



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
6 March 2025

Original: English

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Ninetieth session

Summary record of the 2130th meeting*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 11 February 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Haidar

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* No summary records were issued for the 2128th and 2129th meetings.

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

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

Combined fifth to ninth periodic reports of Belize (CEDAW/C/BLZ/5-9; CEDAW/C/BLZ/Q/5-9; CEDAW/C/BLZ/RQ/5-9)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Belize joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Belize**, introducing her country's fifth to ninth periodic reports (CEDAW/C/BLZ/5-9), said that all sections of her Government shared the same determination to tackle the multifaceted challenges faced by women and girls. The inclusive process that had been adopted to prepare the report illustrated the Government's commitment to multisectoral collaboration, which was crucial to ensure the progressive implementation of the Convention.
3. During the review period, her country had made significant progress in advancing legal protections and rights for women and girls, including through the enactment of the National Women's Commission Act, the Cybercrime Act and the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act. Since the submission of the report, the enactment of the Disabilities Act had strengthened the rights of women and girls with disabilities and the Marriage (Amendment) Act had raised the legal age of marriage to 18. New bills addressing shortfalls in access to justice, enhancing protection for victims of gender-based violence, strengthening workplace protections against harassment and expanding women's economic rights in relation to property ownership had also recently been submitted to the parliament. Belize had acceded to the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, thereby reaffirming its commitment to upholding the rights of older women.
4. Significant reforms had also been introduced to enhance institutional capacity, improve data-driven decision-making and strengthen collaboration between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. At the international level, Belize had actively participated in the activities of the Commission for Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women of the Economic and Social Council. Domestically, it had adopted the National Gender Policy for the period 2024–2030 and had restructured the National Women's Commission. The Women and Family Support Department had been renamed the Family Support and Gender Affairs Department and had been equipped with its own economic empowerment unit, while the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous People's Affairs had adopted a road map to address gender disparities in leadership, education and economic participation. A coordinated multisectoral mechanism had been put in place to address cases of gender-based violence and strengthen victim support services. Data collection and analysis on gender-based violence had been strengthened through the establishment of the Integrated Data Collection and Reporting System and the publication of an annual report on violence against women and girls by the Belize Crime Observatory.
5. Women's representation in the National Assembly and in senior positions in the judiciary had continued to increase. Training programmes implemented under the Engaging Men and Boys initiative fostered community dialogue and challenged harmful gender norms, while supporting women's participation in leadership roles. To promote women's economic empowerment more generally, over a thousand women had received training in business strategy, digital skills and entrepreneurship under State programmes during the reporting period. Most recently, the Decent Work Country Programme had been put in place in 2024 to provide women with vocational training, raise their awareness of labour rights and improve their access to financial resources.
6. Belize had made significant strides in improving the national education and healthcare systems with a view to promoting gender equality. Girls were encouraged to study science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics in order to strengthen women's representation in high-income careers, and comprehensive sexuality education had been incorporated into the national curriculum. As from January 2025, the coverage of the National Health Insurance system had been extended to all areas of the country. Over 21,000 households had also

benefited from the social protection measures implemented in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which had disproportionately affected women and girls.

7. Belize continued to face challenges in its efforts to implement the Convention, notably including a lack of resources and the effects of climate change. The Government nonetheless remained steadfast in its commitment to realize gender equality and, to that end, had developed a road map built around the following pillars: expanding access to gender-responsive social services; enhancing data systems; strengthening partnerships with civil society, development partners and international organizations; breaking down cultural and structural barriers; developing the leadership skills of women and girls; and strengthening the legislative framework.

Articles 1–6

8. **Ms. Reddock** said that Belize was affected by the widespread violence linked to drug trafficking that plagued the wider region of Central America and the Caribbean. She would welcome further information on the ways in which that violence had had an impact on women's rights and gender equality in the State party and on any measures that the Government had taken to mitigate that impact.

9. She wished to know whether the State party would consider amending or withdrawing its reservations to articles 8 and 9 of the Convention. While she commended the State party on legislative developments since the previous review, she was concerned at the lack of implementation of many important laws. It would also be useful to know what mechanisms had been put in place to ensure that all enacted legislation was fully implemented in practice. She would welcome updated information on any steps taken to collect and publish comprehensive national data disaggregated by sex. She also wished to know to what extent the Legal Aid Act had been implemented, what forms of legal aid were currently available to women and whether a legal aid commission had been established.

10. She would like to know whether there were any plans to incorporate the Convention into domestic law in order to ensure the applicability of all its provisions. In view of the Committee's general recommendation No. 39 (2022) on the rights of Indigenous women and girls, which set out the different forms of intersectional discrimination faced by that group, it would be helpful to hear whether the Government intended to incorporate Indigenous rights into the Constitution or a specific piece of legislation. Lastly, she wondered whether the Gender Equality Protocol for Judicial Officers and efforts to strengthen the magistrates' courts and the Family Court had had a significant impact on access to justice for women and girls in rural and urban communities.

11. **A representative of Belize** said that Belize maintained its reservation to articles 8 and 9 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. Belize had a strong domestic legal system and institutions to handle complaints and provide redress where required.

12. **A representative of Belize** said that the Legal Aid Act had two key components: its implementation by the Legal Aid Office and an educational aspect. The National Women's Commission provided ongoing education to women and girls, while the Office of the Special Envoy, local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) held legal clinics to support vulnerable populations. Handbooks such as the *Women's Rights Handbook* and the *Women's Handbook on Domestic Violence* were available in multiple languages, including English, Spanish and Mayan languages. The National Gender Policy included a monitoring and evaluation component under its priority area for gender-based violence, and the Family Support and Gender Affairs Department was working on a strategic plan with a monitoring and evaluation framework.

13. **A representative of Belize** said that the National Women's Commission and the National Commission for Families and Children were responsible for monitoring the implementation of the legislative reforms adopted since the previous dialogue. A joint monitoring and evaluation committee worked with the Statistical Institute of Belize to improve data collection and disaggregation.

14. **Ms. Reddock** said that she wished to know whether other institutions and ministries had responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the legislative reforms.

15. **A representative of Belize** said that, while the National Women's Commission led efforts to promote the legislative reforms and coordinate relevant actors, the multisectoral National Gender-Based Violence Committee, together with representatives of the judiciary and the private sector, also held responsibility for monitoring implementation of the law. A gender-based violence referral pathway connected survivors to essential support services, such as those providing economic, healthcare, psychosocial, protection or legal assistance.

16. **A representative of Belize** said that the coordinated efforts of key ministries, the courts, the police and health and social services sectors were essential to implementing the legislative reforms. The National Women's Commission played a critical role in reviewing data to ensure a cyclical approach that continually strengthened the country's legislation, policies and programmes on gender-based violence.

17. **Ms. Toledo Vásquez** said that she would like to know what percentage of the budget for the national and subnational institutions that made up the national and district gender-based violence committees was covered by the regular State budget, what percentage depended on external funding and what progress was being made to reduce that dependence. She wondered how the State party ensured an intersectional approach in addressing all key areas of the National Gender Policy 2024–2030, particularly regarding the participation of Indigenous women and other marginalized groups in the drafting and evaluation of policies affecting them. It would be useful to know the status of the legislative proposal to transform the Office of the Ombudsman into a national human rights institution, including a time frame for its adoption. She would be interested to hear about any anticipated obstacles to the proposal's adoption, how those obstacles would be overcome and how the sustainability of the national human rights institution would be ensured.

18. **Ms. Mikko** said that she would like to know whether the State party had plans to impose a quota to increase women's political participation, introduce a gender quota to guarantee women's representation at the management level in State-owned enterprises such as Belize Electricity Limited, Belize Telemedia Limited or Belize Water Services Limited, and adopt temporary special measures to increase access to education for rural and Indigenous women and girls.

19. **A representative of Belize** said that 60 per cent of the regular budget of the National Women's Commission was provided by the Government while 40 per cent came from external financing through international and regional partner organizations.

20. **A representative of Belize** said that a road map for transforming the Office of the Ombudsman into a national human rights institution had been approved, and its implementation was in progress. A three-year 450,000 Belize dollar project would be launched in 2025 to advance its implementation by facilitating stakeholder engagement and consensus building. A multisectoral national human rights institution committee had been established to guide the legislative reforms, foster inclusive participation and ensure alignment with international human rights standards. The committee included representatives from independent oversight bodies, civil society organizations, academia and international partners, in addition to relevant ministries and statutory bodies, including the Belize Bureau of Standards, the Integrity Commission and the Bar Association. The Government was committed to ensuring adequate resources, long-term sustainability and the independence of the national human rights institution.

21. **A representative of Belize** said that, while the representation of women at higher levels of Government and in politics remained a challenge in her country, she was confident that the joint advocacy work and aligned strategies of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, the Caribbean Women in Leadership and the National Women's Commission would drive progress in that area.

22. **A representative of Belize** said that the Government aimed to improve Indigenous persons' access to education by extending educational social assistance to the southern region of the country, where the majority of Indigenous communities lived. Furthermore, the education sector strategy addressed the need to provide a wide range of methods through which they could obtain an education.

23. **Ms. Mikko** said that legally-binding quotas were a necessary complement to strategies and action plans aimed at increasing the number of women in decision-making positions. She wondered whether there were plans to introduce a gender quota in decision-making systems, including in State-owned enterprises.

24. **Ms. Reddock** said that she would like to know whether the National Women's Commission was one of the statutory bodies involved in the process of establishing a national human rights institution, and to what extent women had requested support from the Ombudsman.

25. **A representative of Belize** said that both the National Women's Commission and the National Commission for Families and Children were involved in the process of establishing a national human rights institution. Further information would be provided at a later stage regarding gender quotas for State-owned enterprises and the number of requests for support from the Office of the Ombudsman.

26. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she would like to know how the State party planned to adopt comprehensive measures to tackle patriarchal gender norms and challenge harmful cultural practices, encompassing all key stakeholders and sectors. She wondered what measures would be taken to guarantee access to specialized support services for female survivors of gender-based violence, including women from rural and migrant communities, women with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. She would welcome information on the current number of crisis shelters, as well as any plans to increase that number and enhance their financial support. She wished to know whether mobile clinics were still in operation and, if so, how many there were, especially in rural and Indigenous communities.

27. Further details on initiatives to control and eliminate the proliferation of weapons, to prevent firearms and ammunition from being diverted to criminal networks and armed gangs, and to evaluate the results of such measures would be appreciated. She wondered how gender equality and gender-based violence policies contributed to combating the culture of violence and impunity, which was fuelled by the feeling of superiority associated with the possession of weapons. Lastly, she would be grateful if the State party could provide a timeline for the explicit inclusion of femicide as an offence in the Criminal Code and for the collection of disaggregated data on the various types of gender-based violence, including data on victims and perpetrators, investigations, prosecutions, convictions, compensation of victims and types of services used.

28. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that she would like to know what steps would be taken to improve judicial efficiency in prosecuting cases of trafficking, ensure appropriate sentencing in proportion to the severity of the offence and tackle official complicity in trafficking. She would be grateful if the State party could provide information on the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking for the period 2024–2028, including a timeline for its implementation. She wondered what measures were in place to protect migrant and asylum-seeking victims of trafficking from being penalized for offences committed as a direct result of their exploitation, and whether the State party would allocate adequate financial and human resources to shelters for victims of trafficking.

29. The Committee would welcome further information on the new labour policy, measures in place to improve oversight of labour recruitment and efforts to enhance victim identification and screening. It would also be useful to know what steps had been taken to strengthen the enforcement of monitoring obligations and legislation on prostitution; address the trafficking and exploitation of Mayan girls, particularly in relation to the *fichera* phenomenon, a practice whereby men paid a higher price to drink in the company of adolescent girls or young women working in bars; and prevent the sexual exploitation of children in tourist regions and tackle the involvement of foreign perpetrators. Lastly, she wished to know what measures would be implemented to create comprehensive support and exit programmes for women exploited in the sex industry, address the underground nature of sex trafficking and enhance reporting mechanisms.

30. **A representative of Belize** said that the National Women's Commission and relevant agencies were working to address gender stereotyping under a communication strategy for achieving social and behavioural change. The National Commission for Families and

Children was implementing the road map to end child marriage and early unions in Belize as part of a wider child protection agenda.

31. **A representative of Belize** said that the Engaging Men and Boys programme had been run since 2020 with the participation of the National Women's Commission, the Office of the Special Envoy for Women and Children and other organizations with a view to encouraging men and boys to act as advocates for gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence. Men who provided training under that programme, who had been drawn from all districts of the country and diverse backgrounds, had worked with members of the uniformed services especially and with boys in the school system. Approximately 1,000 men and boys throughout the country, including Indigenous persons, had received training so far. An increasing number of men and boys wished to take part in the programme.

32. **A representative of Belize** said that the Spotlight Initiative had resulted in the development of a package of essential services for women who had been subjected to violence that included improved justice, policing, legal and psychosocial support services. Shelter services were provided primarily by civil society organizations operating in Belize. There were three main shelters in Belize and additional shelters for victims of trafficking in persons and migrant workers. Jamaica and Belize had conducted a South-South exchange of best practices on gender-based violence, which had deepened his Government's understanding of setting up safe spaces and providing short-term, long-term and emergency shelter care for survivors. During and since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government had collaborated with a civil society organization to operate around 16 mobile clinics that provided essential legal, counselling and sexual and reproductive health services to women and services to children, which had since been integrated into the standard range of services provided. The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Council continued to work to increase the number of cases of trafficking in persons reported and improve its conviction rate, including by working with the Belize Tourism Board to combat trafficking in persons for sex tourism. While the Council had yet to make use of targeted programmes for vulnerable groups, it continued to support education campaigns and capacity-building measures aimed at ensuring that relevant authorities visiting rural and remote areas were able to identify and support victims of that crime. The Council was also working to strengthen its partnership with the Director of Public Prosecutions and the police with the aim of improving judicial efficiency.

33. **Ms. Reddock** said that she wished to know whether members of uniformed services who provided training to boys and young men under the Engaging Men and Boys programme had themselves received gender-sensitive training on masculinities and femininities prior to doing so.

34. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that it would be useful to learn how the State party intended to help victims of trafficking in persons who came forward to report the crime, but were left especially vulnerable when the perpetrators were not prosecuted or properly sanctioned, or were released on bail.

35. **Ms. Toledo Vásquez** said that she would welcome information on any plans the State party might have to make femicide a stand-alone offence and on the measures being implemented by the State party to prevent that crime, in line with general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19. Was the State party considering undertaking an in-depth, multisectoral analysis of murders of women committed on the grounds of gender with a view to identifying and addressing relevant shortcomings and better respond to those crimes?

36. **A representative of Belize** said that, although few members of the uniformed services were involved in providing training under the Engaging Men and Boys programme, many were participating in the training provided. Trainers were provided with occasional refresher training with a focus on any areas that required additional attention. The programme covered both masculinity and femininity with regard to gender issues and gender-based violence.

37. There had been 17 femicides in 2019, 11 in 2020, 11 in 2021, 9 in 2022, 10 in 2023 and 10 in 2024. While the Government possessed data that was disaggregated by categories such as area and age group, it needed to improve its analysis of that data with a view to producing more comprehensive reports on femicide.

Articles 7–9

38. **A representative of Belize** said that trainee police officers received training on gender and gender-based violence from the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs.

39. **Ms. Schläppi** said that she wondered whether, in view of the upcoming elections, the State party had taken or planned to take any concrete measures to increase the number of women members of parliament, including women from Indigenous communities. She would be interested to know how the State party intended to ensure that political parties would put forward more women candidates. She would welcome information on the plans and achievements of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus thus far, and wished to know how it was funded. It would be helpful to know what specific measures had been planned to promote women's equitable participation in leadership and political governance, in line with the National Gender Policy for the period 2024–2030. She wondered who was responsible for achieving that goal, who would monitor its implementation, what resources had been earmarked for that purpose and how the Government intended to strengthen women's advocacy groups under the Policy. It would be useful to learn what steps were being taken to empower Indigenous women to participate in politics. She would appreciate more information on the representation of women, including women from Indigenous groups, in the country's diplomatic service.

40. **Mr. Safarov** said that he would be interested know what steps the State party had taken in recent years to incorporate the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness into its national legislation, and why it had still not directly incorporated definitions from those Conventions.

41. He wondered what steps, including in the form of advocacy programmes and e-government systems, the State party was taking to combine the birth certification and birth registration processes, which were currently distinct. Given the large number of Kekchi women and girls in Belize who did not have birth certificates and were consequently unable to claim Belizean nationality or social benefits, or participate fully in the economy, he wished to know what steps the State party planned to take to improve birth registration throughout the country and to ensure that women and girls had access to legal status, justice, education and services. How were women and girls affected by such laws such as the Belizean Nationality (Amendment) Act of 2023, especially in cases of cohabiting parents who were not legally married?

42. **A representative of Belize** said that the national strategy that the Women's Parliamentary Caucus was implementing in collaboration with other governmental and non-governmental organizations included measures intended to promote women's leadership in politics through capacity-building training and mentorship initiatives; advocacy for gender quotas, financial support for women candidates, accountability, transparency in political financing and combating corruption, which limited women's access to politics; public awareness campaigns about the links between discrimination, corruption and women's exclusion from politics; and regional cooperation with other organizations. The Caucus had held a forum on the Convention in November 2024 in which high-level members of the Government and the private sector had participated together with relevant NGOs. It obtained funding from the Government and international organizations.

43. Implementation of the National Gender Policy for the period 2024–2030 was the responsibility of all the organizations in the country that provided services related to gender and gender-based violence, including the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and relevant NGOs. The National Women's Commission was responsible for monitoring the implementation of that policy using a monitoring and evaluation framework.

44. The Government had continued to engage with Indigenous communities, particularly through the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, whose Minister had hosted two forums for the empowerment of Indigenous women in 2021 and 2022 that had been attended by 100 women and girls. Those who had attended had received relevant information and indicated that they required additional support in areas

including access to and affordability of healthcare services, education and measures to combat violence.

45. **A representative of Belize** said that, although the candidates for the upcoming elections had already been selected, part of the work of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus was to organize a strategy for ensuring that, in subsequent elections, the increase in women's participation in politics that had recently been observed at the local level would take place at the national level.

46. The Spotlight Initiative had a focus on women's advocacy groups and their integration into a larger network. An NGO representative to the Senate, or NGO senator, would be appointed to ensure that the needs of the advocacy groups could be addressed at a higher level.

47. The Ministry of Immigration was currently conducting a comprehensive legislative review of discriminatory laws and improving support provided to migrants and other vulnerable groups.

48. Efforts had been made during and since the COVID-19 pandemic to improve the birth registration process with the support of the Vital Statistics Unit and in partnership with key international partners. The operation of mobile registration clinics in rural and hard to reach areas in the south of the country and migrant communities especially had resulted in the registration of 7,791 births and 1,588 deaths in 2023. Translation support had been provided to Indigenous, migrant and refugee communities to ensure that they had access to those services. Efforts had been made to implement bedside registration processes with the aim of encouraging more mothers to give birth at hospitals.

49. **A representative of Belize** said that 30 rural communities had benefited from registration campaigns that had been conducted to reach Indigenous communities, asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants. In one initiative, a total of 201 children had been registered.

50. **Ms. Mikko** said that she would be interested to know what powers the Women's Parliamentary Caucasus had and whether, for example, it could insist that political parties adopt a quota system for women's representation. It would be useful to learn what percentage of candidates in the forthcoming elections were women. She wondered whether parity as recommended in general recommendation No. 40 (2024) was being debated either in the Women's Parliamentary Caucasus or in the media.

51. **Ms. Schläppi** said that it would be helpful to know whether the State party intended to support a role for advocacy groups as representatives of the interests of specific Indigenous and other groups, for example in dialogues with the Committee.

52. **A representative of Belize** said that steps were being taken to overhaul the Vital Statistics Unit and the civil registry. The Women's Parliamentary Caucus was intended to be a formal committee within the House of Representatives that would advocate for women's rights. The Government intended to support civil society organizations as promoters of women's rights and service providers. In so doing, it would identify the relevant organizations and the ways in which they could contribute to the services provided by the Government.

53. **Ms. Hacker** said that she wished to know why no representatives of NGOs were participating in the meeting.

54. **A representative of Belize** said that the Government always made efforts to promote the participation of civil society organizations and to consult them about the drafting of reports for the treaty bodies.

55. **The Chair** said that the Committee depended on the information provided by civil society organizations and its interactions with them. It was essential that such organizations should be able to cooperate with the Committee and contribute to the review process.

Articles 10–14

56. **Ms. Akia** said that she wished to know why the State party had raised the age of compulsory education to 16 years rather than to 18 years. She wondered what steps were being taken to implement water, sanitation and hygiene projects in schools. It would be interesting to hear about any measures being taken to increase school enrolment rates and reduce the number of early pregnancies. She would appreciate information on the measures being taken to protect the mental and physical well-being of pregnant girls and adolescent mothers in and out of school and to support their re-enrolment in school. Information on the National School Feeding Programme and the benefits that it afforded to vulnerable learners would also be welcome. What measures were being taken to establish compulsory nutrition standards in schools and to provide learners with nutritious school meals?

57. She would welcome data disaggregated by age, sex, ethnicity and disability on the number of women and girls enrolled in vocational training courses and in science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses. Further information on any measures being taken to eliminate stereotypes and structural barriers from all levels of the education system, including teacher training courses and the curricula for science, technology, engineering and mathematics, would be appreciated.

58. It would be helpful to see data disaggregated by age, sex and disability on the number of women and girls with special needs who were receiving an education and the number of teachers trained to work with such women and girls. She wondered how the State party ensured the provision of quality education to women and girls with special needs, women and girls living in poverty, and refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking women. How did the State party ensure the physical and mental safety of girls and women and how did it protect them against violence, bullying and exposure to pornographic material in schools and online forums?

59. **A representative of Belize** said that the Ministry of Education was committed to upholding the right to education for all students, including those who became pregnant. There was no national policy on the education of pregnant students and adolescent mothers but schools were free to develop their own policies.

60. International Girls in ICT Day was celebrated every April under the slogan “Lead Like a Girl”. On that day, 100 high school girls from around the country gathered together to participate in events that introduced them to technology through competitions. The Government also invited stakeholders to take a pledge to promote the participation of girls in information and communications technology.

61. **A representative of Belize** said that the adoption of the Disabilities Act would lead to improvements in the accessibility of school facilities for children with disabilities. The Ministry of Agriculture was making efforts to ensure food security for children in all schools around the country. An education strategy had been launched in 2024 to increase school attendance and completion rates and to broaden access to education, especially in rural areas, where multi-year group classes were sometimes established. The Ministry of Youth implemented a zero-tolerance approach to bullying in schools. Under the Cybercrime Act, measures were taken to combat bullying in online forums, including social media.

62. **Ms. Akia** said that it was still not clear what measures were being taken to combat early marriage and teenage pregnancy.

63. **A representative of Belize** said that the Government was implementing a strategy to end child marriage and early unions. Under the strategy, data on such marriages and unions were gathered to enhance understanding of the problem. The Marriage Act had been amended to raise the minimum age for marriage from 16 to 18 years, in line with international standards. Efforts were being made to change social attitudes towards early unions. Schools developed policies on the elimination of child marriages and early unions.

64. **Ms. Reddock** said that she wished to know whether any measures were being taken to build capacities in the areas of social science, psychology, social psychology, sociology and gender studies.

65. **A representative of Belize** said that a master's course in social work had been launched by one of the universities in Belize and efforts had been made to strengthen existing courses in social work and the social sciences.

66. **Ms. Akizuki** said that she would welcome further information on the Decent Work Country Programme for the period 2024–2029. In particular, she wished to know what strategies were in place to increase women's labour force participation and to eliminate horizontal and vertical occupational segregation in the public and private sectors, particularly in traditionally male-dominated industries. She wondered what measures had been taken to challenge the view that unpaid domestic and care work was primarily the responsibility of women and to promote the equal sharing of household and parental duties between men and women.

67. She would welcome information on the current status of the equal opportunities bill and any steps that would be taken towards its adoption. Details of any measures being implemented to strengthen the national insurance system and extend its scope to include self-employed women would also be welcome. She would like to know whether the Government had any plans to conduct research into women's employment in the formal and informal sectors in order to identify the barriers that they faced in trying to obtain decent work. Would the State party consider ratifying the International Labour Organization (ILO) Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187), and the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)?

68. She wondered what was being done to expedite the reduction of the gender pay gap and how the State party monitored compliance with the Equal Pay Act. She would welcome information on the current status of the sexual harassment bill and any mechanisms that would be established to implement the Act. The State party might consider ratifying the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

69. **A representative of Belize** said that there was indeed a significant disparity in the employment rates for men and women. One of the main barriers to women's participation in the workforce was that they were disproportionately burdened with childcare duties. The Government was working with the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank to determine how to address that issue and increase women's labour force participation. It was also partnering with the business processing sector to establish childcare centres. Appropriate safeguarding measures were applied to any new childcare mechanisms that were put in place. An economic empowerment unit established within the Ministry of Human Development provided support to vulnerable women.

70. Currently, only 3 per cent of self-employed persons were covered by social security. In view of that situation, measures were being taken to broaden the coverage of the social security system and to bring more workers into the formal sector. The Government was considering ways of expanding an existing cash transfer programme and enhancing access to free and subsidized day care, bank loans and business support services. Measures were being taken to combat discrimination in the workplace in all sectors of the economy and to implement the Decent Work Programme.

71. **A representative of Belize** said that steps were being taken to increase access to education and training for women, particularly rural and Indigenous women. Formal employment opportunities were being expanded and financial incentives were offered to women entrepreneurs and small business owners to reduce their dependency on low-paid informal work.

72. **A representative of Belize** said that the measures being taken to establish environmental safeguards in protected areas also provided economic opportunities for communities living in buffer zones near those areas, including Indigenous communities.

73. **Ms. Akizuki** said that it was still not clear whether any mechanisms for monitoring the gender pay gap had been established.

74. **Ms. Hacker** said that she wished to know what measures would be taken to increase the availability of up-to-date statistics on health matters, including the number and rate of unplanned pregnancies and abortions among different social and economic groups. She would welcome accurate statistics on teenage pregnancies and births and information on any

measures being taken to reduce the teenage pregnancy rate. Would the Government consider amending the law to grant women and girls the right to use safe and accessible abortion services?

75. She wondered whether contraceptives were subsidized by the State, and if so, which methods were subsidized and to what extent. She would like to know whether free contraceptives were made available for girls and whether any plans were in place to enhance and expand science-based sex education programmes, including in faith-based schools. Information on the resources allocated to developing and implementing such programmes would also be appreciated. She would be grateful for details of any awareness-raising campaigns, educational programmes or training initiatives for enhancing reproductive health literacy, including in relation to early and unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortions, the misuse of contraception and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

76. She would welcome up-to-date statistics on the total number of people living with HIV/AIDS, the annual infection rate and the groups most affected by the illness, disaggregated by gender. She wondered whether radiotherapy was made available for the treatment of breast cancer and, if not, when it would become available.

77. Up-to-date statistics on child and maternal mortality rates would be appreciated. She wondered what was being done to reduce the maternal mortality rate and to improve the overall state of health of mothers and newborn babies. It would be interesting to learn about the main challenges that the State party faced in ensuring equitable access to healthcare services for rural and Indigenous women, especially older women, and any steps that it might take to overcome those challenges.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.