006

Original: English

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

Summary record of the 724th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 17 May 2006, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Manalo (Chairperson)

later: Ms. Schöpp-Schilling (Vice-Chairperson)

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06-35135 (E)



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

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

Combined initial and second report of Turkmenistan (continued) (CEDAW/C/TKM/1-2, CEDAW/C/TKM/Q/2 and CEDAW/C/TKM/Q/5/Add.1)

Article 10

1. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** expressed the hope that the next report would include not only statistical data but also substantive details. More information was needed on the closure of some Russian schools. Another issue requiring clarification concerned the difficulties faced by women in gaining access to higher education. She would appreciate some comment on the mention in an alternative report of women who had trouble finishing their education because they had married and were burdened with household duties.

2. Reference had been made in an alternative report to a presidential decree denying recognition of foreign diplomas; that seemed to contradict information in the report that many students were studying abroad. It was unclear why students would study abroad if their diplomas were not recognized.

3. She had been struck by the reference to the differentiation in specialties connected with women's or men's paths. More information was needed on the measures being taken to encourage girls to pursue traditionally male subjects and whether there was any regular monitoring of the curricula and textbooks to guarantee that the latter did not convey stereotyped notions of sexual roles. She would like to know, in particular, how men and women were represented in textbooks.

4. **Ms. Khan** said that she, too, would like more information on the reasons for reducing the number of years of mandatory education from 11 to nine. She saw no reason for such a reduction other than budgetary constraints. It would be useful to know how such a reduction would affect the education of girls.

5. The responses to the list of issues and questions (CEDAW/C/TKM/Q/5/Add.1) listed some subject areas covered in vocational secondary schools, including economy and planning, education, health

care and culture and art. She would like more detailed information, however, on the level of educational attainment by women in the area of science and technology. She drew attention to paragraph 84 of the report, noting that it was unclear why carpet weaving, cooking and sewing were considered to be part of women's education. It would be useful to have more information on the number of women enrolled in such areas as engineering, marketing, management and computer science.

6. She would appreciate further information on the extent to which the book by the Turkmen President, "Ruhnama", had shaped the educational curriculum and mindset of young persons in Turkmenistan. It was unclear whether it was an officially recognized ideological basis for Turkmen nationhood.

7. Lastly, she asked whether there were quotas for minority students and whether there were differences in educational attainment between ethnic Turkmen and ethnic minorities. If there were differences in educational attainment, particularly with respect to women, it would be useful to know whether a quota system had been used.

8. **Ms. Gaspard** said that it would be interesting to learn what impact the reduction in the length of mandatory education was having on rural women. She would like to know whether Turkmen citizens, particularly women, had access to the Internet and could exchange information with institutions dealing with women's issues, especially the United Nations.

9. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that the next report would contain more gender-disaggregated data concerning health and education. The reason for the reduction in the duration of mandatory education was that unnecessary subjects such as scientific communism had been dropped. Mandatory education ended at age 16, after which students could enter institutions of higher education and specialized secondary educational establishments. There were regional quotas for entry into higher educational establishments, and students were selected on the basis of competitive examinations.

10. The Government had established the age of consent for marriage at 16 in order to promote demographic growth. The population had in fact increased by 6.1 per cent between 2002 and 2004. The decision also served to prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

11. Boys and girls in Turkmenistan were educated under a single curriculum and under the same teachers, and received the same qualifications. Concerning retraining and the choice of further specialization, some vocational guidance was provided at the secondary school level, enabling students to pursue a professional career for which they were best suited.

12. With respect to the question about men's and women's professions, she said that some professions tended to attract more men while others, such as health, education, social services, culture and science, tended to attract more women. Fewer women worked in the industrial branches since the work involved much physical labour. However, women were currently pursuing careers as truck drivers and the number of women working in the oil and transport industries was increasing.

13. Concerning the closure of Russian schools she said that the Russian population had greatly decreased since Turkmenistan's independence, owing solely to the fact that the Russian presence had been mostly made up of military contingents. After their withdrawal there had been no need to keep open many of the schools. However, Russian continued to be taught in all educational institutions and there were some 1,700 schools where teaching was conducted in both Russian and Turkmen. There were also Russian schools where teaching was done only in Russian. The number of such schools was determined by need. The Government was not aware of any dissatisfaction with regard to the availability of such schools.

14. With respect to the decree concerning foreign diplomas, it did not say that foreign diplomas should not be recognized. Rather, its purpose was to ensure that diplomas granted abroad met established international standards.

15. There was no emphasis in textbooks on any particular women's or men's specialities or career paths and there were no quotas for entry into institutions of higher education. The conditions of entry were the same for all Turkmen citizens, regardless of ethnic origin.

16. Women were represented in Turkmenistan not only in the economy of the country but also in culture, art, science and technology. There were no limits on the choice of specialities. Men and women were able to freely choose their career paths. Women were therefore present in all sectors. They were not limited to carpet weaving and cooking, for example. Women and men

alike were able to study marketing, computer science and other similar subjects if they wished.

17. Concerning the "Ruhnama", it was not the ideological basis for the nation. It was taught because of the moral values that it conveyed. First and foremost, it promoted respect for women and condemned discrimination against them. Therefore, it should be seen in a positive light.

18. Concerning the training of officials to combat discrimination, the Union of Women and the Parliament of Turkmenistan had organized workshops and courses under the auspices of the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund to raise awareness about women's rights.

19. Access to the Internet was available to all citizens at an affordable cost. Although the network had not yet been fully developed, the Government was trying to spread the network as widely as possible because it understood the value of the information available on the Internet.

20. While reproductive health was not a mandatory subject in schools, discussions and lectures on the matter were conducted separately for boys and girls.

21. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that the next report should clarify the relationship between the gender-based development index and the human potential development index mentioned in the delegation's introductory statement. Without such clarification, she could not agree to the statement that the relation between the two indices demonstrated that there were minimal differences between men and women in the sphere of human development in the country.

22. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that such information would be included in the next report as requested.

Article 11

23. **Ms. Patten** said that, according to independent reports, many teaching positions had been cut following the reduction in the length of mandatory education. Independent sources had also stated that 15,000 jobs in the health-care sector had been eliminated in 2004; both reductions had directly affected women. She requested data on the number of women relative to men affected by those cuts and the steps taken to provide the women concerned with alternative employment.

24. There were independent reports of unemployment rates as high as 70 per cent. Meanwhile, the Government's report mentioned that the President had granted permission for foreign citizens to work in the country provided that the number of foreign nationals employed in any enterprise did not exceed 30 per cent of the total number of workers. She would appreciate data on the number of such foreign workers and up-to-date information on the number of unemployed persons in Turkmenistan.

25. More information was also needed on job segregation in the formal sector and the efforts being undertaken by the Government to encourage women to take up occupations traditionally pursued by men. It would also be useful to have data on women's participation in the informal sector and what measures were being taken to protect women in that sector.

26. Lastly, it was unclear how effectively the provisions of the Labour Code mentioned in the report were being implemented, especially with respect to discrimination against women on the basis of marital status, family responsibilities and pregnancy. She would like to know the extent to which women were aware of their labour rights, whether they belonged to trade unions and, if so, whether they held senior positions in them. She noted with concern that the Labour Code contained no provisions against sexual harassment at the workplace and wished to know whether the Government was planning to introduce such provisions.

27. **Ms. Saiga**, referring to paragraph 101 of the report (CEDAW/C/TKM/1-2), noted that only mothers were mentioned as recipients of State assistance in connection with the upbringing of children. She would like to know whether there were plans to change the law so that fathers would also be eligible to receive such assistance. Noting that the cost of maternity leave was covered by employers, she wondered whether that affected their willingness to employ women and whether there were plans to change the arrangements so that such assistance was covered by the social security system instead. She would also like to know whether women were entitled to continue working after reaching retirement age and why the retirement age for women was lower than for men, given that their life expectancy was longer.

28. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling**, referring to the unemployment affecting women in the education and health sectors, asked what measures were in place to retrain such women and to provide them with new jobs.

She was concerned about the gap between men's and women's pay in different government sectors. In education and health, where the majority of employees were women, average pay was only 84 per cent of the average pay in government administration, which was dominated by men. She would like to know whether the reason for the pay gap was that women were unable to reach decision-making positions even in those sectors dominated by women or whether "care" work was lower paid because it was viewed as an extension of women's unpaid role in the home. Lastly, she would welcome more information about maternity benefits for self-employed women.

29. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that the only jobs where the employment of women was prohibited were certain jobs involving particularly difficult working conditions. Pay depended not on gender but on the nature of the job and the qualifications required to do it. Pay levels were determined by employers in cooperation with trade unions, taking into account the factors mentioned. A number of surveys had been carried out in conjunction with international organizations on employment, income and standard of living, all of which had found that men's and women's salaries differed only in that men tended to be employed in sectors such as industry, where working conditions were more difficult and therefore pay was higher than in sectors traditionally dominated by women.

30. The reduction in the number of teachers and health workers resulting from the reorganization of the education and health systems had been only temporary, as newly created institutions had provided new jobs for the women concerned. Appropriate training courses had also been provided.

31. Refusal to employ a woman on grounds of pregnancy was prohibited by law and marital status was also irrelevant for the purposes of recruitment. People were hired solely on the basis of their qualifications for the job in question, and were fully aware of their employment rights thanks to publicity campaigns conducted by the country's trade unions.

32. Child benefits were paid not only to mothers but to families in general. All women were entitled to 112 days' leave on full pay for pregnancy and birth, with additional leave in the event of a difficult birth, and employers were obliged to cover the cost. That arrangement had not resulted in women being refused jobs. However, the situation would be monitored and the system adjusted if necessary.

33. Retirement ages for both men and women had been raised in recent years because of the increase in life expectancy. Pensioners were entitled to continue working beyond the age of retirement and to receive wages in addition to their pension.

34. The unemployment figure that had been quoted was not accurate; the actual figure was 2 per cent and reflected the level of internal migration of the workforce. Job vacancies were advertised at job centres throughout the country, in the press and at special vacancy fairs that were open to all but were particularly targeted at women.

Article 12

35. **Ms. Dairiam** said she was disappointed to note that there were no indicators of women's health and well-being or how they accessed health services. She would welcome information on the eligibility criteria for medical insurance and the extent to which women had access to such insurance. She also requested information on the average distance from a person's home to the nearest health centre, the average number of people served by each centre, and doctor-patient ratios.

36. According to independent sources, despite improvements in the provision of antenatal care, maternal and infant mortality rates remained a cause of serious concern. An international survey in 2004 had revealed significant shortcomings in maternal health services. Independent sources had also highlighted problems relating to the definitions of maternal and infant mortality and morbidity. She recommended that the Government should obtain technical assistance in all those areas, particularly from the relevant specialized agencies of the United Nations.

37. No information had been provided on the use of contraception. According to independent sources, access to contraception was a problem in rural areas. She would welcome more information on that issue.

38. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said that she, too, was concerned about the lack of specific indicators regarding women's health. It was curious that, though the State party had described the method used for the calculation of maternal and infant mortality rates, no actual rates were given. Moreover, the Committee needed more information on female mortality and morbidity in general, not merely in relation to reproduction. She would like to know whether there

were specific programmes for the prevention and treatment of uterine and cervical cancer, which was a significant women's health issue in most countries.

39. Noting that the birth rate had risen dramatically in recent years, she asked whether that was due to incentives of some kind, a conscious decision on the part of women or simply lack of access to family planning services. She would also welcome separate indicators of women's health for rural and urban areas, given that nearly 54 per cent of the population lived in rural areas.

40. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that every effort would be made to include indicators disaggregated by sex, age and disease in the next report, along with maternal and infant mortality data. The World Health Organization was currently providing technical assistance in that regard.

41. Under the State Health Programme adopted in 1995, the country's health system had been reorganized, with improvements to health-care management and medical insurance. Health care in rural areas remained free of charge and access had been improved, while multi-purpose hospitals and mother-and-child hospitals provided specialized care. Small hospitals had been converted into "health houses" and more than 4,000 family centres had been set up, where health care was provided by family doctors and nurses. Medical insurance provided cover for medical services and a substantial discount on the cost of medications. Signing up for insurance was voluntary, but more than 93 per cent of the population now had insurance coverage.

42. A project was under way in conjunction with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to ensure the availability of contraceptives and to provide training for nurses and for the population in general in the use of contraceptives. As a result, intervals between births were becoming longer. Finally, she said that special programmes had been set up for the prevention of cancer and other diseases. No indicators were available to show the effectiveness of those programmes, but they would be provided in the next report.

43. *Ms. Schöpp-Schilling (Vice-Chairperson) took the chair.*

Article 13

44. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that it would be helpful to know what the conditions were for obtaining credit or loans — for example, whether a borrower must own property as collateral and, if so, whether women owned sufficient property to be eligible to apply for credit — and whether a prospective borrower required the consent of their spouse. Regarding inheritance rights, she wondered whether in reality daughters inherited the same amount from their parents as sons.

45. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that a prospective borrower must own property in order to obtain credit, but did not require the consent of their spouse. Any woman who felt that she had been unfairly denied credit could complain through the procedure established for that purpose. Women had the same right to inherit as any other member of the family.

Article 14

46. **Ms. Simms**, noting that the report projected an image of rural women as being extremely happy, said that she wished to know what was the minimum age at which a girl could marry in rural areas. She would also like to see more statistical information indicating how much of the land being distributed could be owned by rural women; whether divorcees could also own land, and if so, whether they had the same access and rights to the property as their former spouses; and to whom land belonged in a household of several generations. Was the rural woman regarded as chattel and did she depend on her children in her old age?

47. **Ms. Tan** said that it would be interesting to know what proportion of agricultural credits and loans were granted to women, what sums were awarded, how long the repayment period was and how many women defaulted on repayments as compared to men. She would welcome information on the progress of the New Village programme, mentioned in paragraph 138 of the report, and to what extent basic amenities — such as adequate housing, schools and piped water — were available in rural areas. It would also be useful to know what percentage of women had come to own private land pursuant to the decree mentioned in paragraph 129 of the report.

48. She asked whether rural women who worked in agricultural family enterprises were paid for their work, and whether the State extended social security and benefits and national and medical insurance to such women. Finally, referring to paragraph 130 of the

report, she requested details of the benefits provided to rural women engaged in home-based work.

49. **Ms. Zou Xiaoqiao** said that paragraph 129 of the report indicated neither the conditions that must be satisfied in order for individuals to own or lease land nor whether women and men enjoyed equal rights as lessees. The State party should indicate what impact the transition from State to private ownership of agricultural land had had on women. Given the importance of reproductive health services, it would be helpful to know what measures the State was taking to ensure that rural women had access to information on reproductive health. She had heard that the maternal mortality rate was 6 per 1,000 live births. It would be interesting to hear the delegation's comments on that subject.

50. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that the State offered certain concessions and advantages to owners and lessees of land engaged in agricultural cultivation — inter alia in the form of equipment for harvesting and other agricultural work, concessional prices for the purchase of fertilizers and seeds and water for irrigation provided free of charge — irrespective of sex. Women in agriculture enjoyed the same concessions and opportunities to obtain credit as men.

51. Although she did not, however, have figures showing the proportion of agricultural credits granted to women, the amounts granted, periods of repayment and the number of defaults among male and female borrowers comparatively, she was able to indicate that under the New Village programme, men and women had the equal right to apply for credit. The overall progress of the programme had not yet been assessed.

52. Any impression that rural women married at an earlier age was incorrect. Rural women had opportunities to become, inter alia, lessees of land, agricultural workers, doctors, medical staff and teachers, and all had the right to own property and use their land as they wished. The rural population enjoyed the same social benefits and concessions as urban populations and had access to contraception, family planning assistance and reproductive health services. The establishment of “health houses” in rural areas had made it possible to increase access to medical facilities and had had a positive impact on the health of the rural population.

Articles 15 and 16

53. **Mr. Flinterman** said that the State party should provide more statistical data to facilitate a more accurate assessment of the situation in Turkmenistan; for example, it should indicate at what age marriage was contracted and what the divorce rate was. Independent sources reported that the custom of bride prices remained deeply entrenched. In that regard, and given the impact of such practices on free choice of spouse, further information was needed. Referring to paragraph 145, he said that it would be interesting to know whether anyone had been prosecuted for the offence of kidnapping a woman for the purpose of marriage, and how widespread the practice was.

54. Finally he noted that, in its responses, the Government had not really replied to questions 30 and 31 on the list of issues (CEDAW/C/TKM/Q/2).

55. **Ms. Tan** asked whether the Government planned to raise the minimum age for marriage to 18, so as to bring the law into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

56. **Ms. Khan**, noting that men and women enjoyed the same right to enter into marriage, asked whether they enjoyed the same rights during the marriage and after its dissolution. She would also appreciate additional information regarding the penalty for polygamy and whether polygamy was considered grounds for divorce. Finally, it would be interesting to know whether men and women enjoyed the same inheritance rights with respect to paternal property.

57. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that there were no plans to change the minimum age for marriage. Although girls were permitted to marry at sixteen, most did not do so until they were 18. Indeed, public health bodies and reproductive health centres counselled young adolescents against early marriage. Bride prices and kidnapping for the purpose of marriage were also penalized under the law. Surveys showed that girls who married at an early age did, in fact, continue their education.

58. Both spouses were legally responsible for raising their children, including after dissolution of the marriage, and both had the right to sue for divorce and custody. Although polygamy was condemned under the criminal code, polygamous marriages were legally valid.

59. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that it was difficult to accept the delegation's explanation that women's salaries were lower because their work was easier. Nursing and teaching jobs were traditionally held by women; yet they were by no means easy professions. There were criteria which could be applied to measure the value of a job and the amount of hardship involved.

60. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that the Government had applied such criteria and that salaries in each sector were reviewed annually. She agreed that the salaries of nurses and teachers should be reviewed, given the level of responsibility involved.

61. **Ms. Shin** said that she would like further information regarding the reception centres for women whose rights had been violated. She wished to know how many there were, who was in charge and whether they were easily accessible to women.

62. **Ms. Šimonović** asked whether spousal rape was criminalized and whether the Government was seeking technical assistance from different United Nations agencies, such as the World Health Organization.

63. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that the reception centres were operated by the local governments and were easily accessible to women. The centres were obliged to respond to complaints within a certain time period and if they were unable to resolve the issue, they were required to refer it to the appropriate bodies. In reply to the question regarding spousal rape, she said that all types of rape were punishable by law.

64. **The Chairperson** said that there appeared to be a lack of understanding of the notion of indirect discrimination, namely laws or policies which appeared to be neutral but had the effect of discriminating against women. It was impossible to assess the effect of such laws without sufficient data. The Committee strongly recommended that the delegation should include more statistics in its next report.

65. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that the Committee's recommendations would be taken into account and that particular attention would be paid, in the next report, to the provision of statistics.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.