



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Twentieth session

Summary record of the 408th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 22 January 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. González

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

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

Initial report of Kyrgyzstan (CEDAW/C/KGZ/1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Ismailova (Kyrgyzstan) took a place at the Committee table.

2. **Ms. Ismailova** (Kyrgyzstan) said that the report of Kyrgyzstan had been prepared on the basis of information from the ministries and departments with responsibility for issues relating to the situation of women and the exercise of their rights and from public organizations concerned with human rights, including women's rights. Efforts to ensure wide public dissemination of the material in the report had been initiated as the report was being written. The special commission established to write the report had held a number of meetings and carried out consultations, and the draft report had been sent to all ministries and government departments, as well as non-governmental organizations, so that their recommendations could be taken into account in the final version.

3. While the values and outlook of the Kyrgyz people reflected the Republic's nomadic traditions, the people were also ready to embrace change and were receptive to the influence of East and West. After gaining its independence in August 1991, Kyrgyzstan had embarked upon the process of transition to a market economy, in which men and women were equally involved. That difficult process had been accompanied by rising poverty among women, high levels of maternal and child mortality, the increasing prevalence of physical and sexual violence against women, a decline in the number of women in Government, and violations of the right of women to acquire property and to obtain credit.

4. Her Government had taken a series of measures to enhance the status of women. It had established a group of experts to conduct a gender analysis of the national legislation. Kyrgyzstan had acceded to 22 international human rights treaties, including five conventions and agreements on women's rights. Compliance with those instruments at the national level was monitored by a national council, which made recommendations to the President regarding gender

policy and was involved in a broad range of initiatives aimed at ensuring women's exercise of their rights.

5. Implementation of the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action was proceeding under the "Ayalzat" programme. Her Government had established an interdepartmental working group, including representatives of ministries, departments and the regional governments, together with non-governmental organizations, with the participation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) country office, to coordinate the programme. Also, Regional Centres for Women's Initiatives had been set up by the State Committee for the Family, Women and Youth to implement the programme in Kyrgyzstan's six regions. Initiatives were to be launched in 11 main areas, which were described in paragraph 68 of the report. The programme was designed to build on achievements in the field of women's rights in recent years, including the elimination of overt discrimination on grounds of gender or ethnicity; the enactment of legislation enshrining women's basic rights and freedoms; and the attainment of a high level of education among women.

6. In October 1996, within the context of the programme, there had been a series of parliamentary hearings on the situation of women in Kyrgyzstan; and in 1997, with the assistance of UNDP, a meeting had been held with the participation of women deputies and leaders of non-governmental organizations to examine the gender issues relating to the drafting of Kyrgyzstan's new electoral legislation.

7. Kyrgyzstan's 97 non-governmental women's organizations were making an important contribution to the implementation of the Convention. Those groups were most active in the capital and in regional centres, although discrimination against women was more prevalent in Kyrgyzstan's remote mountain villages and particularly in the south, where the patriarchal family system accounted for women's low status. There were three main kinds of women's organizations: women's committees, which had subsisted from the Soviet period; self-help groups consisting of women from the same district or extended family, which were active mainly in rural areas; and organizations bringing together professional women, academics and businesswomen, which tended to be more innovative and radical in their approach to women's issues, analysing social and economic conditions and organizing seminars and conferences. While the

activities of women's groups were largely focused on the social, economic and humanitarian spheres, there was also a Women's Democratic Party, which sought to encourage women's participation in political and public life. While women in Central Asia were not traditionally politicized, a recent survey had revealed that the majority of Kyrgyz women regarded such participation favourably. The Party's candidates had stood for election to national and local government bodies.

8. Her Government listened attentively to the views of women's organizations. It was at their insistence that the elimination of violence against women had been made one of the priorities of the "Ayalzat" programme. Most women's organizations worked in close cooperation with the Government and some had been contracted to carry out specific projects on its behalf, which were funded either from the State budget or by international donors. Others were collaborating with UNDP in the implementation of a programme aimed at reducing poverty. In the future, women's organizations must focus on promoting self-reliance among women, which was the key to social development, and women's groups in urban areas must work to promote activism by women in rural areas, where the problem of discrimination was most acute.

9. Referring to the implementation of article 1 of the Convention, she said that the Constitution prohibited discrimination against women in the political, economic, social, cultural and civil spheres. The Criminal Code set forth penalties for infringement of the equality of citizens on grounds of sex, although no complaints of discrimination had as yet been brought by women before the courts. The penalties for violent acts of a sexual nature perpetrated against women were described in paragraph 75 of the report.

10. With respect to article 3, she said that measures taken by her Government to ensure the full development and advancement of women included the adoption of a programme for the eradication of poverty (1998-2005). Its main features were set out in paragraph 76 of the report. Also, 1998 had been proclaimed the Year of Rural Development and Eradication of Poverty.

11. She drew the Committee's attention to paragraphs 77 to 81, 83 to 87, 90 to 96, 102, 103, 105, 107, 108, 111 to 113, 115 to 119, 121, 122, 125 to 127, 131, 132 and 134 to 136 of the report. In relation to paragraphs

111 and 112, she provided the additional information that grants for 50 female students at higher educational institutions had been established and that six medical and sociological visits to remote villages had been organized.

12. Abortion was legal in the Kyrgyz Republic. Since 1993, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) had provided contraceptives, and their increased use had resulted in an overall reduction in the number of abortions nationwide. Unfortunately, up to 20 per cent of maternal mortality had been attributed to complications from abortion, and the Ministry of Health had established a special commission to look into the matter. The network of family planning institutions within the health care system was described in paragraph 136 of the report.

13. The country had reached a critical juncture in respect of substance abuse, with a significant rise in alcoholism and drug addiction, including among women, over the past five years. In view of the threat posed by alcoholism and drug abuse to the family and society, the system for treating such abuse must be improved and new programmes introduced. The lack of resources and poor quality of equipment was making it difficult to provide such care, however.

14. Turning to article 13, she described the family benefits and social assistance available to women on an equal basis with men as discussed in paragraph 139 of the report. Women also participated in cultural activities and sports on an equal basis with men.

15. With regard to the situation of rural women (article 14), the agrarian nature of Kyrgyzstan's economy throughout its history had led to extensive involvement of women in agriculture. A substantial portion of women were involved in the cultivation, harvesting and processing of tobacco, and many had suffered adverse effects from exposure to it. Women herders also were subjected to extremely severe climatic conditions. The selling of collective farms and closing of social and cultural establishments in rural areas had led to high unemployment among women.

16. With regard to article 15, she said that under the Constitution of the Republic, all persons were equal before the law and the courts. Women had the same property rights as men, and the relevant provisions of the Marriage and Family Code were described in paragraph 147 of the report. The Marriage and Family Code also provided for equality of women and men in

all matters relating to marriage, divorce, property and family.

17. The implementation of national programmes and projects for the advancement of women could be achieved through the realization of the national "Ayalzat" programme, effective government policies for the development and expansion of non-governmental organizations and the further development of normative and legislative framework for women's equality. Full implementation of the Convention would require a number of strategic measures, namely, continued implementation and full funding of the national programme, expanded activities of the inter-agency working group, continued expert review of legislation, the mainstreaming of a gender perspective and the yearly publication of national statistical information disaggregated by gender. At the executive level, the State Committee for the Family, Women and Youth must be strengthened and a social partnership between the Government and non-governmental organizations must be developed.

18. A number of activities were planned for 1999. In the education sector, science and research centres would be established in order to train students in gender studies. Further support would be provided to women's non-governmental organizations for the creation of gender studies centres. At the higher levels of policy and management, reports would be made to the Parliament and the President on programmes for the advancement of women. Finally, in the area of combating violence against women, stiffer legal sanctions would be imposed, programmes to educate youth about tolerance and to enhance the dignity of women and girls would be promoted, and support would be provided to victims of violence.

19. **The Chairperson** invited members of the Committee to make general observations on the report of Kyrgyzstan.

20. **Ms. Açar** said that Kyrgyzstan should be commended for acceding to all the major human rights conventions so soon after independence and during a period of economic difficulty and social and political change. She was also pleased to note that international treaties were being incorporated into domestic legislation, providing a legal basis for their implementation.

21. More than laws were needed in order to implement the Convention, however, and traditions and

attitudes that posed barriers to compliance with it must be eliminated. Kyrgyzstan clearly recognized that need and was attempting to approach the problem through education. She wondered whether any of the programmes designed to modify traditional attitudes had been carried out and if so, what groups had been targeted. Patriarchal attitudes tended to seep into a society during times of economic crisis and social change, often in the guise of protecting the culture. The Government must be alert to the larger ramifications of women leaving the workforce and public life and returning to their traditional place at home. In her country, Turkey, the nomadic roots which her people shared with the Kyrgyz were emphasized as a basis for equality between the sexes. Programmes highlighting that aspect of traditional culture could be helpful in defining the national identity.

22. **Ms. Abaka** said that Kyrgyzstan was to be commended for adopting the Convention without reservation. She enquired whether the bodies mentioned in paragraph 4 of the report as being responsible for its drafting were also responsible for national implementation of the Convention. She was glad to see that human rights instruments were used in developing new domestic legislation and suggested that the CEDAW general recommendations could be helpful as guidelines. Finally, she would like to receive further information on national implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

23. **Ms. Goonesekere** welcomed the ratification by Kyrgyzstan of a wide range of international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Since the transition to a market economy had led to a breakdown in social and public services which had adversely affected women, the report should have provided more information on the specific problems facing women following that transition and on any new policies envisaged by the Government to address the situation. She wondered, for instance, what happened to property rights in cases of divorce, how the concept of de facto polygamy was affecting women's capacity to support children and whether there was a feminization of poverty. She also wished to know whether non-governmental organizations had been consulted in preparing the report and whether there was a dialogue with women in the media. Information on the legal background of women's involvement in the media would be most welcome.

24. **Ms. Ferrer** expressed concern at the fact that the deterioration in economic and social conditions had affected families and women the most. Approximately 40 per cent of families lived below the poverty line, women constituted 58 per cent of the total unemployed, 67 per cent of those unemployed women had children to care for and the situation of rural women was a source of particular concern.

25. Referring to the programme to combat poverty, she asked whether it had actually been implemented, what provisions had been made in it to provide social support for women in the poorest sectors and how many women would benefit from it. She also wished to know what results had been achieved even though only a year had elapsed since the programme's inception, and whether some of the training and retraining centres for unemployed women mentioned in the report had been established. It would be interesting to know what openings had been created in public enterprises, in what sectors, and under what conditions. She asked if there were other projects similar to the one being implemented by the Government together with UNDP to integrate women in development. In addition, information should be provided on the categories and groups of population which were entitled to free health care.

26. Social pressure was clearly building up to try to force women to leave the workplace and return home. Additional information on the origins of that process and any action envisaged by the Government to address it would be most welcome.

27. **Ms. Ouedraogo** welcomed the objectivity of the report and the fact that civil society and non-governmental organizations had been involved in its preparation, and she encouraged the Government to maintain its policy of transparency and to disseminate the recommendations and final comments of the Committee. She also welcomed the fact that thematic committees had been established for monitoring the implementation of the Convention. That formed an excellent basis for future actions in the area of the promotion of the advancement of women's rights and equality between men and women.

28. However, she had very serious concerns about the rise in poverty, the high rate of alcoholism and the increase in drug addiction, because widespread poverty in a country usually meant that women were the hardest hit. Indeed, factors such as increasing domestic

violence and even incidents of gang rape and a steadily rising divorce rate posed a serious threat to Kyrgyzstan's social equilibrium. It was therefore urgent for the Government to take Draconian measures, such as increasing tariffs on alcohol, and to conduct research to determine the root causes of the situation before elaborating a new approach.

29. **Ms. Myakayaka-Manzini** said that the report had not provided a clear picture of the situation of women in 1991, when the country had gained its independence. That made it difficult to make a proper assessment of the current situation, which seemed to have deteriorated rather than improved. Noting that independent sources of information indicated that there had been very little involvement of non-governmental organizations in the preparation of the report, she asked whether they had in fact been involved and whether their views had actually been reflected, stressing that the participation of non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies in the preparation of the report was critical to improving the status of women.

30. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** expressed concern about the lack of detailed information concerning the actual implementation of the Government's plans and its heavy reliance on non-governmental organizations and international donors. She wondered whether the Government intended to develop specific national plans and legislation to implement the Convention.

31. With respect to the Human Rights Commission, she wished to know how many women were on it and whether the gender perspective was reflected in reporting to all treaty bodies. She also wanted to know whether the Government ensured that the International Committee of the Red Cross reflected an overall gender perspective in its textbook on humanitarian law and included a chapter on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. She was concerned that questions relating to women, the family and youth were handled by only one body, a fact which might give the impression that the role of women consisted solely of taking care of the family and raising children, thus perpetuating gender stereotypes. In that regard, she wondered whether the Government had plans to establish a Commission solely for women's issues.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.