



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Summary record of the 2108th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 21 October 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Peláez Narváez

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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)*

Fifth periodic report of Benin (CEDAW/C/BEN/5; CEDAW/C/BEN/Q/5; CEDAW/C/BEN/RQ/5)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Benin joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Benin**, introducing his country's fifth periodic report (CEDAW/C/BEN/5), said that the Government protected the rights of women and girls through general policy measures, specific national programmes and strategies and legislative measures designed to bring domestic law into line with the Convention. Since the report had been submitted, the Government Action Programme had been renewed for the period 2021–2026 and a new law on the Beninese Human Rights Commission had been passed. A number of measures had also been taken to combat trafficking in women and girls, including tougher enforcement of articles 499 ff. of the Criminal Code, the establishment of a procedure for identifying victims, the creation of a court unit for minors, the strengthening of border controls and cooperation with neighbouring countries and the provision of training for judicial personnel, border agents and police officers. The Public Decency Unit of the Directorate of Judicial Police was working with the border authorities to prevent cross-border movements that might facilitate sexual exploitation and, during the previous month, a campaign to combat prostitution had been carried out in cities throughout the country.
3. Under ongoing measures to ensure that girls enjoyed access to education on an equal footing with boys, intimate relations between male teachers and female students had been prohibited. Labour inspectors monitored recruitment practices in the private sector to ensure that women and men had equal access to work, and labour courts handed down penalties to offending employers. The principles of equal opportunity and equal remuneration also applied in the public sector, and the Ministry of Labour and the Civil Service was responsible for ensuring that those standards were upheld. The base loan amount provided by the Government under its Microcredit for the Poorest programme had been increased from 50,000 CFA francs to 100,000 CFA francs, and that amount would rise to 200,000 CFA francs within a few months. The vast majority of recipients of that microcredit were women, many of whom lived in rural areas. The Government also provided rural women with support to help them to develop entrepreneurial activities.
4. Act No. 2021-11 of 20 December 2021 had introduced tougher penalties for sexual harassment, aggravated violence against women and girls, sexual assault, rape, forced marriage, early marriage and genital mutilation. The Economic Crimes and Terrorism Repression Court had been awarded jurisdiction over all gender-related offences, and special rules had been introduced concerning the taking of evidence and the timely administration of justice for such cases. The customary law of Dahomey had been declared unconstitutional, and traditional practices relating to marriage, inheritance and family life had been abolished under new laws, including the Persons and Family Code. The Government continued to organize campaigns to raise awareness of the Code and held legal clinics on the rights of women and girls.

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5. **Ms. Ameline** said that she wished to know what measures the Government intended to take to improve the public's knowledge and understanding of domestic legislation, above all in rural areas, bearing in mind that many different languages were spoken in the country and more than half of all women were illiterate.
6. Given that a regional conference on women and peace and security had been held in the country the previous month, she said that she would be interested to know whether any plans had been made to review and strengthen the national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, which had been adopted in 2019. It would also be useful to know what steps the Government would take to strengthen its cooperation with the Network on Peace and Security for Women in the ECOWAS Region. The Committee had learned that a training course on the prevention of the

proliferation of light weapons and violent extremism in the region had taken place in Cotonou in February 2024. She would like to know what measures the Government was taking to protect the population, particularly schoolchildren, against violent attacks and what steps were taken to mobilize women in such efforts.

7. She wished to know whether any initiatives were implemented to improve the local justice mechanisms available to women, bolster judicial independence, strengthen training on women's rights for judges and appoint more women judges. It would be useful to find out whether the Government had given priority to using the financial support received from international partners to advance women's rights.

8. Women had played a leading role in the history of Beninese civilization. With that in mind, would the Government be prepared to increase its investment in women's organizations to ensure that they were active and enjoyed full freedom of expression? Would it give priority to the inclusion of those organizations in national policies? And lastly, could such organizations apply for the legal status of human rights defenders?

9. **A representative of Benin** said that a number of initiatives had been taken to raise public awareness of national legislation. A committee formed under the aegis of the Ministry of Justice had been tasked with ensuring that all laws were translated into local languages so that they could be disseminated, including through community radio services. The Ministry had also developed a chatbot tool to enable citizens to access information on the law and their rights. The chatbot initiative was part of a broader strategy on legal aid, one of the aims of which was to improve access to information on citizens' rights. The Government's community digital hotspots had been converted into one-stop shops where people could access not only the Internet but comprehensive information about social protection services. A law adopted in 2020 modernizing the justice system had provided for the creation of advice centres for litigants to ensure that people who did not have the means to access the services of a lawyer could receive personal assistance and access to certain legal services.

10. Earlier in the year, the Government had launched a new policy aimed at protecting schools against the risks associated with climate change and terrorism. Under the policy, systems had been put in place to ensure that, in spite of the dangers the country might face, children were always able to access their schools safely and schools continued to receive basic supplies such as food.

11. A gender approach had been implemented in every prosecutor's office and every court unit for minors. Women judges were actively involved in implementing that approach and promoting gender equality and women's access to justice. However, there were not currently enough women appointed to the most senior judicial and prosecutorial roles. A recruitment strategy had therefore been put in place to ensure that there would be more female candidates with the required level of experience and expertise to occupy those positions in the future.

12. A draft bill on the status of human rights defenders was being prepared and would be submitted to the National Assembly in the near future.

13. **A representative of Benin** said that awareness-raising activities were carried out all over the country to inform people in their own language about the important provisions on family relations, marriage, divorce and women's inheritance rights contained in the Persons and Family Code and the protections provided under the Children's Code. There was still a certain level of resistance to that legislation in some quarters. However, the Government was committed to pursuing and strengthening its dissemination measures so that nobody could claim to be unaware that child and forced marriage and female genital mutilation were now criminal offences, for example.

14. The National Institute for Women received considerable support from the international community to fight gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination against women. It received financial support from, among others, the embassies of France and the Netherlands, the Canadian Cooperation Support Unit, the Belgian Cooperation Agency, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the United States Agency for International Development and the European Union. Among other activities, the National Institute provided socioeconomic support to economically vulnerable victims to enable them to attend court hearings. For example, if a girl under the age of 13 living in a remote rural

area was raped, the National Institute paid all the travel, food and accommodation expenses required to enable her and an accompanying parent or guardian to attend her hearing at the Economic Crimes and Terrorism Repression Court in Cotonou. It also offered her free psychological support and covered the cost of any interim protection measures ordered by the court.

15. **A representative of Benin** said that elected representatives periodically visited their constituencies to present to the local residents, in their own language, the nature and purpose of newly adopted legislation. Those activities were organized by the National Assembly or, in some cases, by political parties.

16. **Ms. Ameline** said that she noted that equality before the law was guaranteed under article 26 of the Constitution. However, she would like to know whether the Government would consider adopting a comprehensive anti-discrimination law that would prohibit all direct and indirect discrimination on any grounds. She would also welcome further information on the Government's current activities and plans regarding women and peace and security, including the progress made so far under the national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

17. **Ms. Akia** said that she wished to know whether the Government had taken any measures to assess the impact of its provision of legal aid, with a view to making it more effective in addressing the needs of women. It would also be useful to learn whether the State party had a law on legal aid. If so, she would like to know whether there were any plans to amend it to respond to the challenges that women and girls faced, and if not, she would appreciate it if the delegation could inform the Committee whether the Government had made any plans to enact such legislation in the foreseeable future.

18. **A representative of Benin** said that legal aid was currently available to all children in conflict with the law and to adults who were prosecuted for criminal offences. In November 2023, the President had announced plans to extend the coverage of State-funded legal aid to include adults prosecuted under both criminal and civil law and to introduce a new scheme for disadvantaged persons. Recipients of basic social security benefits would thus receive free access to information on their legal rights and the services of a lawyer or legal professional to help defend their rights. Preparatory work had already reached an advanced stage and the new initiatives were expected to be rolled out in the near future. Certain courts, including the Supreme Court, also made legal aid available to parties to the cases before them.

19. With respect to women and peace and security, the national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) would soon be updated to reflect the security challenges currently facing certain regions of the country.

20. **Ms. Mikko** asked what specific action was taken on the ground to ensure that Benin fulfilled its obligations under Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

21. **Ms. Akia** said that she would like to know which of the targets set under the National Gender Promotion Policy had already been reached. It would also be helpful to find out what percentage of the national budget was allocated to measures designed to support the implementation of the Convention, of domestic legislation on women's rights and of programmes benefiting women. The Committee would like to find out how much of the national budget was allocated to ensure the effective coordination of the departments that made up the national machinery for the advancement of women. She would appreciate it if the delegation could confirm whether the national gender machinery was fully independent. She noted that the machinery had issued policy guidelines to address gender inequality. It would be of interest to the Committee to hear the delegation's assessment of the effectiveness of those guidelines in meeting the specific needs of all women, including women with disabilities and refugee and migrant women, both in general and specifically with respect to the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). She would also be interested to hear about the steps the Government took to ensure effective coordination between the national gender machinery, government ministries and non-State institutions, including civil society, with a view to making sure that all laws and policies on women's empowerment and gender equality were successfully implemented.

22. **Mr. Safarov** said that he would like to know what temporary special measures had been taken to improve the access of women and girls to State services. The Committee would welcome further information on any plans made by the Government to use temporary special measures, including quotas, to accelerate the achievement of equal representation of women and men in decision-making positions, particularly in local councils, municipal governments and the Government itself. The delegation might also wish to describe any temporary special measures implemented in the areas of public life, culture, sport, the media and the judiciary. It would be useful for the Committee to learn what preventive measures had been taken to mitigate the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls. Lastly, he would welcome statistical data concerning the implementation of positive discrimination measures, including any actions provided for under the national labour law.

23. **A representative of Benin** said that a quota had been set to guarantee the participation of women in the monitoring committee overseeing implementation of the national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Chaired by the Minister of Social Affairs and Microfinance, the committee was composed of representatives of various ministries and civil society organizations. Its activities were partly funded through support received from the United Nations Development Programme.

24. A number of national policies had been implemented to promote women's economic empowerment. For example, women had access to both the National Programme for Employment and a special programme designed to integrate graduates into the world of work. Two programmes had also been launched to provide targeted support to people in rural areas with little or no access to education. The first was the Microcredit for the Poorest programme. The second was a programme supported by the Agency for the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, under which businesses were encouraged to set up offices and create job opportunities for rural people in a dedicated industrial and commercial development zone.

25. With respect to the national machinery for the advancement of women, the Department for the Promotion of Women and Gender had been established under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance. The Department was tasked with analysing the gender disparities that existed in different areas of society, with a view to proposing new policies. It was also responsible for coordinating the implementation of existing gender policies and policies for the empowerment of women and for ensuring the dissemination and application of all relevant legislation and international instruments ratified by Benin.

26. Act No. 2019-43 establishing the Electoral Code had raised the quota for women's representation in the National Assembly. Similar quotas had been set for women's representation on the executive bodies of municipal councils, although those rules had not been formally set out in legislation. A gender-responsive recruitment policy for the civil service had also been put in place throughout the country.

27. Through its implementation of Act No. 2021-11 establishing special measures to repress gender-related offences and to protect women, the Government aimed to eliminate harmful practices that had previously been permitted under customary law and, more generally, to bring about cultural change. An important aspect of that process was ensuring that justice was served at the local level. Therefore, the Economic Crimes and Terrorism Repression Court in Cotonou, which had been given jurisdiction over cases involving gender-related offences such as rape, sexual assault, early marriage and female genital mutilation, organized mobile court hearings around the country. Those hearings played an important role in strengthening the enforcement of Act No. 2021-11 and giving visibility to the Government's efforts to address gender-based violence.

28. From time to time, the Government hired experts such as cultural guides, sports coaches and teachers of handicrafts to conduct training activities as part of its implementation of national policies. Although no formal quotas had been set, a gender-responsive approach to recruitment had been adopted, and preference was often given to female candidates for those roles.

29. **A representative of Benin** said that no special measures had been put in place to strengthen women's participation in the implementation of the national action plan for the

implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Women currently occupied between 10 and 30 per cent of decision-making positions at each of the institutions tasked with taking action relating to women and peace and security, such as the Economic and Social Council, the armed forces, the police, the intelligence service, the judiciary, the prison service and the border force. From the defence industry to the arts and culture sector, whenever a new structure was created, efforts were always made to include women and to ensure that women were represented in public committees and commissions.

30. Although the National Institute for Women operated under the supervision of the Presidency, it was a fully independent body. The Institute had received complaints brought against diplomats and even a member of the National Assembly, and it handled all such cases with complete impartiality. It was currently working with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance to put in place a framework for consultation between State structures and civil society organizations dealing with women's rights issues. The Institute also provided mentoring services, which often involved offering psychological and emotional support to women who had endured particular hardship. It was only when such women had recovered their self-confidence and self-esteem that they stood to truly benefit from the opportunities made available under national programmes for women's empowerment.

31. **Ms. Akia**, noting that the Government had set a timeline for addressing gender gaps, said that she would like to hear how the delegation rated the progress made in eliminating the gender gap so far.

32. **Mr. Safarov** said that he would appreciate details of temporary special measures and positive discrimination to give women and girls better access to employment and leadership positions.

33. **A representative of Benin** said that the situation with regard to greater gender equality was promising. Women were able to speak out and obtain State protection from violence or discrimination. Momentum was gathering pace towards women's greater representation in the civil service. The National Institute for Women had focal points in all administrative entities, State institutions and universities, which could receive complaints of obstacles to women's pursuit of a normal career, such as discrimination and sexual harassment. In job recruitment, preference was given to women when they had qualifications that were equal to those of male candidates. Women were increasingly present in the business world, especially in the artificial intelligence and high-technology sectors, where an increasing number occupied senior positions. Gender-responsive budgeting meant that Benin was on track to achieving Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national and local levels. A new generation of women leaders was currently being educated at political training schools. An approach had been adopted by the executive branch to ensure that more women would take office after the forthcoming local government elections. Prospects were bright for women in the future in the political, economic, cultural and artistic spheres.

34. **A representative of Benin** said that there was a genuine political will to advance gender equality. There was widespread social acceptance of women in decision-making bodies. She was confident that measures debated in the National Assembly would ensure that progress was made towards women's greater representation on municipal councils.

35. **A representative of Benin** said that he wished to draw attention to the figures of budgetary appropriations for the National Institute for Women in paragraph 33 of the State party's replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/BEN/RQ/5). It was difficult to say exactly how much was allotted to gender issues in each ministry's budget. Acts Nos. 2021-12 and 2012-13, while admittedly not special temporary measures, were examples of legislation benefiting women.

36. **Ms. Tisheva** said that the Committee wished to know when the Government intended to adopt a comprehensive and regularly monitored strategy for combating discriminatory gender stereotyping in all spheres. Such a strategy should encompass key actors, such as the media, teachers and authors of school educational materials, community and religious leaders, young people, men and boys. It would be helpful to hear the delegation's assessment of action to prevent and end impunity for harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. She would like to receive a description of measures taken to investigate, prosecute and punish persons responsible for such practices, which often amounted to torture and

inhuman and degrading treatment of women and girls. She would appreciate data on the number of prosecutions and convictions for the period 2022–2024.

37. She wished to hear an assessment of the impact of the Government's action to ensure that persons responsible for gender-based violence against women were held responsible and for ensuring more effective protection of all women, including women with disabilities, rural women, refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum-seekers and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women. It would be useful to learn what steps had been taken regularly and in local languages to inform women and girls about the protection available to them. The Committee would welcome data on the number of prosecutions and convictions for different forms of gender-based violence during the period 2022–2024 and the number of cases referred to the Economic Crimes and Terrorism Repression Court. The delegation was requested to inform the Committee whether the gender-based violence referral pathway in fact ensured that victims received the necessary services, including counselling, access to justice, temporary shelter and housing. She would like to hear clarification of whether, in cases of gender-based violence, in particular in cases of sexual violence, medical certificates were issued free of charge for all, including refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers and prostitutes. Lastly, she wished to know how many one-stop centres for integral support existed and whether they covered most of the country.

38. **A representative of Benin** said that action was consistently taken to combat gender stereotyping. As it was often difficult for a woman to escape violence if she was economically dependent on its perpetrator, the National Institute for Women had stepped up measures to promote the economic empowerment of women. It encouraged women to pursue legal remedies and provided them with psychological support. If a woman decided not to press charges, the Institute could initiate legal proceedings. In some cases, if a man was convicted of domestic violence and imprisoned, it became necessary for the Institute to impress upon his family of origin that it must not retaliate against the victim or her family. The Institute cooperated with the few existing shelters for victims of gender-based violence. It planned to build six more itself, with the assistance of the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation.

39. Female genital mutilation and forced child marriage were criminal offences. However, there had been a recent trend of performing female genital mutilation on extremely young children who were no more than babies. Unless the act was reported by midwives or hospital staff, it was very difficult to trace the perpetrators. The Government was therefore working with hospitals and health centres and trying to prevent travel for the purpose of female genital mutilation.

40. The National Institute for Women was by no means silent on such violence. The apparent upsurge in cases might be due to better reporting of the crime. Between 2015 and 2023, the Institute had recorded over 500 complaints; the courts had ruled on 201 cases. At the end of 2023, the courts were still processing 357 cases and 26 cases had been referred to social advancement centres. Between January and September 2024, the Institute had recorded over 1,000 cases, 300 of which had already culminated in a court decision, and 391 case files were currently before the courts. She would subsequently share with the Committee a document containing statistics on and a breakdown of the types of cases of gender-based violence.

41. **A representative of Benin** said that there was a one-stop centre in every commune and there were several in urban centres. The assistance of religious leaders and opinion-makers had been enlisted in the fight against female genital mutilation. Persons who had taken girls abroad for female genital mutilation were prosecuted on their return to Benin. Any woman who was a victim of violence could dial the 138 helpline to obtain assistance.

42. **A representative of Benin** said that it was primarily the judicial police who received complaints of violence against women, regardless of where it occurred and who lodged the complaint. The information was then passed on to the prosecution service. Medical certificates in cases of gender-based violence were issued free of charge for all victims. It was crucial that the medical examination should be carried out in a timely fashion, otherwise the evidence might be insufficient to secure a conviction. If the victim was under the age of 13, the case was heard by a special court. The protection of the best interests of the child was

the guiding principle in all cases of child abuse. Awareness-raising was conducted among civil society and religious leaders, families and social welfare bodies.

43. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she wished to know what action was taken to rehabilitate perpetrators of different forms of gender-based violence to ensure non-repetition, and whether programmes for male perpetrators were based on legal or policy provisions. She wondered whether the State party had adopted legislation to prevent and combat online and technology-facilitated violence against women and girls. She would like to know how many cases of such violence had been registered and decided by courts in the previous two years.

44. **The Chair** said that she would like to know the number of convictions handed down since 2023 for female genital mutilation and child marriage. She would appreciate information about how children who had been abused by family members were protected, and she would like to know who wound up with custody of the child in such cases. What special protection was afforded to victims of serious abuse who were women with disabilities?

45. **A representative of Benin** said that the Information and Communication Code and the Digital Code had provisions for the prosecution of perpetrators of cyberviolence against women. A special body was responsible for tracing the source of such violence and referring the case to the competent court, which had already ruled on some cases. The State party and the United Nations Population Fund were launching a Making All Spaces Safe programme to strengthen legislation and other measures to prevent cyberviolence against women. The National Institute for Women would use the programme to build its capacity to deal with such cases. It was generally non-governmental organizations that were responsible for the rehabilitation of sex offenders and for their reintegration in society.

46. **A representative of Benin** said that convicted sex offenders were usually imprisoned. The Ministry of Justice and Legislation kept records of sex offenders and perpetrators of gender-based violence who had either been in conflict with the law or imprisoned for that reason.

47. **A representative of Benin** said that the agencies set up by the State to deal with cybercrime had been equipped with the best resources and mechanisms for investigation. They were thus able to detect such activity on social media, for example, to prosecute offences and to correct behaviours. The policy in place was one of zero tolerance: complaints lodged with the criminal police were followed up in an effective manner and proceedings were instituted promptly. Educational measures could also be used, where appropriate, to correct behaviour without resorting to court proceedings. Abuse of personal data, in particular, women's personal data, on social media was also monitored and those responsible were identified and prosecuted.

48. **Ms. Bonifaz Alfonso** said that she would like to know what the outcome of the National Plan of Action against Trafficking 2020–2024 had been. She would be interested to know what concrete actions the Government was taking to prevent, investigate and punish offences of trafficking in women and girls and how many people had been convicted in the previous five years. She would appreciate it if the delegation could provide information on the training provided to migration service personnel, police officers, prosecutors and judges, with a view to reducing impunity. What gender-sensitive action was the Government taking to increase funding and budget allocations for the strengthening of prevention and for the protection of victims, including through the use of shelters, hotlines, detection efforts, victim identification and legal support?

49. **A representative of Benin** said that, thanks to the Government's efforts to monitor the movements of children, which had yielded a good deal of information and made it possible to track down the networks responsible for trafficking in persons, the problem of trafficking had become less acute. The real challenge was not regular migration flows, but irregular migration, so the focus had been placed on properly identifying persons moving across the borders, in order to establish their migration status. Border controls had been stepped up with a view to preventing women and girls, in particular, from being lured into migration by promises of work or marriage in another country. The judicial police had been provided with the resources to conduct investigations and identify the networks involved.

50. The General Programme to Combat Trafficking in Persons set forth a clearly defined policy. Assistance was provided to families and individuals to help prevent them from falling into traps. The Programme funded capacity-building for the judiciary – both initial training for judges and in-service training in the investigation, prosecution and punishment of offences – and also provided funds to encourage a more structured and effective approach in dealing with offences.

51. The Programme was administered by the Ministry of Planning and Development, with effective support from all stakeholders, including the court unit for minors and the prosecutor's office. Benin had concluded agreements with foreign police services in regions where trafficking was prevalent, in order to facilitate the exchange of information, the identification of networks and more effective prosecution of perpetrators.

Articles 7–9

52. **Ms. Mikko** said that, although progress had been made in women's representation in the political and public spheres, the situation in the State party was still far short of equal representation. Cultural factors such as custom and tradition had restricted women to household duties, giving them less access to formal education and discouraging them from involvement in politics. She would like to know what measures the Government was taking to support women candidates in elections, particularly in remote areas, and whether new regulations had been adopted to combat online harassment, which was one of the reasons women hesitated to enter politics. What measures were in place to guarantee women's access to leadership and managerial positions in academia, technology and the private sector?

53. She would be interested to know what steps had been taken to empower women in leadership positions in the judiciary and the foreign service; what training was provided to prepare women to assume posts as female judges and prosecutors; and how many judges and ambassadors were women. She would also like to know how many women held positions in the office of the Chief of Staff of the Beninese Armed Forces and how many of the senior judicial police officers were women.

54. **A representative of Benin** said that, thanks to the 2019 reform of the Constitution, women's representation in the National Assembly had improved, and there were now 29 female members of the Assembly. The focus for improving representation had shifted to local councils and regional representation, and the Government had launched initiatives to encourage women and girls to take a greater interest in politics. There were special schools to train women politicians, and their husbands were being encouraged to change their attitudes. The regulations governing political parties had been changed to ensure that women held 30 per cent of decision-making positions.

55. Harassment had been virtually eradicated in universities, in part by ensuring that anyone partaking in such behaviour would be held accountable, right up to the most senior levels.

56. **A representative of Benin** said that the Government's efforts to raise the profile of women who had played a leading role in the history of Benin had yielded results. The National Institute for Women and the caucus of women parliamentarians, together with the Vice-President, had been working to reinstate a model of female leadership that had been forgotten. A kingdom in the north of the country had, for 500 years and up to modern times, had Vice-Empresses who had ruled alongside the Emperors with their own court, their own ministers and their own special festival. The concept was deeply ingrained in the culture of that region and the intention was to study that institution and extend it, as a blueprint for a change in women's leadership roles, to the country as a whole, giving people confidence in their own heritage and showing women that taking an active part in politics was nothing new or alien.

57. In the political training schools, some of which were mixed and others for women exclusively, a scheme had been developed, in cooperation with the Embassy of the Netherlands, to invite the husbands of women who were interested in politics into the classes. The aim was to ensure that they would not feel threatened by their wives' political commitment and achievements and to help them see that a woman who attended a political meeting was not behaving in an inappropriate manner.

58. **A representative of Benin** said that women occupied around 20 per cent of posts in the police force. The police supported women's applications for senior positions and, indeed, encouraged applications from women for the position of Vice-President for Africa of the Executive Committee of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).

59. No social media campaigns to discourage women from taking part in politics had been observed. If any were detected, they would be countered with the full force of the law. Conversely, in order to support women's effective participation in government in rural areas, mechanisms and training schemes were in place at the community level to encourage the emergence of women leaders and women councillors. Such measures had already had positive results.

60. **Ms. Mikko** said she had noted that a new article of the Electoral Code had recently been adopted, requiring a minimum of 24 women members of the parliament out of a total membership of 109. She would like to know when the figure would be raised to ensure parity, so that women would comprise half the membership. Was the question already being discussed?

61. **Ms. Ameline** said that she wished to draw the delegation's attention to the Committee's forthcoming draft general recommendation No. 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems. She encouraged the Government to speed its work to achieve women's parity with men as a catalyst for sustainable development and peace and stability.

62. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she warmly welcomed the delegation's narrative concerning African women's traditional leadership role, which challenged the dominant narrative. It was important that children should understand that women's leadership was a part of West African tradition in general and not an idea that had been imported from elsewhere. She would therefore be interested to know if such models of women's leadership were deeply rooted in early education so as to ensure that children would come to regard them as natural rather than something new or strange.

63. **A representative of Benin** said that the two most prestigious positions in his country's diplomatic network, namely ambassador to France and ambassador to Nigeria, were held by women. In addition, half of the country's deputy heads of mission were women.

64. **A representative of Benin** said that the quotas of 24 per cent or 30 per cent of women in the various political spheres that had been mentioned were threshold quotas. Where it was possible, Benin would go further. It would depend on capacity-building and the availability of human and financial resources.

65. **Ms. Leinarte** said that the Government was to be commended for its amendments to the Nationality Code that enabled women to automatically transmit their nationality to their children and for its efforts to streamline and digitize civil registration, including for births. The level of birth registration continued to be low in rural areas, however, in part because a fee had to be paid if the application was made more than 10 days after the birth. She would like to know what steps were taken to encourage birth registration, including by facilitating access to free, universal and compulsory issuance of birth certificates. Such a measure would open the way to the acquisition of national identity cards and passports.

66. On efforts to combat statelessness, she welcomed the Government's proposal to grant three-year passports, with a route to citizenship, to stateless individuals from certain communities along the border with the Niger and Nigeria, following the resolution of the State's land disputes with those countries. She would appreciate information on the current status of that legislative proposal.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.