



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

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Ninetieth session

### Summary record of the 2134th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 13 February 2025, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Haidar

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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)**

*Ninth periodic report of Sri Lanka (CEDAW/C/LKA/9; CEDAW/C/LKA/Q/9; CEDAW/C/LKA/RQ/9)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Sri Lanka joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Sri Lanka**, introducing her country's ninth periodic report (CEDAW/C/LKA/9), said that the current dialogue was the country's first engagement with an international human rights treaty body since the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2024 and the formation of the new Government. As a result of those elections, the share of parliamentary seats held by women had risen from 4.8 per cent to 9.7 per cent, and Harini Amarasuriya had become the third female Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. Women had been appointed to a number of other senior parliamentary roles, and the Government had pledged to make the structural and social changes necessary to increase women's political participation by 50 per cent. Those changes would build on the progress made in recent years, during which far-reaching efforts had been made to ensure that women's perspectives were integrated into executive, legislative, judicial and administrative decision-making processes, with the result that women had been appointed to a number of senior roles in the judiciary, the diplomatic service and the police.
3. The Government believed that economic justice must be a cornerstone for achieving gender equality. Various policies and measures intended to promote women's economic empowerment had been included in its general policy framework, including plans to reduce the burden of unpaid care work on women. The Government was actively working to strengthen women's representation in top leadership positions in economic sectors where they played a pivotal role, such as the clothing industry, and measures were being taken to provide training to ensure that female migrant workers leaving Sri Lanka were able to take up better employment opportunities. Plans had also been made to establish a new development bank aimed at providing new entrepreneurs, especially women and young people in rural and economically disadvantaged areas, with loans without the requirement for collateral. The Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka was committed to developing a strong network of women's organizations to implement projects and programmes for the social and economic development of women at all levels.
4. Women and girls stood to benefit from the Government's plans to increase investment in essential public services such as education, health and transport. Various measures were being implemented to ease the financial burden on families, particularly those struggling to afford the basic necessities for their children's schooling. For example, free sanitary towels were provided for all girls aged 13 and over in school. The Government had also made plans to incorporate existing welfare programmes into a new universal social protection system with a special focus on vulnerable groups, including women. Strengthening governance and institutional frameworks was a priority in order to ensure that members of those vulnerable groups received the assistance that they needed in an efficient and transparent manner.
5. During the reporting period, several key policy and legislative reforms had been put in place to strengthen implementation of the Convention. They included enactment of the Anti-Corruption Act, the Land Development (Amendment) Act and the Women Empowerment Act. The latter, which explicitly referred to the Convention in both its aims and its definition of women's rights to equality and non-discrimination, provided for the creation of an independent National Commission on Women, the appointment of an ombudsman to ensure women's rights and the establishment of a National Fund for Women. More recently, the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus had also proposed to introduce a minimum legal age of marriage in the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act.
6. Following a review of its first action plan on sexual and gender-based violence, 70 per cent of which had been deemed to have been implemented, the Government had adopted its second National Action Plan to Address Sexual and Gender-Based Violence for the period 2024–2020. The Government was committed to raising awareness of sexual and gender-based violence among key state actors, particularly law enforcement personnel, and

establishing mechanisms to expedite the resolution of cases involving sexual offences against women. The Women Parliamentarians' Caucus, which had organized activities in support of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign in 2024, had proposed the creation of a mechanism to handle sexual harassment complaints in Parliament. Dedicated units headed by female officers had been established at all police stations to respond to complaints, and the Government had doubled the funds initially allocated in the 2025 budget for the establishment and expansion of shelter homes for women victims. One of the aims of the Online Safety Act, adopted in 2024, had been to address technology-facilitated violence against women in accordance with the standards set out in the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime.

7. The first national action plan for women and peace and security, covering the period 2023–2027, had been developed through an inclusive process of broad consultations with women at all levels of society. The Government was committed to advancing the women and peace and security agenda through a survivor-centred approach, including reparation for women survivors of conflict and their families. Furthermore, the President had reaffirmed his commitment to returning civilian lands that had been appropriated by the military.

#### *Articles 1–6*

8. **Ms. González Ferrer** said that the Committee would welcome updated information on the ongoing process of constitutional reform, including the status of all proposals concerning women's and girls' rights. The Committee had learned that the National Women's Policy of Sri Lanka, which had been drafted in 2019, had finally been submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers. It would be useful to know what plans had been put in place for its adoption and implementation. She would also like to know what measures had been planned under the Government's current legislative programme to review and amend potentially discriminatory laws.

9. The Committee would welcome further information on the nature and effectiveness of the activities undertaken by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka since 2020, particularly in relation to the protection of women's rights. She would like to know whether the Commission's mechanism for reporting human rights violations guaranteed confidentiality and protection for victims and whether it was truly accessible to all citizens. It would be helpful to know whether there were plans to renew the National Human Rights Action Plan, which had covered the period 2017–2021.

10. She wished to know what measures were taken to ensure that, in practice, women had access to the courts to file claims and that court proceedings were not unduly delayed. It would also be helpful to know what steps the Government took to ensure that the judiciary and law enforcement authorities handled cases in a gender-sensitive manner. In that regard, she would like to know whether specialized and systematic training on gender-specific issues and mitigating factors had been put in place for lawyers and members of the judiciary. She would welcome statistical data, disaggregated by offence, age, nationality and ethnicity, on women victims of gender-based violence who had been punished for actions taken against their aggressors. It would also be useful to know whether the Convention had been invoked in court in the State party.

11. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the principles of equality and non-discrimination, including on the grounds of gender, were enshrined in the Sri Lankan Constitution. The Constitution also established that the Supreme Court had sole and exclusive jurisdiction to hear and determine any question relating to the infringement or imminent infringement by executive or administrative action of any fundamental right. The Convention and the Committee's jurisprudence had been invoked by the Supreme Court in several of its rulings, above all in relation to cases concerning sexual and gender-based violence. In its judgment of February 2024 relating to a case brought against Sri Lankan Airlines, the Supreme Court had held that, taking into account the Committee's general recommendations, equality in employment could be seriously impaired when women were subject to gender-specific violence in the workplace.

12. With the promulgation of the Women Empowerment Act in 2024, women's rights had been defined in Sri Lankan legislation for the first time. The concluding observations issued

by the Committee following its previous review of Sri Lanka in 2017 had been taken into account during the drafting of the Act. The references to the Convention in the Act gave the Convention greater visibility in the country. It included provisions protecting women from all forms of discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation, ensuring the economic empowerment of women with disabilities and providing for the implementation of legislative measures and other procedures aimed at ensuring equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value.

13. The Act also provided for the creation of the National Commission on Women. As well as being responsible for formulating national policy on the advancement and empowerment of women and developing a framework to facilitate the implementation thereof, the Committee would also have the power to receive complaints, investigate those complaints, initiate legal action on behalf of a complainant and intervene in existing legal proceedings. It would be able to make recommendations on employment issues affecting both the public and the private sectors. The Act also provided for the establishment of the National Fund for Women. The Fund would strengthen the Commission's economic independence and provide it with the financial resources that it required to guarantee meaningful access to justice for women. Regional offices would be set up all over the country, ensuring the Commission's accessibility to Sri Lankan women.

14. Various other mechanisms and laws had been put in place to facilitate women's access to justice. Although the Legal Aid Commission generally provided free legal aid services only to persons with an income of less than 40,000 rupees, that criterion no longer applied to family law cases. The Supreme Court exercised epistolary jurisdiction, which allowed it to take up cases based on letters or petitions from persons to address grievances related to violations of fundamental rights. Complaints could also be submitted either in person or online to the Human Rights Commission. It should be noted that complainants did not need to be represented by a lawyer in order to have their complaints investigated by the Human Rights Commission or the National Commission on Women. Both those bodies also had the power to look into possible rights violations of their own volition – in the absence of a formal complaint from one of the parties – and to cooperate directly with the Supreme Court on such matters. In accordance with the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, any person could make a complaint concerning such offences directly, and without legal representation, to a magistrate's court or a police officer.

15. Under the Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act of 2023, the number of protection officers assigned to a police station was determined, among other factors, on the basis of the number of women residing in the administrative district to which it belonged. The Act identified a number of crimes for which victims would be provided with financial assistance, counselling, rehabilitation services, medical treatment and psychosocial support.

16. Although the sentence of death was still a penalty under domestic law, a de facto moratorium on the death penalty had been in place since 1976. No presidential orders to approve executions had been issued over that period, and the Supreme Court had issued an interim order to prevent death sentences from being carried out. The Penal Code had also been amended to increase the minimum age of persons sentenced to death from 16 to 18 years.

17. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the coordination committee set up by the Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment to oversee implementation of the Committee's recommendations had participated both in drafting her Government's replies to the list of issues and in preparing the current dialogue. All the coordination committee's work was carried out in consultation with representatives of civil society and non-governmental organizations.

18. The national action plan for women and peace and security had been developed with the support of the Government of Japan and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). It had been prepared through an inclusive process based on the premise that, in order to accurately reflect realities on the ground, consultations must be extended beyond the Government to include non-governmental organizations and the general public. Consultations had therefore been held with stakeholders

from all 25 administrative districts, as well as with victims, survivors of conflict, military widows, female heads of household and children and women with disabilities.

19. The National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment for the period 2023–2032 envisioned a just society where the equity of women and men and gender minorities was upheld and where all people enjoyed fundamental rights and benefited from democracy and development in both the public and private spheres. The overarching focus of the policy was to combat discrimination and ensure substantive equality, in accordance with the Convention, while also addressing key areas of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

20. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that, in 2022, provisions authorizing the marriage of a minor with the consent of his or her parents or guardians had been removed from the Kandyan Marriage and Divorce Act. The amendment had brought Kandyan law into line with general law, which established the minimum age of marriage as being the legal age of majority. In general, her country's efforts to protect women and advance women's rights in recent years had been focused on legislative measures rather than constitutional reform.

21. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that women accounted for 90 per cent of the personnel employed by the Legal Aid Commission, which had offices all over the country. Since 2018, the Commission had provided services to sex workers and persons with different sexual orientations without discrimination.

#### *Articles 7–9*

22. **Ms. González Ferrer** said that she would like to know whether the Government planned to review the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act with a view to amending or repealing all discriminatory provisions relating to marriage, divorce and inheritance. It would also be useful to know whether there were any plans to review the Penal Code, since concerns remained regarding its treatment of serious matters such as rape and abortion. In general, she wished to know what specific steps were being taken to ensure that, in practice, the judicial authorities could incorporate a gender perspective into their work and into their efforts to guarantee access to justice for women. Any statistical data that the delegation might be able to provide to illustrate the results of those efforts would be of particular interest.

23. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that extensive consultations had been carried out on possible amendments to the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act, which had been under discussion for a number of years. The ultimate aim of those consultations was to ensure that the sections of the population who were governed by that law were comfortable with the proposed changes and did not feel that the amendments were being forced on them. In that regard, the amendments needed to strike the right balance between women's rights, children's rights and the cultural rights of the Muslim community.

24. Ongoing discussions were also being held concerning possible amendments to the legislation on abortion. Abortion was currently defined as a criminal offence under Penal Code, except if performed to save the life of the mother. However, practical non-legislative steps had been taken to promote abortion rights. For example, the Ministry of Health had issued a guideline in 2015 authorizing women who suffered complications as the result of an abortion to seek medical care at State hospitals.

25. **The Chair** said that she encouraged the State party to follow the good legislative practices that had been adopted by other countries in the region, which had succeeded in advancing women's rights in relation to a variety of sensitive issues, in spite of the tensions that existed between women's rights, religious rights and cultural rights.

26. **Ms. Rana** said that she would like to know whether the Government was considering carrying out a midterm impact assessment of the national action plan for women and peace and security. It would be useful to know whether the Government would consider revising the plan to ensure women's equal participation and full involvement in transitional justice, truth and reconciliation mechanisms. She would also welcome further information on the survivor-centred approach that had been adopted and the measures that would be taken to implement it.

27. The Government had put forward a bill on the establishment of the Commission for Truth, Unity and Reconciliation in January 2024. She would be interested to know what measures the Commission would take to ensure that the recommendations made by truth-seeking mechanisms were fully addressed and implemented. It would also be useful to know what steps would be taken to ensure accountability for historical conflict-related sexual violence and other gender-based crimes and to guarantee access to justice and reparations for survivors. She wished to know what measures the Government would take to uphold the right to association and protest of all citizens of Sri Lanka, including women family members of disappeared persons, and to guarantee their right to mourn publicly without harassment.

28. The Committee would like to know what progress had been made towards appointing senior gender focal points in all line ministries and what operational procedures had been put in place to ensure the effectiveness of their activities. She wished to know what mechanisms had been established to ensure that the policies formulated by the Women's Bureau were implemented by all government departments and what steps were taken to ensure the independence and effectiveness of the National Commission on Women. She would welcome updated information on the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting, including any steps taken to sustain it and incorporate it into national and subnational planning processes.

29. It would be interesting to know what measures had been taken to protect women human rights defenders and organizations, particular in areas affected by conflict, and what steps the Government planned to take to remove the legal and bureaucratic restrictions, including funding constraints and strict registration requirements, that limited the activities of civil society.

30. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that the Committee welcomed article 12 (4) of the Constitution, which provided for special provisions for the advancement of women. The Committee would like to know whether temporary special measures had been implemented for women under that article for purposes other than increasing their political representation and strengthening their economic empowerment. For example, it would be interesting to learn whether any quotas had been introduced for the appointment of women to decision-making roles in the public sector. She would also welcome information on any additional legislative instruments, budgetary allocations, targeted recruitment schemes, numerical goals or quota systems that had been introduced since the State party's report had been submitted in 2022.

31. She wished to know whether any substantive plans had been made to introduce quota systems for elections at all levels and what steps the Government planned to take to bring existing quotas into line with the Committee's standard of absolute parity, as established in its general recommendation No. 40 on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems.

32. She understood that the Cabinet of Ministers had issued a memorandum calling on selected ministries and all provincial councils to dedicate 25 per cent of their spending on rural development to the development and economic advancement of women. How successful had that initiative been? Had any similar forms of affirmative action been taken in other sectors? Had measures such as the provision of financial support or training in entrepreneurship and running microenterprises been established specifically for women?

33. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the Government acknowledged and appreciated the contribution made by the vibrant and committed civil society sector to the advancement of rights in Sri Lanka. To facilitate the involvement of civil society organizations and interest groups in the legislative process, the window of time during which bills could be challenged by civil society prior to their enactment had been extended from 7 days to 14 days.

34. A number of rights that applied to the work of human rights defenders were set out in the Constitution, including freedom of speech and expression and freedom of assembly. In December 2023, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka had reaffirmed those rights in its general guidelines and recommendations on the protection of human rights defenders. Human rights defenders were entitled to submit complaints concerning any infringement or imminent infringement of those rights to the Human Rights Commission or the Supreme Court, and claims against the police could be submitted to the National Police Commission.

35. Article 12 (4) of the Constitution had made it possible to enact various laws to advance the rights of women, notably including the Women Empowerment Act. That article also gave the Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment the constitutional authority to carry out much of its work, including the distribution of free sanitary towels to schoolchildren.

36. Women enjoyed access to employment opportunities on an equal basis with men. There were currently two female Supreme Court judges, and the Chief Justice of Sri Lanka was also a woman. None of them had been appointed on account of their gender. No quotas had been put in place for recruitment in the public sector, but over 50 per cent of the prosecutors working under the Attorney General were women. The absence of quotas did not therefore prevent women from rising to senior positions and decision-making roles on merit.

37. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the appointment of a woman from a minority community as Minister of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs reflected her country's commitment to diversity and inclusion. In addition, five female secretaries had been appointed to cabinet ministries. To encourage women's participation in decision-making and political life, awareness-raising activities had been organized, alongside capacity-building sessions and diploma programmes to prepare women for political roles, which had reached over 900 participants. A further 250 women had attended programmes focused on enhancing communication skills for aspiring female leaders. Training on decision-making and networking had also been made available to female representatives of local government bodies.

38. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the amended Provincial Council Election Act, enacted in 2017, mandated a 50 per cent female quota in electoral nominations. In 2021, the Women Parliamentarians Caucus had proposed to the Select Committee of Parliament on electoral reforms that women should make up 50 per cent of the national list and 30 per cent of seats in Parliament, provincial councils and local government bodies.

39. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the National Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security addressed six thematic areas. The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs planned to complete a review of the Plan of Action, with the assistance of UN-Women, to ensure its effective implementation. The Steering Committee, comprising 13 ministry officials and 7 representatives of civil society organizations, was responsible for reviewing all reports submitted by the coordination and assessment committees, adopting the necessary decisions and making policy recommendations to high-level decision makers in the Government.

40. The National Women's Bureau would be upgraded to a department under which it could have its own budget, facilitating its mission to organize activities to empower women, especially in rural areas. The National Committee on Women was responsible for policymaking and legal reforms and proposals. It was likely that the Committee would be replaced by the National Commission on Women once the Commission was operational.

41. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the Government had committed to examining the bill on the Commission for Truth, Unity and Reconciliation to ensure that it met the needs of victims and survivors and conformed to international rules and standards. The Office on Missing Persons had received more than 650 new complaints and over 6,000 complaints had been reviewed by the panel of inquiry. By the end of 2024, the Office on Missing Persons had traced 18 missing persons and referred over 2,500 families for certificates of absence and 428 families for certificates of death. The Office on Missing Persons ensured that the results of investigations were available to the public, particularly victims' families, while maintaining security and privacy.

42. The Office for Reparations had formulated the National Reparations Policy and Guidelines and provided relief and assistance through eight key interventions. Close to 4,000 applicants had received family revival payments between 2022 and 2024, and over 11,000 individuals had received monetary relief in 2024. The Office for Reparations aimed to empower female heads of households and vulnerable groups through livelihood support programmes, which included skills development, employment facilitation and psychosocial support.

43. Established as an independent institution in 2024, the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation implemented its mandate in areas such as social cohesion, conflict transformation, language training and community engagement with Government officials and community and religious leaders. Over 2,000 civil society organizations operated at the national, provincial, district and local government levels. The National Secretariat for Non-Governmental Organizations had simplified administrative procedures and registration requirements for civil society organizations, while ensuring that regulatory mechanisms were in place to mitigate risks related to terrorism, financing and money-laundering.

44. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that, as the use of temporary special measures and a merit-based system were not mutually exclusive, she wondered whether the State party would consider implementing additional temporary special measures and whether the proposal to increase electoral quotas was actively being considered.

45. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the Government was committed to achieving gender parity and recognized that women's representation and leadership in decision-making were crucial for inclusive and sustainable development. It aimed to achieve its target of at least 50 per cent representation by women in political institutions through education and the enactment of relevant laws and policies.

46. **The Chair** said that she wished to emphasize the point that temporary special measures were a tool for accelerating equality between men and women that made it possible to address historical gender-based discrimination.

47. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she would welcome updated information on the actions taken by the State party to incorporate comprehensive gender equality education into school curricula, including a textbook review and training for teachers on supporting children to challenge gender-based stereotypes, and overturn systematic, discriminatory social norms by including all relevant actors, such as men, boys and community and religious leaders. She also wondered when the planned reforms to the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act would be adopted to ban child marriage.

48. She would be grateful if the State party could provide further details on the timeline for the adoption of the proposed amendments to the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act and on the measures taken to raise awareness of existing laws and complaint mechanisms and remove the legal and cultural barriers that prevented female victims of violence from seeking justice. It would also be useful to have an assessment of the effectiveness of the Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act.

49. She would like to know the timeline for explicitly recognizing marital rape as a criminal offence, as well as for amending the Penal Code to ensure that the offence of statutory rape applied to all girls under 18 years of age without exception. Would the State party consider expanding the definition of the offence to cover all genders and include all forms of sexual penetration?

50. **Ms. Mikko** said that it would be interesting to learn what measures had been taken to ensure the safety and protection of victims and witnesses who reported information on trafficking; eliminate the requirement for victims of human trafficking to obtain a magistrate's order to receive access to support; proactively screen potential cases of trafficking for trafficking indicators; and ensure that potential victims of trafficking were not criminalized for offences committed as a direct result of their exploitation.

51. She wondered whether the State party planned to expand police training on trafficking modalities, whether officers deployed in Sri Lankan consulates received training on labour rights and gender issues; and whether the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force was staffed by civilian or military personnel and whether it included women.

52. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that, subject to the approval of the Cabinet of Ministers, the amendments to the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act should come into force in 2025.

53. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act provided for victims or witnesses to give evidence from a remote location, using contemporaneous audiovisual means. It also provided for the establishment

of a National Authority for the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses and set out the duties and responsibilities of the State, judicial officers and public officers.

54. Under the Act, a victim of crime was entitled to request reasonable financial assistance, counselling, rehabilitation, medical treatment and psychosocial assistance. Female victims of crime could request to be attended by staff of the same sex. The National Authority was mandated to carry out a threat assessment in relation to the victim or witness and take appropriate measures to provide protection in cases of offences such as trafficking, rape, incest and grave sexual abuse. The Inspector General of Police was required to assign police officers designated as Victims and Witnesses Protection Officers to each police station, including female and specially trained staff, to overcome social barriers to reporting such crimes.

55. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that domestic violence was the most common type of violence against women reported to the Sri Lanka Police. In 2023, it had been found that only 0.31 per cent of victims had been issued with protection orders annually owing to the tendency for victims and their families to categorize domestic violence under family disputes and a reluctance to file cases against relatives and partners.

56. The Sri Lanka Police had implemented a special programme to address the low number of protection orders, which included conducting awareness-raising activities and training sessions among police officers and the general public and in schools. The percentage of victims issued with protection orders had risen to 3.17 per cent over the previous two years.

57. Women could report domestic violence at any time by email or through a toll-free hotline operated by female officers. Furthermore, separate units staffed by specially trained female officers had been established at police stations to provide a safe space for women to report without fear of revictimization.

58. The National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force coordinated efforts to prevent and address the trafficking of women and children, particularly in the domestic sphere. It also conducted awareness-raising programmes among schoolchildren, vulnerable communities and police officers to promote the reporting of trafficking cases. A special unit under the Criminal Investigation Department investigated organized crimes, including trafficking and human smuggling cases. Daily reports of crimes against women and children were monitored by the Women and Children Bureau.

59. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that, under the Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution Act, any person involved in the trafficking of women and children for prostitution was liable to be punished with imprisonment for a term of 3 to 15 years. The Act also provided for compensation, counselling and job training for victims.

60. Under the Penal Code, any person convicted of rape should be punished with a sentence of rigorous imprisonment for a term of not less than 7 years and not more than 20 years. If the victim was under 16 years of age, the sentence was increased to a term of 15 to 20 years. With regard to marital rape, a man who had sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent, where the woman was his wife but was legally separated from him, was considered to have committed rape under article 363A of the Penal Code.

61. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that online and in-person training sessions on trafficking had been organized for diplomatic and consular staff based in Sri Lankan missions abroad.

62. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force had been established under the Ministry of Defence, but its members were from a wide range of Government sectors and it was not a militarized entity. The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs provided shelter and support services for female victims of trafficking. Women in an emergency situation did not need a magistrate's order to receive support.

63. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she would be grateful if the State party could indicate the current status of the amendment to the Penal Code to ensure that the offence of statutory rape applied to all girls under 18 years of age without exception, as well as the timeline for the

criminalization of marital rape. She wondered whether the State party planned to ensure specific services for victims of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and whether training on that issue would be provided to key stakeholders, such as the police, the judiciary and social workers.

64. **Ms. González Ferrer** said that she would like to know what steps were being taken to ensure that women who were at a higher risk of trafficking and gender-based violence, such as those living in rural areas or in poverty, were aware of their legal rights and how to exercise them, and whether those efforts had been effective.

65. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that paralegal training had been organized for Women Development Officers and counsellors involved in combating gender-based violence. A comprehensive handbook on laws relating to women and children, available in Tamil, Sinhala and English, had been distributed among field officers, police officers, divisional and district-level officers and ministries. In connection with International Women's Day, awareness-raising programmes had been conducted through the media to inform women about relevant laws and the resources and safety networks available to them.

66. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that statutory rape currently referred to rape committed against anyone under 16 years of age. Marital rape was criminalized only in cases where the partners were married but were legally separated.

67. The Online Safety Act had been introduced to ensure the online safety of all Sri Lankans, including vulnerable groups such as women and girls. Amendments had been proposed following consultation with local institutions, civil society representatives and international stakeholders, however progress on those amendments had been temporarily halted with the dissolution of Parliament.

68. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Response Team served as the national centre for cybersecurity and was responsible for safeguarding the nation's cyberspace. The Cybercrime Investigation Unit, operating under the Criminal Investigation Department, handled all cyber-related complaints, including those related to technology-facilitated sexual and gender-based violence. The Unit had established a legal portal and collaborated with social media platforms to facilitate content removal, as well as with the Computer Emergency Response Team and the Government Analyst's Department, which provided digital forensic services. The Women and Children Bureau operated a cybercrime investigation unit dedicated to cases related to online child exploitation.

69. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she would like to know how the State party intended to achieve parity with regard to women's participation in public life, political life, diplomacy and decision-making systems. She would welcome further details on legislation that specifically addressed the targeting of women and minority groups through online hate speech and harmful content, and on any formal investigations or prosecutions undertaken against perpetrators. It would also be interesting to learn whether the State party had plans to strengthen the regulation of private companies, including social media companies, to prevent the harassment of women seeking to enter politics. She wondered whether the State party would consider expanding the mandate of the Election Commission to monitor and act on gender-based attacks in the political sphere.

70. She would be grateful for further information on any plans to amend voter registration to allow individuals to vote based on their current residence and on the possibility of alternative verification methods for individuals without family documentation who wished to register to vote. Lastly, she wondered what measures were being implemented to increase the number of women in the diplomatic services, including as ambassadors.

71. **Ms. Toledo Vásquez** said that she would like to know what measures have been taken to ensure that women were able to maintain and pass on their nationality to their children on equal terms with men, and to facilitate access to birth certificates and identity documentation for vulnerable groups of women, including Tamil women and girls from rural areas and those who had been displaced by armed conflict, exiled and refugee women who had returned to Sri Lanka, female tea plantation workers, women in prostitution or sex work and transgender women. Lastly, she wondered what action had been taken to address the legacy of historical

statelessness, particularly as experienced by many Tamils of Indian origin and plantation workers.

72. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the new Government aimed to improve women's representation in public and political life by making structural changes that would create a level playing field for all.

73. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that women played a significant role in the diplomatic representation of Sri Lanka at all levels. Recruitment to the Sri Lanka Foreign Service was conducted through an open competitive examination, which could be completed in Sinhala, Tamil or English. Women currently represented 63.8 per cent of the total number of officers in the Sri Lanka Foreign Service. Due to the seniority process for appointing diplomats as ambassadors, it was expected that women would make up the majority of those leading diplomatic missions within the next few years.

74. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the aim of the Online Safety Act was to protect persons from harm caused by the communication of prohibited statements through online accounts or locations. A person who committed an offence against a Sri Lankan citizen, whether in Sri Lanka or abroad, could be held liable. The Act also introduced measures to detect, prevent and protect against the misuse of online account and bots for committing offences in Sri Lanka.

75. The Act provided for the establishment of an independent Online Safety Commission, which had the power to issue directives to persons, Internet service providers and intermediaries who had published or communicated prohibited statements, or whose services had been used to do so. The Act could also require those parties to offer those adversely affected by such statements an opportunity to respond. Additionally, the Commission was empowered to advise the Government on all matters relating to online safety in Sri Lanka.

76. A significant aspect of the Act, particularly for women, was the recognition of private information, which was defined as personal data, including any images, audio or video, that a person could reasonably expect to remain private. The Act also defined harassment broadly as any act or behaviour that threatened, alarmed or distressed a person, violated their dignity or created an intimidating, degrading, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment, which ensured that a wide range of harmful behaviours were covered. The Commission had the authority to take swift action to block access to online content in Sri Lanka and remove prohibited statements, thereby providing a quick resolution when online violations occurred.

77. In cases where a person was harmed by a prohibited statement and the identity of the person who made the statement was necessary for legal proceedings, the Act allowed the Commission to apply to a magistrate for a conditional order. The order could compel the Internet intermediary to disclose the identity of the person responsible for the prohibited statement.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*