

Thirty-first session

Summary record of the 662nd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 19 July 2004, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Açar

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

Combined initial, second and third periodic report of Latvia (continued)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

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

Combined initial, second and third periodic report of Latvia (CEDAW/C/LVA/1-3) (continued)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Latvia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **The Chairperson** invited the members of the delegation of Latvia to respond to questions posed by Committee members at the previous meeting.

3. **Ms. Druviete** (Latvia) said that the general principle of equality and the prohibition of discrimination was included in the Latvian Constitution and provided the foundation for Latvia's Society Integration Programme (2001). Over the past 60 years Latvia had undergone major ethnic and demographic changes as a result of the effects of the Second World War and the country's annexation by the former Soviet Union. Latvian legislation clearly prohibited discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, and very few violations had been reported during the previous 10 years. All the country's inhabitants enjoyed equal social and economic rights. In response to the Committee's questions concerning citizenship, she noted that, under Latvia's Citizenship Law, all those permanently resident in Latvia for at least five years could acquire Latvian citizenship through naturalization, and that neither the marriage of a Latvian citizen to an alien or stateless person, nor the dissolution of such a marriage, affected the citizenship rights of the citizen concerned. Addressing questions concerning the Latvian language, she said that significant efforts had been made to encourage minority groups to learn Latvian, and that there was no evidence of language-based discrimination against women from minority groups. With respect to the legislative basis for gender equality, she said that her country must pay more attention to providing information about gender equality and women's rights, and about the need to eliminate negative gender stereotypes. It had been virtually impossible, in the short period since Latvia's independence, to change public attitudes about gender roles. However, there had been some major successes. The issue was increasingly debated in the mass media and was promoted at all levels of the education system, and the content of the delegation's dialogue with the Committee would also be widely publicized.

4. **Ms. Reine** (Latvia), addressing the Committee's questions concerning Latvia's constitutional and institutional structure, noted that the combined initial, second and third periodic report of Latvia (CEDAW/C/LVA/1-3) had been submitted late owing to a shortage of human capacity. Latvia had ratified the Convention in 1992, just two years after regaining independence, and the necessary infrastructure for submitting reports to United Nations treaty bodies had not been established until 1998. The late submission of the report had thus been the result of structural difficulties, rather than a lack of political will on the part of Latvia. With regard to the preparation of the report, she said that the draft version had been submitted to non-governmental organizations, the Human Rights Institute of the Law Faculty of the University of Latvia and the Latvian National Human Rights Office, and that their comments had been incorporated in the revised version. The report had been prepared by the executive branch; national procedures did not provide for Parliament to be involved in its preparation. It had been made publicly available, however, and the drafting and adoption process had been closely followed by the media. The report had been written in Latvian and then translated into the official languages of the United Nations. It was available on a public Internet site that was widely accessed by non-governmental organizations and organizations of civil society. The Office of the Government Agent, which represented Latvia before international human rights organizations, had undertaken and published an analysis of the provisions of the Convention and the Committee's General Recommendations, and the Convention itself had been translated into Latvian and made available on the Internet.

5. With respect to the national legal system, she noted that Latvia had ratified a number of international instruments since regaining independence, but that national laws had not yet been brought fully into compliance with their provisions. The matter would be discussed, however, and it was only a matter of time before compliance was achieved. With respect to legal provisions prohibiting discrimination, she noted that, when it had regained independence in 1990, Latvia had re-established its 1922 Constitution, which was a framework document that stated only general principles. Under Latvia's national legal system, legislation was incorporated under specific areas of the law, such as civil law or administrative law, rather than being adopted as specific laws covering certain issues. With regard to the institutional structure for dealing with women's rights, she said that the Ministry for Special Assignments for Children and Family Affairs had been established to coordinate and monitor the implementation of measures relating to the protection of children's rights, as well as youth and family issues. The Ministry dealt with complaints and conducted on-site inspections, either on a reactive basis or on its own initiative.

6. With respect to women's participation in the legal profession, she said that the Government saw no need to adopt temporary

special measures, since women were already very prominent in that sphere. Judges were appointed by the Saeima (Parliament) upon nomination by the Ministry of Justice. With regard to judicial and legal training, she noted that international standards on equal treatment and non-discrimination — including United Nations and Council of Europe standards — were included in compulsory human rights courses for newly appointed district and administrative court judges. Moreover, women's rights and gender equality were integrated into annual courses on family, labour and social law attended by district and regional court judges. The Law Faculty of the University of Latvia provided classes on the Convention as part of its international law and labour law courses, and the Riga Graduate School of Law offered a short course on the Convention for students studying international human rights law. The Convention had been invoked in two legal cases concerned with equal access to employment.

7. Responding to the Committee's question regarding effective remedies in cases of alleged discrimination, she said that the Labour Inspectorate provided advisory services for employers and employees, received complaints from women and conducted regular on-site inspections. Furthermore, the National Human Rights Office was mandated to examine any complaint alleging a violation of human rights and to issue recommendations to employers. With respect to judicial remedies, she said that the Employment Law offered women the possibility to seek redress in cases of discrimination when entering employment or giving notice of termination, during employment, in regard to remuneration, and in the case of dismissal from work without a legal basis. In the case of differential treatment, the burden of proof was on the employer. In the event of differential treatment outside employment relations, women had the right to request compensation for non-pecuniary damage as a result of insult to honour or dignity. The Constitutional Court should also be seen as a remedy, as it was mandated to rule in individual claims that a legal provision violated a constitutional provision. The effectiveness of that remedy had been recognized by the European Court of Human Rights. Free legal advice was provided by the Labour Inspectorate and the National Human Rights Office, and free legal aid was available in the country for those wishing to apply to the courts. A joint assessment conducted by the Ministry of Justice and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had found that women applied for legal aid more often than men, primarily because of a lack of financial resources. With respect to the procedure for determining compensation by the courts, the Labour Law provided that the amount of compensation payable in cases of discrimination was determined by the court, except where the parties to the dispute reached a mutual agreement. That provision did not violate European Community law, provided that it was interpreted according to the Community's legal standards.

8. With respect to questions concerning the Latvian National Human Rights Office, she said that the Office was empowered to deal with complaints alleging human rights violations, initiate inquiries on its own initiative, make recommendations to the Government and the Parliament concerning the conformity of legislation with international human rights standards, bring applications to the Constitutional Court regarding the compatibility of legal provisions with the Constitution and international standards, and inform society about human rights. It was also empowered to request information (including restricted information) from the authorities, conduct on-site visits, issue recommendations and assist the parties in reaching a friendly settlement. The Office had so far issued three general recommendations on combating discrimination: recommendations regarding discriminatory advertising practices, discrimination in education and possible discrimination in the organization of the all-Latvia Olympic games. The Office had 22 staff members and its budget for 2003 was \$296,578. During 2003 it had received 4,769 complaints, had held 508 information seminars, made 129 trips to local governments and issued three information publications. Staff members regularly visited schools to inform students about human rights, including domestic violence issues. The Office had thus far submitted eight applications to the Constitutional Court, and in four of those instances the Court had found the provisions concerned to be unconstitutional. The Office regularly attended meetings of working groups involved in drafting legislation, and was often invited to give its opinion. It was part of the working group that had drafted the anti-discrimination bill currently before the Parliament, and had a permanent advisory seat on the Human Rights and Public Affairs Commission of the Saeima.

9. The voting age was 18 years and the minimum age for seeking elective office, whether to Parliament or to local government, was 21 years for both men and women. Proposed legislation requiring that women should comprise at least 25 per cent of electoral candidates had been considered by the Parliament; although it had been rejected, it would most likely be reconsidered before the next elections.

10. There were only 49,037 places available in day-care facilities for the country's 60,500 children under three years of age. Nearly 100 per cent of the children in other age brackets, however, were enrolled in school: 69,194 in preschool (3 to 6 years of age), 103,359 in primary school (7 to 12 years of age), 175,860 in lower secondary school (13 to 15 years of age) and 107,622 in upper secondary school (16 to 18 years of age). Additional childcare facilities were being financed by the local government of Riga, where the population was concentrated.

11. Referring to paragraphs 300 to 304 of the report, she said that, under the civil law, persons between 16 and 18 years of age needed the consent of their parents or legal guardians to marry; however, if it was refused without a valid reason, consent could be given by the custody court. It was inaccurate to claim that a married man could not be recognized as the father of a child born to another woman; his spouse's consent was required only for recognition of paternity by the courts. Women were not held to that requirement.

12. **Mr. Badovskis** (Latvia) said that the Cabinet of Ministers had adopted a number of policy instruments to promote the equal treatment of women, inter alia, the Concept for the implementation of gender equality in Latvia, the memorandum of understanding between the European Union and the Republic of Latvia, the Joint Inclusion Memorandum of the Government of Latvia and the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission, the Joint Assessment Paper of Latvia's employment and labour market policy priorities, the State Programme for the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings 2004-2008, national employment plans and the Single Programming Document 2004-2006 of the European Union structural funds. The Minister of Welfare was currently reviewing a number of draft policy papers for submission to the Cabinet of Ministers and other government entities, including the Programme for the Implementation of Gender Equality 2005-2006, the National Action Plan for Reduction of Poverty and Social Exclusion and a national programme entitled "Support for capacity-building in the institutions responsible for the implementation of labour market and gender equality policy, and the dissemination of information and raising awareness".

13. Recently adopted legislation included the new Labour Law, the Law on Labour Protection, a number of regulations of the Cabinet

of Ministers on employment and labour protection and the Administrative Procedure Law. A draft Discrimination Prevention Law had been accepted on first reading in the Parliament. The newly drafted Labour Law introduced specific definitions of direct discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment) and indirect discrimination in line with the recent case law of the European Court of Justice. It also placed the burden of proof on the defendant in cases of victimization, and included provisions for the reasonable accommodation of disabled persons and penalties for the violation of the principle of equal treatment (including compensation for moral injury).

14. Gender equality issues were addressed by a number of parliamentary bodies, including the Gender Equality Subcommittee of the Commission on Human Rights and Public Affairs and the Women's Interparliamentary Cooperation Group, and by specially designated officials in every government Ministry. Implementation of the equal treatment policy by all Ministries was coordinated by the Inter-ministerial Working Group and the Ministry of Welfare, the chief government institution responsible for gender equality issues. The Latvian Council for Gender Equality advised the Government on gender issues, and the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and the Secretariat for the Minister for Special Assignment for Social Integration had recently been established. Gender issues were also addressed by the National Human Rights Office, the State Labour Inspectorate, the Latvian School of Public Administration and the Central Statistical Bureau.

15. Projects launched since January 2002 to promote gender equality included "Gender and Politics in Latvia", aimed at increasing the number of women candidates in elections, particularly in the local government elections scheduled for March 2005, and "Promotion of Gender Mainstreaming in National Policies in Latvia", implemented in 2003 in cooperation with the European Community programme. Under that project, aimed at eliminating stereotypes and creating equal employment opportunities for men and women, training seminars were offered to representatives of labour and management. The twinning light project entitled "Administrative Capacity-Building of Governmental Bodies and Social Partners in Gender Mainstreaming Development and Implementation", which was implemented jointly with the European Union and Poland-Hungary Aid for the Reconstruction of the Economy (PHARE) and was aimed at achieving gender mainstreaming in national policies, had already sponsored a successful training workshop. The project "Women towards Leadership in Business and Agriculture" was being implemented within the context of the Programme for the Implementation of Gender Equality of the European Community and in partnership with Sweden, Greece and Iceland. Led by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs of Norway, its objective was to enhance the participation of women in business and agriculture and to strengthen their role in economic decision-making. The project "Mass Media in (re) Distribution of Power", to be launched in January in cooperation with the European Union, would combat stereotyping in the media, policymaking and society in general and strengthen women's role in the decision-making process. Other projects included the Programme for the Implementation of Gender Equality 2005-2006, the Programme of Social Rehabilitation, and "Gender Mainstreaming Development and Implementation at the Municipal Level in Latvia", which had just concluded in June.

16. Approximately 40 women's organizations were officially registered in Latvia and 33 were active. The Coalition for Gender Equality in Latvia was an umbrella organization for 30 women's organizations and approximately 40 individuals; the Women's NGO Network included women's organizations and clubs from all parts of the country. NGOs provided regular input to government institutions through their participation in the Council for Gender Equality, the Inter-ministerial Working Group on Gender Equality Issues and other relevant working groups. The Ministry of Welfare communicated with NGOs regarding policy decisions. In addition, all draft legislation on employment and social issues was discussed with the relevant civil society organizations, usually in the National Tripartite Cooperation Council and its subcouncils.

17. Government funding was also available for NGO projects. For example, the Skalbes Crisis Centre and the Talsi Women's and Children Centre were partially funded by municipal governments. Although women's issues had not been addressed in the National Action Plan for 2002, a three-year project entitled "Gender in politics in Latvia" was aimed at increasing women's involvement in the election process. The project was scheduled to conclude in December. The project known as "Women Towards Leadership in Business and Agriculture", launched in 2003, provided alternative childcare arrangements and allowed women to set up flexible work schedules.

18. The most recent publication on gender equality and women's rights was the translation of the gender mainstreaming handbook compiled by A. Neimanis of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Concept Paper of Gender Equality Implementation and European Community frameworks had been published in the Latvian language, and gender equality and women's rights were components of various research projects and publications funded by the Ministry of Welfare or international organizations. The new Labour Law was disseminated by the media, and a manual on labour rights had been issued to Latvian employees and employers. The mass media were being encouraged to combat existing stereotypes under the project entitled "Mass Media (re) Distribution of Power". In August, a newly trained expert in gender budgeting would conduct a seminar for State officials and representatives of other institutions.

19. The high unemployment rate among women was a reflection of Latvia's overall unemployment rate, which stood at 10.6 per cent. That figure had decreased slightly, however, between 2002 and 2003 for both women (0.5 per cent decrease) and the overall population (1.4 per cent decrease). Vigorous measures were being taken in the labour market to address the problem, and, in particular, to address the problem of persons returning from parental leave (Law on Support to Job-seekers and the Unemployed). In 2003, 92.3 per cent of all employed women had unemployment insurance; disabled persons and retirees were not eligible. According to statistical data provided by the State Employment Agency, 4,679 women had received training or retraining; 8,371 women had been recruited for paid temporary public work, 21,155 women had acquired new skills through "job-seekers clubs"; and 601 women had benefited from special measures for disadvantaged groups. In the first quarter of 2004, 8,761 women or 2.6 per cent of women receiving old-age pensions were in receipt of early retirement pensions.

20. Benefits and a family-friendly environment attracted many women to the public sector, but their large presence in that sector was also due to gender segregation or stereotyping; for example, women were heavily concentrated in certain sectors, such as health care, education and social work. Horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market was also responsible for wage disparities between women and men. The Labour Law guaranteed equal pay for equal work or work of equal value and the right to seek full

remuneration or bring a court action within a one-month period for violations by employers. It also established basic methodology for assessing intellectual and physical work. Occupational qualification categories were determined by the Cabinet of Ministers. There were numerous trade unions for public-sector employees, including the Trade Union of Employees of State Institutions, Self-Governments and the Finance Sector, the Trade Union of Public Service Employees, the Nursing and Health Care Personnel Trade Union, the Health and Social Care Workers Trade Union and the Education and Science Workers Trade Union.

21. Although the Labour Law guaranteed equal employment opportunities without discrimination on the basis of gender, exceptions could be made on a case-by-case basis where gender was a precondition for the performance of relevant work (for example, a woman could not apply for a man's role in a film). That provision, however, could not be invoked to establish a standing list of professions which excluded women. Similarly, differential treatment on the ground of pregnancy was prohibited by law with rare exceptions (for example, where a particular job could not be performed during pregnancy on a short-term employment contract). Very few cases of pregnancy-based discrimination had been reported. Additionally, 52.6 million lati (approximately \$100,000) had been allocated from the basic State budget, the State special budget and local government budgets for the development of a social assistance policy documents, legislation and projects.

22. **Mr. Rozkalns** (Latvia), replying to questions concerning health, said that the number of abortions in Latvia had declined from 15,647 in 2001 to 14,508 in 2003 and from 796 per thousand births in 2001 to 734.4 in 2002 and 695.5 in 2003. Under the Law on Sexual and Reproductive Health, adopted in 2003, an abortion could be performed only on the basis of a woman's own decision, for compelling medical reasons or in cases of pregnancy as a result of rape. In the latter two cases, the opinions of at least three doctors were required; confirmation by police was also necessary in the case of rape. Doctors had an obligation to provide women with oral and written information about the moral features and possible medical complications of abortion, and about ways of keeping the child. In general, they were expected to attempt to discourage the procedure. An abortion could be performed only within 72 hours from the time a woman gave her consent and had been warned about its potential medical consequences.

23. An abortion could be performed on a girl only if the girl herself and one of her parents consented to it. The Cabinet of Ministers had established a regulation governing all aspects of the issue, as well as a Public Health Strategy to promote healthy lifestyles, particularly with regard to reproductive health. Under a special programme entitled "Friendly Health Care Services for Young People", developed by the Ministry of Health, health-care centres sponsored special educational and information activities to help young people to prevent unwanted pregnancies and choose appropriate forms of contraception. The Association of Family Planning and Reproductive Health (known as "The Flower of Fern") offered lectures for young people on healthy lifestyles and reproductive health.

24. Latvia's Ministry of Health had an AIDS Prevention Centre, and in 2003 the Cabinet had adopted a "Programme on Combating the Spread of HIV and AIDS for the period 2003-2007", within the overall public health strategy, to produce a reduction in the number of new cases by 2010. That was consistent with the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted by the General Assembly in 2001 and numerous other international instruments. The costs of treatment were met in full by the State.

25. The prescribing of contraceptives to a young girl was a matter for her own doctor. Consultations were free for minors, but there was no reduction in the price of the actual contraceptives. At the other end of a woman's reproductive life, the annual "KONTIA" project surveyed the health and quality of life of those going through menopause and provided information about their problems and how they could be dealt with. That information was then disseminated to health professionals and in public information campaigns.

26. **Ms. Falka** (Latvia), referring to educational issues, said that human rights principles, including gender equality, were incorporated into the entire curriculum by order of the Ministry of Education and Science. For example, health studies courses in vocational institutions brought up gender equality in dealing with such topics as hygiene, workplace safety, organization of work and relations between staff. In health courses in primary and secondary schools changing gender roles and stereotypes was discussed. In the secondary schools, all young people were also taught about the dangers of drug addiction and given very full instructions on ways of preventing drug dependency. In that connection, a number of non-governmental organizations worked with the schools to operate HIV/AIDS centres, youth health centres and summer camps for teachers and students. Courses in the history of culture taught tolerance for cultural and gender differences and dealt with the gender equality, male and female roles in society and feminism and sought to inculcate creative and critical thinking that went beyond gender differences to the value of individual personality and talents. Irrespective of gender, all secondary students also took courses in domestic skills and household organization and in one of the manufacturing technologies. In 2003 and 2004, about 1,000 primary and secondary schoolteachers had been trained to give social science courses that taught human rights, gender equality, family and social cooperation and the rights and duties of citizens. The latest statistics showed that two thirds of university professors and about one third of the rectors of universities were women.

27. **Mr. Vaisla** (Latvia) said that police statistics for 2003 indicated that over 750 women had been victims of violence: approximately 80 had been murdered, 60 raped, 280 assaulted and 100 seriously injured. One fourth of the average 400 calls a week received by the Riga municipal police had to do with domestic violence, and about half of all crimes committed against women in Latvia, including approximately 35 homicides a year, occurred in the family.

28. Women accounted for about one quarter of all police officers and less than half of the police academy recruits. The police profession was not well paid and women generally preferred the civil service. Law enforcement and judicial training included seminars on the topics of domestic violence and the prevention of trafficking in women.

29. The Government had set up a four-year programme for the prevention of trafficking, under which the public — and especially young people — would be informed about the issue, law enforcement officials and teachers would be trained to prevent trafficking, and rehabilitation services, including medical examinations, support and shelters for returning victims of trafficking would be established. The Government would be applying to the European Community for financial assistance for such support services and would seek ways to assist aliens who had fallen victim to trafficking in Latvia. Repatriation and rehabilitation funds had been provided by the International Organization for Migration. The police were cooperating well with State and municipal institutions and non-

governmental organizations in the field, and there were various crisis centres, resource centres and psychological and medical assistance centres for women, as well as child rehabilitation centres.

30. The police believed that more than 100 women left Latvia every month to engage in prostitution in other European countries, more than 99 per cent of them of their own free will and in full understanding of their decision. Prostitution was not prohibited in Latvia but was considered a social evil. Third party encouragement of prostitution and the engagement of minors in prostitution were prohibited. In the case of the latter, the situation had improved since the law had become significantly harsher in 2002, and the police and the media were cooperating to publicize the strict attitude of the courts in dealing with those who involved minors in prostitution or trafficking.

31. The budget for the Nordic-Baltic campaign against trafficking in women was 300,000 Danish kroner, which had been used between April 2002 and December 2003 to organize seminars in schools and for broadcasts to raise awareness of trafficking. There were also joint seminars in the three Baltic capitals, open to government agencies, researchers, police, immigration authorities, NGOs, the media and the public from all eight countries involved. Those seminars served as catalysts for public debate.

32. In the first six months of 2004 eight cases had been brought to court, with 36 indictments, and 17 people had been convicted of violations of article 165.1 of the Criminal Code relating to sexual exploitation. The equivalent figures for the whole of 2003 were 12 cases, 68 indictments and 17 convictions, and for 2002, 13 cases, 17 indictments and 12 convictions. Five people had been convicted under article 154 since 2003. The victims of those crimes were mostly young women aged between 18 and 25, who had been lured to Western Europe by the differential in potential earnings available through work in Western European brothels. They were very rarely the victims of aggression by the criminals involved, because violence would attract unwelcome attention from the police. For the most part they complied willingly, well aware that they were being recruited for prostitution. Sometimes they had agreed to work in a strip club and when they found that the job involved prostitution, they had the choice of returning home.

33. **Ms. Tavares da Silva**, noting that paragraph 17 of the report was very misleading, welcomed the clarification about the establishment of the Council for Gender Equality.

34. **Ms. Šimonović** asked whether the specific principle of equal rights for women and men was to be found anywhere in the Constitution.

35. **Ms. Morvai** said that she did not understand why only three Latvian non-governmental organizations had commented on the report when presumably there was structured cooperation between the Government and nationwide non-governmental organizations. The Government had conducted a campaign to inform the public about the availability of assistance in cases of domestic violence, but it was not clear if any government funds had been given to the non-governmental organizations that apparently provided the bulk of the services. Commending the new criminal penalties for clients of prostitutes, she asked whether marital rape had been criminalized, and what penalties were being imposed on traffickers in women. On the question of abortion, preventive action by the Government to reduce the huge number of abortions should target not only young women but also middle-aged women, and especially men, who also had a responsibility in the matter.

36. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** asked whether the reassessment of the value of intellectual work had actually led to higher pay for female-dominated fields such as teaching, cultural affairs, medicine or law; and if the criteria used to determine what constituted physical labour included computer-related strain or simply heavy work. She encouraged the Government to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention; it in no way altered the substance of Latvia's obligations under the Convention but simply added two monitoring procedures, a complaint and an inquiry procedure.

37. **Ms. Manalo** asked whether any of the applicable legal Codes defined marital rape and, if not, how the Government could go about sponsoring legislation penalizing it.

38. **Ms. Reine** (Latvia) said that, indeed, paragraph 17 of the report had been superseded. The Government had followed a different path and had instead established the Gender Equality Council.

39. The Constitution stated that everyone was equal without qualification. That equality provision had been regularly interpreted by the courts as prohibiting gender, age or any other kind of discrimination.

40. The Government had sent copies of its report to the three major non-governmental organizations active in the field and had provided an opportunity for all others to comment during a period of public discussion, either on their own websites or directly to the Government. It was up to the non-governmental organizations themselves to take advantage of the procedure, and only three had done so.

41. Information on any Government funding for private services provided to victims of domestic violence would have to be given later. The Criminal Code prohibited rape, and marital rape was considered rape. The penalty for trafficking in women was automatically imprisonment in virtually all cases.

42. More information would have to be provided in the next report on the actual wage gap in Latvia, and the Government might have to order a special survey to determine the figures. Salary levels depended normally on the qualifications of the employee: education, intellectual ability, special skills, knowledge of languages and the like. There had been proposals to raise salaries in the teaching profession, which was underpaid. The legal profession, on the other hand, was one of the highest paid: that was intentional in order to reduce the incidence of corruption.

43. She could not say that the Government was prepared to undertake another international commitment, but she assured the Committee that it would continue to discuss the possibility of ratifying the Optional Protocol.

44. **Mr. Roskans** (Latvia) observed that research had shown that the vast majority of women who underwent abortions in Latvia

were between the ages of 18 and 25 and they therefore had to remain the main target of Government campaigns. The results of both the 2000 "Flower of Fern" campaign and a UNDP study had indicated that the vast majority of men did not recognize any personal responsibility in family planning, and the Government was aware that such an attitude had to be changed through education.

45. **The Chairperson** thanked the delegation of Latvia and informed it that the concluding statements of the Committee would be forwarded to the Government of Latvia after the end of the current session. She welcomed the focus of Latvia's social policy on empowering individuals and congratulated the country on its accession to the European Union with all that that implied. She underlined, however, that, since the contractual obligations of States parties under the Convention were the most important consideration in the Committee, Latvia would be well advised to take the Convention as the basic framework for its legislation aimed at combating discrimination against women in the future. While Latvia had undertaken far-reaching legal reforms, there still remained many problems relating to the implementation of those reforms. The labour legislation, for instance, was now in line with European standards, but that did not preclude a need for specific mention in the Constitution of gender equality or of a definition of discrimination in the terms laid down in the Convention. Laws alone were never enough, in any country, to effect change, but such a definition would go beyond the law, into the private sphere, where there was still a need to address discrimination, and into practical implementation, as under article 2 (a) of the Convention, not only in the labour sector but also in other spheres such as health and family life. Latvia also needed to intensify its work in countering gender stereotypes and discriminatory cultural practices, and the Committee was pleased to hear of the approval of the National Programme for the Implementation of Equal Treatment. The work of gender sensitizing must be pursued in the Civil Service, among legal personnel (including judges) and throughout civil society. As important as having the necessary legislation were the issue of how that legislation was implemented by the legal community and the police and the level of awareness in society at large, and among women more specifically, about how to use the law and the court system to combat discrimination. The Convention should not only be integrated into the curriculum for law students; it should also be used in retraining those judges and law enforcement personnel who were already working, and its provisions should be incorporated into any new law to combat discrimination.

46. Latvia had a large proportion of women in local authorities and should build on this in improving the number in Parliament and in the executive branch, since a pool of educated women was available. Special temporary measures would be a way to achieve this and, if used in a timely fashion, would be effective at keeping the issue on the agenda. It was important to have women decision makers at the national level, just as it was important to have them in the private sector; information on that subject, disaggregated for the two sectors, would be welcome in the next report.

47. If in spite of Latvia's legislation stipulating equal pay for equal work there was still a pay differential between men and women, the country clearly needed structural reform with changes to define that equality in the terms of the Convention. The Latvian Cabinet might avail itself of the helpful handbook published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Division for the Advancement of Women, which was available in Russian and so accessible to the majority of Latvians, and proceed to adopt the Optional Protocol.

48. **Mr. Jegermanis** (Latvia) remarked that, while drafting its answers to the supplementary questions, the delegation had had heated and fruitful discussions with the Latvian NGOs present, and both sides of the exchange would return home better able to understand each other and to work together in the future. Latvia had a strong folk-song tradition peopled with goddesses, so the role of strong women was an important part of the country's culture. Moreover the influence of the country's Scandinavian neighbours was now much stronger than it had been in the recent past.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.