



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Twenty-fourth session

Summary record of the 501st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 25 January 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Acar (Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of Ms. Abaka, Ms. Acar, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

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

Initial report of Uzbekistan (continued)
(CEDAW/C/UZB/1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Saidov (Uzbekistan) took a place at the Committee table.*

Article 5

2. **Ms. Livingstone Raday** endorsed Ms. Ferrer Gómez's comments regarding polygamy, early marriage, the division of labour in the family and the impact of traditional and religious attitudes on women's motivation and their participation in the labour force. She asked what legal and media-related measures were being adopted to combat traditional perceptions of women. She wondered whether polygamists were prosecuted; and whether the media discussed and explained why polygamy undermined women's right to equality and was one of the causes of female poverty.

3. **Ms. Corti** said that Ms. Ferrer Gómez had covered most of the points she wished to make, but urged the Government to cooperate with non-governmental organizations in its efforts to shape new role models and overcome existing stereotypes. It should not limit its activities to holding seminars but should promote human-rights education. Furthermore, the fact that men also had parental responsibilities should be driven home with more force.

4. **Ms. Shin** considered that the fine provided for in article 136 of the Criminal Code was problematic, because it might place a heavy financial burden on the family and did not sufficiently punish the man concerned. Abduction, even if followed by marriage, was a serious crime for which a mere fine was an inappropriate penalty. She wondered whether the lack of statistics in the report on offences under article 136 meant that there had been no cases of coercion or abduction between 1994 and 1998. Similarly, the report did not provide any data on cases filed or prosecutions brought under article 122 of the Criminal Code. Had no such cases occurred?

5. The report suggested that domestic violence was regarded as a crime against the life and health of the individual resulting from family strife or a domestic dispute. Did the courts fully comprehend the nature of domestic violence? The thrust of measures seemed to overlook the fact that most of such violence was directed against women and children. Cases of domestic violence were first dealt with by local community mediators from the Makhallya Foundation, who attempted to bring about a reconciliation between the members of a family, but in doing so they did not give first priority to the rights and interests of the woman concerned, who was sometimes advised to put up with the situation and not to go to court. The police should be instructed to react faster to emergency calls from victims of violence, so that such victims could avail themselves of the formal legal system. Moreover, it appeared from the reports of non-governmental organizations that when men were prosecuted for violence against their families, they were often merely fined. That penalty again placed the burden on the family's finances, while the man was not really punished.

6. She therefore hoped that the next written report would provide more statistics based on a nationwide survey, on the number of complaints of domestic violence lodged and on the prevalence of domestic violence. Information should be given on the way in which women victims of violence were cared for, what legal, psychological, medical and financial assistance they received and whether shelters for battered wives existed.

7. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said she supported everything that had been said with regard to sexual stereotyping and cultural attitudes and practices. She explained, however, that the Committee's call for a reappraisal of women's status did not imply that members placed no value on a woman's role as a mother; rather, the experts' stance was dictated by the reference in the preamble to the Convention to a need to change the traditional role of men, and the belief that women had additional roles to play.

Article 6

8. **Ms. Feng Cui**, referring to measures for stopping the exploitation of women, noted that the punishment for the operation of brothels mentioned in the report should be more severe than that described for the distribution of pornographic materials. She would

appreciate an explanation of the reasons for the provisions of the law as they stood. She also wondered why the number of people in the high-risk group for prostitution had risen. It would also be helpful to have more information on the special units that had been established to combat prostitution and the distribution of pornographic products, including the composition of such units, their responsibilities and their law-enforcement status.

9. **Ms. Achmad** returning to article 3, said she would like Uzbekistan to provide a diagram showing the hierarchy of institutions dealing with the status of women including information on their cooperation with non-governmental organizations, terms of reference, programmes, target groups and budgets.

Article 7

10. As for article 7, she was worried by the fact that quotas for increasing the number of women in executive posts had been introduced in the social sphere alone since, in a transitional economy, the role of women in decision-making was of crucial importance.

11. **Ms. Ferrer Gómez** said she was also puzzled why women in high positions were supposed to deal only with social affairs. She asked what the extent of their responsibilities was, and how many social affairs directors there were.

12. **Ms. Gaspard** endorsed the preliminary statement of the Chairperson and the experts' comments in the general debate and emphasized that women should not be regarded solely as mothers, but should be seen as human beings with human rights. Despite the reference to a State programme to increase the number of women in leadership posts, in view of the small number of female members of Parliament, it was necessary to go to the root of the matter and ensure that more women were elected. She asked whether any measures existed to encourage women to take part in regional civil society and village life, and whether any studies had shown that women were discouraged from political activism.

13. From the information available to the Committee it emerged that discrimination against women was not always taken into consideration in legislation and public policy, although it was well known that until a critical mass of women in decision-making posts was achieved, many questions related to equality would be

ignored. Balanced participation of women and men in political and public life was both a means for attaining greater equality and proof of society's recognition that men and women were equally able to decide the fate of the nation. That was a precondition for the full use of human resources.

14. **Ms. Feng Cui** enquired about the ratio of 100 men electors to female elected representatives. In view of the Presidential Decree of 1995, allowing women to be appointed as "deputy" directors of administration, she wondered whether the position of director of administration was reserved for men.

15. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** asked whether any women's non-governmental organizations had been rejected for registration and, if so, on what grounds. In Uzbekistan, as in many countries of the region, such organizations were heavily dependent on international donors which would one day withdraw their funding. The Government should therefore anticipate the need to allocate funds to women's non-governmental organizations, which played an important function in a democracy.

16. She asked whether trade unions, especially those with a large percentage of women members, had instituted temporary special measures, such as training programmes, to promote women's representation in leadership positions. Similarly, the delegation had mentioned the establishment of a special school for women leaders but had not specified whether specific training for the administrative, private and non-governmental sectors was provided. It would be useful to know the backgrounds and areas of employment of participants in that programme and the impact that it had had on their chances of promotion.

Article 8

17. **Ms. Gaspard** requested statistics on the number of women in the diplomatic corps, including those serving abroad.

Article 10

18. **Ms. Gaspard** requested an explanation of the 50 per cent decrease in student enrolment in recent years and asked what measures were being taken to encourage young women to pursue higher education.

19. **Ms. Achmad** noted that special centres were being set up to identify talented young boys and girls

and promote the development of their abilities. Such programmes often discriminated against girls, particularly in the areas of science and technology; she wondered what methodology was being used in Uzbekistan.

20. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that she welcomed the high literacy rate and girls' presence at all levels of the educational system, notwithstanding the decline in the overall number of students. However, she was concerned at the fact that women aged 18 to 23 were often compelled by their parents or husbands to abandon their studies in order to marry and have children. She applauded the decision to require 12 years of compulsory education and to discourage early marriage; however, it was also important to combat gender stereotypes and to promote an image of women not only as mothers, but as full persons and members of the work force and of society.

Article 11

21. **Ms. Corti** said that as significant numbers of women were employed in fields such as industry, State administration, housing and utilities, it would be useful to know the minimum wage for each sector. She also wondered what welfare, pension and other benefits were provided to persons in need, including single parents; what quotas had been set for the hiring of disabled workers; and whether training programmes were provided to prevent women from being channelled into low-paying jobs.

22. She asked whether parental leave and the opportunity for part-time employment were available to fathers as well as mothers. Lastly, she noted that the Labour Code set the minimum age of employment at 16, which was not in accordance with international conventions to which Uzbekistan was a party.

23. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** stressed the need to re-evaluate the definitions of "heavy" and "light" work: for example, agricultural workers were subject to frequent bending and exposure to pesticides; teachers and health-care workers suffered from overwork, night shifts and emotional involvement; and workers in the so-called "light" industries must endure eyestrain and high noise levels. She asked whether the Government had made a systematic effort to evaluate the various employment sectors according to gender-neutral criteria and, if not, whether it planned to do so in the future.

24. She wondered whether maternity and parental leave were available to both parents or whether fathers could take such leave only if the mother was unable to do so. Furthermore, it was not clear whether workers in the private sector were entitled to the same benefits as civil servants. In that regard, she asked whether the Government planned to introduce a specific prohibition of gender-based discrimination in public- and private-sector employment since private-sector employers did not always realize their obligations in that area. The new legislation should include a definition of discrimination; specify the areas covered; allow for the taking of temporary special measures; ensure that where complaints were lodged, the burden of proof did not lie solely on the woman; prohibit negative repercussions for women lodging complaints; and clearly define the concept of equal pay for work of equal value.

25. She asked what action was being taken to combat stereotypical attitudes to male and female labour. The report gave the impression of entrenched traditions that dictated that women were invariably physically weak and men were strong, even though women seemed to be allowed to do heavy agricultural work. It was a matter of concern, also, that as many as 67 per cent of women considered their wages too low. The creation of additional jobs for women was encouraging, but she wondered whether such jobs involved "light" work, with correspondingly low wages. Generally, women's work was — as the report itself explicitly recognized — chronically undervalued in such fields as health, insurance, education and culture, largely because it was seen as an extension of women's traditional work in the home. Whatever the reason, it amounted to discrimination and needed to be addressed.

26. The development of entrepreneurship among women was commendable, with such features as the 50 per cent discount on licence charges and the 30 per cent quota for the leasing of non-residential premises. She asked, however, what training was given to women seeking such a career. Women should be helped to break into the ranks of the highest paid, only 2 per cent of whom were women. Lastly, she wondered whether the problems in the country's economic development which had prevented various special projects to provide direct assistance with setting up a personal business had operated as a similar obstacle to men in such circumstances.

27. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** commended the Government's efforts to provide help and incentives for various new forms of work for women. She was, however, concerned about the mention of "guarantees and privileges" for working women who in any way sought to reconcile work with family. Such possibilities ought to be available to men as well, both for intrinsic reasons of fairness and because — as acknowledged in the report itself — treatment perceived as preferential could backfire on the campaign for equality. The solution was for men and women to share full responsibility for family and household responsibilities, thus entitling them to measures to promote parenthood rather than merely motherhood.

28. **Ms. Achmad** said that a similar objection could be made to the more advantageous conditions applied to women's pensions. Noting that the survey of women quoted in the report gave priority to the family over material prosperity, she said that the one did not rule out the other: the answer was rather for men to share responsibility. Research showed that, if child care was provided, productivity increased among men as well as women. The Government should review its current policy to ensure that women were not in fact disadvantaged by its approach.

29. **Ms. Abaka** expressed concern about the information on the statistics relating to suicide among women, which had shown a marked rise between 1995 and 1997, although in 1998 it had dropped slightly. It was a serious matter and she requested further information on the women concerned: what their marital status was, for example, or whether they were drug addicts. She also asked what measures were in place to provide appropriate programmes for women suffering from mental disorders. Information on the incidence of cardiovascular disease would also be welcome. She wondered whether the substantial increase in that and other diseases was due to a change in lifestyles, such as increased smoking or alcohol consumption among women or young people. Lastly, she asked whether screening was compulsory for pregnant women and also what action was taken after such screening.

30. **Ms. Myakayaka-Manzini**, noting that of the 12 million women in Uzbekistan 60 per cent lived in rural areas, asked for information on the impact of the transition to a market economy on the health, education and general standard of living of such women. She wondered whether any programmes were in place to help them, whether they had access to basic utilities like water and whether child care was provided. She

asked what percentage of work was done by rural women and of what such work consisted. She also asked whether any measures were planned to overcome the obstacles to their being granted credit, since without funding they would be unable to undertake any kind of meaningful employment. She requested further information on the numbers of rural women involved in primary, secondary and university education, and in occupational training, compared with urban women. Was any specific amount allocated to the needs of rural women in the national budget and, if so, how much? Lastly, she asked whether there were cultural traditions preventing women from participating in particular activities and, if so, what such activities might be.

31. **Ms. Feng Cui**, noting that about 1 million hectares of agricultural land had been transferred for management as personal subsidiary plots, asked what percentage of such plots had been transferred to women.

32. **Ms. Achmad** asked about men's attitudes to the action directed at helping rural women, which might be seen as offering them unfair advantages. She also asked whether care was taken to consult rural leaders, who were especially qualified to identify any problems.

33. **Ms. Livingstone Raday** asked whether there was any evidence of a return to traditional values, religious or otherwise in family life, leading to the reappearance of de facto polygamy. Indeed, she wondered whether article 26 of the Family Code effectively constituted a prohibition of polygamy and whether it was enforced as such. Secondly, she noted that property acquired during marriage was the shared property of the spouses, "unless provided for otherwise by law or by a marriage contract". She asked whether the existence of marriage contracts also signified a return to traditional practices. Lastly, she asked for further details on the incidence of family violence, which was often associated with patriarchal attitudes, and, more specifically, on the incidence of marital rape. She wondered whether women were able to obtain restraining orders to remove a violent husband from the family home. She also asked for statistics on the prosecution, conviction and sentencing of violent spouses.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.