



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Eighty-sixth session**

Summary record of the 2011th meeting*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 17 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Peláez Narváez

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* No summary records were issued for the 2009th and 2010th meetings.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

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

Ninth periodic report of France ([CEDAW/C/FRA/9](#); [CEDAW/C/FRA/Q/9](#); [CEDAW/C/FRA/RQ/9](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of France joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Couillard** (France), introducing her country's ninth periodic report ([CEDAW/C/FRA/9](#)), said that profound changes had taken place since the consideration of the previous periodic report: the President had declared gender equality his grand cause for two successive terms, and that commitment had been translated into action in all areas of government. Her delegation was comprised of high-level representatives from a range of departments and ministries that reflected the diversity of the country and efforts to strengthen women's rights across France and its overseas departments and territories. The Government sought to defend the French model, grounded in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789, while seeking progress on gender equality in response to a global decline in respect for human rights. The Convention, and its Optional Protocol, were disseminated to the public and guided action in all areas. The Ministry for Gender Equality published an annual compilation of comparative statistics of the position of women and men in France and around the world, in French and English. At the international level, the Government systematically called for observance of the Convention. The periodic report and the responses to the Committee's list of issues had been drafted through interministerial cooperation and consultation with the national human rights institution.
3. With regard to the situation of women during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the priorities had been protection and adaptation. Alongside the emergency plan to protect victims of domestic violence, €1 million had been provided to support organizations working in the field and in shelters. Measures had been taken to ensure continued access to justice, despite periods of lockdown. Victims of domestic violence had been able to access support through telephone and videoconference consultations, and listening, warning and support systems had been established and strengthened.
4. Efforts to tackle gender-based and sexual violence had started before the pandemic. They had included a response to the #MeToo movement – which had led to women talking openly about their experiences of sexual harassment and sexual violence – and to a number of highly publicized cases of femicide in 2019. Significant developments had included the provision of helpline 3919, which was available around the clock; training on domestic and sexual violence for officers of the police and gendarmerie, including all new graduates of the police and gendarmerie academies; and an accelerated process for protection orders, which had led to a 90 per cent increase in their issuance between 2017 and 2021.
5. The Government's policy on human trafficking was aimed at the protection of victims, in particular minors. Women who had been sexually exploited were the main victims of human trafficking identified by the security services. The Government took a firm abolitionist stance regarding trafficking in persons. The Act of 13 April 2016 on strengthening action to combat the prostitution system and support prostitutes had abolished the crime of passive solicitation and penalized clients by prohibiting the purchase of sexual services. Since 2016, there had been a 48 per cent increase in convictions for trafficking in persons or exploitation, and in 2022 more than 1,000 clients and procurers had been convicted. The Ministry for Gender Equality intended to develop a plan of action to strengthen the Act of 2016 in response to recommendations issued by the National Consultative Commission for Human Rights. In addition, a plan was under development to tackle all forms of trafficking in persons; it would include specific actions for each form of trafficking, and the third plan to combat trafficking in persons would be introduced in parallel with the first national strategy to combat the system of prostitution.
6. In the workplace, the focus was on ensuring equal pay, a place for women in leadership positions and improvement of the gender balance. In 2019, an equality index had been established to encourage companies to make progress in ensuring equal pay. Businesses with more than 50 employees were obliged to publish their results annually, and sanctions

could be imposed for low scores or the failure to declare a score or to implement an improvement plan. Quotas for women in management positions had begun to show results. The social partners were increasingly signing agreements on equal pay, and workers were starting to take gender equality into consideration in their career choices. The Act of 19 July 2023 had increased to 50 per cent the quota for each sex for first-time appointments at senior levels of the civil service. The problem of gender balance at the workplace was being tackled through the 2023–2027 gender equality plan, the adjustment of salaries in female-dominated industries such as teaching, nursing and midwifery and action to improve the provision of childcare.

7. The national sexual health strategy for 2017–2030 was comprehensive in approach and contained ambitious targets, while the national strategy to combat endometriosis was intended to set up regional networks for patient care, improve training for health workers and increase funding for research. A number of measures had already been implemented under the women's health pillar of the interministerial gender equality plan, including the free provision of condoms at pharmacies and improved care for miscarriage. The right to abortion continued to be strengthened, and in 2022 the law had been amended to permit abortion up to the fourteenth week of pregnancy and to allow midwives to perform surgical abortions in hospital.

8. Sexual and reproductive health and rights were a central element of the feminist diplomacy pursued in foreign affairs, and the second international strategy on sexual and reproductive health and rights had been launched on 8 March 2023. France sought to send a clear message to women around the world that they needed to defend their right to abortion at all times and in all places. Women must be involved in tackling global issues, and progressive countries needed to remain alert to challenges to women's rights. The success of the Generation Equality Forum, which had raised \$40 billion for equality measures around the world, should encourage continued efforts. The French Development Agency's support fund for feminist organizations had pledged funds of €250 million over five years in support of those efforts.

9. Attention was also paid to the rights of the LGBT+ community in France and around the world. In 2021, a law on bioethics had been adopted, which permitted same-sex female couples and single women to access fertility treatment. In 2022, so-called conversion therapy that targeted sexual orientation or gender identity had been prohibited in law. An ambassador for the rights of LGBT+ persons had been appointed. In July 2023, a comprehensive plan for equality and to combat hatred and discrimination against the LGBTI+ community had been adopted. It had been drafted in harmony with the plan to combat racism, antisemitism and anti-LGBT+ hatred.

10. In certain parts of the world, women's lives were under threat due to armed conflict and acts of war, terror or suppression. The third national action plan for the women and peace and security agenda, which covered the period 2012–2025, had therefore been published on the occasion of the Generation Equality Forum. The action plan was based on four pillars: awareness-raising of the challenges of gender-based violence, women's rights and gender equality; protection against gender-based and sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings; women's participation in the prevention, conduct and settlement of conflicts; and promotion of the women and peace and security agenda. The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, torture and terror and the presence of armed conflict and aggression demonstrated the need for the women and peace and security agenda and the innovations that it supported. The Government of France played a key role in mobilizing the international community to support that agenda. On 8 March 2023, it had called for the United Nations to appoint an emissary to accelerate progress on the participation of women in political life and decision-making. It had also called for financing to support the implementation of the agenda, in particular for the Global Survivors Fund. At the regional level, the Government regularly called on States to adhere to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention).

11. Women and the digital world and women and the environment were areas that had not received adequate attention, although an initiative to protect women's freedom of expression online had been launched on 8 March 2023. Studies showed that women were particularly affected by the consequences of climate disruption and global warming, yet they were largely

absent from decision-making in the field of environmental policy. The Government was studying with interest the recommendations made by the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council in a March 2023 report on gender inequalities, the climate crisis and the ecological transition. She stood ready to defend the French model and the comprehensive, ambitious and progressive nature of the French vision of women's rights.

12. **Ms. Lafourcade** (National Consultative Commission for Human Rights, France) said that the commitment shown by France to an ambitious feminist diplomacy was welcome. She expressed appreciation for the adoption of the second international strategy on sexual and reproductive health and rights and encouraged the Government to implement the country's third national action plan for the women and peace and security agenda and to integrate a gender perspective in the humanitarian strategy that was under development.

13. At the national level, there was a significant gap between the view of the Government on the action taken and the reality on the ground observed by civil society organizations. Despite the declaration of women's rights as a grand cause, the replies to the Committee's list of issues had been sent one year late. Violence against women and femicide were not declining, and notwithstanding greater attention to domestic violence, rates of conviction remained low. The introduction of specialized legal units gave rise to hope but also to questions about the resources allocated to them. More effective protection for victims would require greater clarity in criminal and civil legal decisions. In addition, some forms of violence were increasing at pace, such as cyberviolence.

14. Despite a significant increase in complaints of sexual violence prompted by the #MeToo movement, a decline in conviction rates had contributed to a culture of impunity, while the restrictive legal definition of rape had limited the opportunities for conviction and had made legal proceedings difficult for complainants. The treatment of rape as a distinct crime should be amended to take into account the notion of consent, in keeping with the Istanbul Convention. French law did not adequately punish the sexual violence experienced by almost all women with disabilities, while migrant women suffered almost systematic sexual violence on their journeys to France, and after their arrival were economically vulnerable.

15. Sexism appeared to be on the rise among younger generations, and mandatory sexuality education was not always provided. The prevention of gender-based and sexual violence should become a priority for the authorities. Despite the 23 categories of discrimination prohibited by French law, no conviction for discrimination had been recorded in 2020. Discrimination and sexist behaviour remained widespread in the workplace. The workplace equality index had little real impact on the gender pay gap; indeed, the gap was growing. The effect of precarious working conditions was more severe for women than for men, and one-third of single mothers lived in poverty. Despite different activity rates for women and men, employment policies were often blind to the difficulties specific to women. Women with disabilities were particularly economically vulnerable and struggled to secure enjoyment of their rights. While progress on access to fertility treatment and the incorporation in the Constitution of the right to abortion were commendable, the closure of specialist clinics would affect equality of access to those rights.

16. France was a transit and destination country for female victims of trafficking in persons; the Government's commitment to an ambitious policy on human trafficking would be closely followed by the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights, in its capacity as the national human rights institution.

17. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that she wished to know whether the delegated Minister for Gender Equality, Diversity and Equal Opportunities had her own ministry, adequate staff and a dedicated budget. The Committee was concerned about the situation of victims of the State party's nuclear testing in French Polynesia. It would be useful to hear how the State party was responding to the alarming levels of sexism reported by the High Council for Gender Equality and what measures were in place to enforce due diligence, transparency, gender-sensitive impact assessments and periodic revision in the use of algorithmic profiling and biometric and surveillance systems in order to avoid sexism and gender stereotyping. She would like to know whether the State party planned to ratify the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), the Occupational Health

Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161), the Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175), the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) and the Safe and Healthy Working Environment (Consequential Amendments) Convention, 2023 (No. 191), of the International Labour Organization. If it did not plan to ratify those instruments, the Committee would like to know what obstacles prevented it from doing so.

18. It would be of interest to the Committee to learn the outcome of any evaluations of activities to raise awareness of the Convention that had been undertaken since 2017 and whether other more modern methods of raising awareness might be adopted. She would like to know whether the courts commonly referred to the Convention in their judgments and to hear examples of capacity-building programmes that included information on the Convention for law enforcement officers, lawyers, judges, social workers and asylum service officials. With regard to access to justice, information would be welcome on any group action taken under Act No. 2016-1547 on modernization of the justice system and the number of effective prosecutions for discrimination, as well as data on or anecdotal evidence of compensation granted to victims of discrimination. She wished to know whether the State party would consider introducing specific legislation on femicide. If not, how would it ensure that all cases of femicide were identified and that victims had adequate access to justice? Lastly, it would be useful to the Committee to hear whether the number of victims of domestic violence who lodged complaints had increased since 2020, and how support for victims who lodged complaints had been improved.

19. **Ms. Haidar** said that the Committee wished to know how the State party addressed the increases in gender inequality and domestic violence that had occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, how it ensured that the pandemic did not affect women negatively in the long-term and how it planned to improve the recognition and status of health professionals, most of whom were women, in the wake of the pandemic. She would like to know whether the State party gathered disaggregated data on the pandemic's differential impact on women in order to prevent such impacts in similar circumstances in the future.

20. **Ms. Couillard** (France) said that as delegated Minister for Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination under the authority of the Prime Minister, rather than being attached to a specific ministry, she and her staff were able to work flexibly with all ministries to promote gender equality. Persons harmed by nuclear testing in Algeria and French Polynesia were entitled to comprehensive compensation. Their claims were considered by an independent committee and were granted, provided they had received exposure doses over a certain threshold and were suffering from related illnesses. The majority of claimants were men, since women had been underrepresented among the military officials and civilian workers involved in nuclear testing, although the number of claims submitted by women was rising.

21. **A representative of France** said that around 120,000 documents relating to nuclear testing had been declassified.

22. **A representative of France** said that consideration was being given to the ratification of several International Labour Organization conventions, which would require amendments to national legislation.

23. **Ms. Couillard** (France) said that the courts were regularly reminded of the need for a solid criminal policy to address discrimination.

24. **A representative of France** said that the Ministry of Justice combated all forms of discrimination, including against women, by employing specialized judicial officials and working with actors at the local level, such as the operational committees for combating racism, antisemitism and hatred against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, and local branches of the Defender of Rights. There was a lack of data on the number of convictions for gender-based discrimination because the Ministry of Justice did not distinguish crimes against women from those committed against men. Judges specializing in anti-discrimination law provided a solid, systematic response to all cases of discrimination, which constituted an aggravating factor in other crimes. Around 600 persons had been convicted of the crime of making sexist comments between 2019 and 2022.

25. **Ms. Couillard** (France) said that, although national legislation provided a rather weak response to discrimination against women, the principle of equality as enshrined in the Constitution had the effect of prohibiting such discrimination.

26. **A representative of France** said that, while the law stated that the Convention could be invoked directly, technical reasons prevented its application in practice. Information on the legal bases invoked by defendants and judges was not available, and it was therefore impossible to know when references had been made to the Convention. Its provisions, however, were included in national laws that could be invoked in the courts.

27. **Ms. Couillard** (France) said that the term “femicide” had only recently begun to be used in the political sphere and society more broadly, but its absence from French law did not hinder the punishment of perpetrators. The term “murder within a couple” was used in French law. While women were most often the victims of that crime, men were also sometimes victims. The strict lockdown imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic had been accompanied by measures to protect wages, including a partial unemployment scheme for persons unable to work remotely. Women, however, comprised the majority of the front-line workers who had continued to deliver public services throughout the pandemic. In recognition of that fact, care sector workers’ wages had been increased by €200 net per month after consultations between their representatives and the Government.

28. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that the fact that the courts seldom referred to the Convention indicated that training on its provisions was insufficient.

29. **A representative of France** said that justice officials, police officers and other public officials received training on the Convention. The Interministerial Mission for the Protection of Women Victims of Violence and for Combating Human Trafficking had created tools and teaching materials to assist professionals in detecting victims of violence and supporting them in lodging complaints.

30. **A representative of France** said that initial and ongoing training for judges addressed discrimination and the relevant legislative provisions. Ministry of Justice staff also received training on the matter.

31. **Ms. Akia** said that the Committee would like to know what steps were taken to fully implement the Paris Agreement on climate change, to meet the specific needs of women and girls, including women with disabilities, in relation to climate change and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It would also welcome information on steps to increase financial support to address the effects of climate change on all women and girls, to increase their access to safe water and to ensure that all policies and legislation addressed climate change and disaster risk management. It would be useful to hear whether the Government had gathered disaggregated data and conducted research on the impact of climate change on women and girls and how it ensured their full and equal participation in decision-making in relation to climate change and disaster risk management. How did the Government ensure that its foreign policy funding addressed the loss of lives and livelihoods and rights violations suffered by women and girls in least developed countries owing to climate change?

32. She would like to know whether a gender-sensitive risk assessment had been undertaken to ascertain whether French law on the arms trade was compliant with the Arms Trade Treaty and could ensure that French weapons were not used to violate the rights of women and girls. If so, she invited the delegation to share its findings. She also wished to know what administrative, legislative and practical measures had been adopted to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security and other international instruments to ensure that French weapons were not used to commit violence against women. It would be useful to learn how the State party increased and earmarked specific financial, human and technical resources to effectively undertake feminist diplomacy and to implement projects that promoted women and girls’ rights and reduced gender inequality. Lastly, information would be welcome on the extent to which national and international women’s groups were involved in implementing, monitoring and evaluating foreign policy projects.

33. **Ms. Rana** said that she wished to know how the 2023–2027 interministerial gender equality plan would be monitored, implemented and funded, and how civil society would be

involved in its implementation. She would also like to know what position the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Service occupied within the Ministry of Solidarity and Health, what authority it had with regard to other ministries' decisions and how it coordinated gender mainstreaming with the Ministry for Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination. The Committee would be interested to hear how the State party planned to implement the recommendations of the Sub-Committee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, in particular with regard to broadening the protection activities of the National Consultative Commission for Human Rights, strengthening its cooperation with other national entities and limiting its members to one term of service.

34. She would like to receive information on the impact of legislation that required large companies to introduce gender quotas for senior executives and board members. The Committee would like to hear whether the recommendations made in the 2023 report of the High Council for Gender Equality had been implemented and how the State party addressed discrimination and stereotyping resulting from legislation that prohibited students from certain religious backgrounds from wearing religious symbols and clothing.

35. She would welcome information on how the State party intended to address stereotypes related to sexual assault, such as victim blaming. How was the State party combating stereotypes to guarantee access to work for women with disabilities? It would also be useful to know if the Government was considering reducing to 18 years the minimum age for adults to receive disability pensions, as that would ensure that young women could gain access to financial support.

36. She would also welcome information on how the State party was fighting stereotypes regarding women who were victims of revenge porn and how it was enforcing the Act for a Digital Republic, adopted in 2016, in relation to the online sharing of explicit images of women and other cybercrimes.

37. **Ms. Couillard** (France) said that the Government took the commitment to the Paris Agreement on climate change seriously, and it was even preparing for scenarios worse than those that had been forecast. It provided financial aid to help reduce emissions in sectors and industries that produced the greatest volume of greenhouse gases, such as cement production. Since her ministerial portfolio was directly attached to the Prime Minister's office, it was possible for it to influence all government ministries on the ecological transition and its impact on women and girls. Women were often the most adversely affected by climate change and were not sufficiently consulted, even though they were acutely aware of its effects. France was a firm proponent of financial aid to help developing countries tackle climate change, including measures to prevent tropical deforestation. An increasing number of women were participating in the relevant climate change conferences, but more progress was needed.

38. **Mr. Bonnafont** (France) said that at the Tenth Annual Conference of the Paris Forum, held in June 2023, the Paris Club had called for a reform of the international financial system to coordinate the aims of development and of fighting climate change and poverty. The Paris Club had thus adopted a new perspective on multilateral development measures and how its members considered the debts of the most vulnerable countries; it had also agreed to increase funding to fight climate change, bringing it to some \$100 billion per year. Women were key beneficiaries of those initiatives, because they were particularly vulnerable to poverty.

39. Due to the surge in food prices caused by the war in Ukraine, the Government had launched an initiative with the World Food Programme, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Children's Fund to make proposals to improve access to food, particularly in Africa, with priority given providing food for women and children.

40. The French Development Agency had been allocated increasing amounts of funding and now included a gender criterion in its projects in 115 countries. It was also involved specifically in programmes advocating for gender equality and access to development for women.

41. **A representative of France** said that the Government had introduced a water plan for its overseas territories to tackle the challenges of sanitation and water access. Between

2016 and 2022, €335 million had been transferred to six overseas territories to support new water projects and the maintenance of existing facilities. In Mayotte, efforts were under way to address a critical water shortage, including the installation of water tap manifolds and the distribution of bottled water. Households were being granted a waiver for water bills between September and December 2023, bottled water was being sent to the island and 50 additional staff had been recruited in schools to help distribute bottled water to pupils.

42. **A representative of France** said that the State party had been conducting a feminist foreign policy for five years, during which it had doubled its financial assistance for development programmes promoting gender equality. The international strategy on sexual and reproductive health rights launched in March 2023 was consistent with government action in that field. The Generation Equality Forum, held in July 2021 in Paris, had been a key event in the country's feminist foreign policy and had brought together many stakeholders. For the period between 2021 and 2025 the Government had committed some €400 million to related activities.

43. In 2020 the State party had created its first fund for supporting feminist organizations, with funding worth €120 million between 2020 and 2022 and over €250 million earmarked for it over the following five years. Many initiatives to promote equality and support women had been taken at the Group of Seven summit hosted by France in 2019. The summit had adopted a framework agreement to promote female entrepreneurship in Africa and had supported the establishment of the Global Survivors Fund for and with survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Half of the Government's €333 million contribution to the Global Partnership for Education was dedicated to gender-related activities and girls' education. An initiative entitled Priority to Equality was aimed at strengthening equality in education in partner countries.

44. France had significantly increased its contributions to UN-Women and the United Nations Population Fund and had also provided them with additional means for helping women affected by the Ukraine conflict. Within the diplomatic service, every department and embassy had a contact person for equality. Regular consultations were held with women's civil society organizations ahead of major multilateral meetings. The High Council for Gender Equality had conducted an independent evaluation of the country's strategy regarding women's rights between 2018 and 2022. The Government was currently in the process of working with all civil society partners to prepare a new strategy for feminist foreign policy for the period from 2024 to 2028.

45. **A representative of France** said that respect for human rights and international humanitarian law by the end users of arms exported by France was at the heart of the State party's international commitments. There was a comprehensive, demanding legal framework for all military and technological exports. All information regarding arms exports was publicly available and an annual report was submitted to the Parliament. Decisions to authorize the export of such material were made by an interministerial commission composed of all government ministries, which conducted a thorough assessment on a case-by-case basis, both in terms of material type and the importing country. The risk of the use of the material to commit gender-based violence or serious violent acts against women and children was assessed. Additionally, arms exports were subject to regularly updated directives that were established for each country.

46. As contexts evolved, the conditions for the export of arms changed over time, both in terms of the list of destination countries and because of changes in their internal situations. France took part in the Arms Trade Treaty Outreach Project of the European Union, which helped strengthen the arms transfer systems of countries outside the European Union. The Government was particularly vigilant regarding its export policy given the current international context.

47. **Ms. Couillard** (France) said that a French law passed in 2021 had set quotas of 30 per cent by 2026 and 40 per cent by 2029 for senior management positions at large companies to be held by women. The Government was making significant progress to increase the proportion of women in decision-making bodies. It had ambitious aims to fight stereotypes in the media and advertising, and culture equality was one of the four pillars of

the national gender equality plan. In 2022, 44 per cent of people appearing on television and radio had been women, a rise of 6 percentage points since 2016.

48. During the COVID-19 pandemic there had been a lack of representation of women experts consulted by the media. However, the proportion of women experts present in the media currently stood at 45 per cent, which was an increase of 15 percentage points since 2015. Stereotypes were combated in advertising; 34 per cent of women in advertisements were now presented in a capacity as an expert, compared with 18 per cent in 2017. The national advertising regulator had signed a voluntary charter with advertising stakeholders to combat sexual, sexist and gendered stereotyping. In 2022 the national public broadcaster had broadcast 800 programmes that contributed to combating prejudice and violence against women, and its fiction content had also promoted non-stereotypical characters.

49. Secularism was a fundamental constitutional principle that guaranteed freedom of conscience, equality and neutrality in public spaces. It was applied through three fundamental principles: State neutrality, religious freedom and the respect of pluralism. The ostensible wearing of religious symbols in public schools was regulated by a law adopted in 2004 whose aim was to ensure the neutrality of public service and equality among students and to prevent religious affiliation from hindering integration. A governmental circular which had been issued to clarify application of the law stated that the wearing of ostensible religious signs demonstrated a religious affiliation and was therefore banned. A dialogue with students had been launched at the start of the 2023/24 academic year to explain the purpose of the policy.

50. According to two reports issued respectively by parliamentarians and the High Council for Gender Equality, there was an increasing quantity of violent content in pornography, and it was thus important to combat children's access to pornographic material. Half of boys aged between 12 and 13 had accessed pornographic videos or images. To prevent children from accessing increasingly violent pornographic content, a bill was being drafted to ensure parental controls would be activated by default on all Internet-connected devices when they were sold. The reports had also indicated that on one pornographic site that was highly viewed in France, there were now 80,000 videos tagged with the key word "torture". The availability of such videos was generating an acquired tolerance among the viewers. A recent study had reported that 30 per cent of French women under 35 had been asked if they wanted to be strangled during sexual relations.

51. Pornographic content featured women who were subjected to an increasing amount of violence, in acts that were close to torture and barbarity. The issue also concerned the respect of labour law, as no working conditions should include such acts. A working group to be set up at the end of October would issue proposals for removing such content.

52. **Ms. Rana** said that, in view of the high number of conflicts worldwide, she would like to know whether, in line with the women and peace and security agenda, France was advocating for women to have a place in negotiations aimed at ending conflicts.

53. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she wished to know whether the monitoring committee for the implementation of the national action plan to eradicate female genital mutilation had convened in 2023, and if so, what its conclusions had been. How were members of that committee designated, and were they independent of the Government? She would also welcome information on initiatives that had been taken to implement the national action plan to eradicate female genital mutilation as part of the "Plan Toutes et Tous Égaux" (Women and men all equal), as well as the results. It would be useful to have recent data on the number of children protected by the Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons because of the risk that they would be subjected to female genital mutilation, and the number of women living in France who had undergone female genital mutilation. How were those women and children supported?

54. She would welcome any information the delegation could provide regarding the extension of the scope of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament on combating human trafficking so that it would include victims of forced marriage and illegal adoption within its definition of exploitation. She asked if the State party could provide data on the number of victims of gender-based violence and femicide in 2022 and so far in 2023. The Committee would appreciate information on the number of shelters and emergency houses currently in operation for victims of gender-based violence and on the number that were run

and/or funded by the Government. She would also like to know if there were plans to strengthen laws concerning sexual assault by better integrating the concept of lack of consent, for example by following European Union standards, according to which the absence of consent was a constituent factor in rape.

55. It would be useful to know if the State party planned to amend legislation on the maximum age gap for sexual relations between minors. The Committee would like to know how many of the danger alert devices known as “serious danger alert phones” had been allocated to victims of domestic violence in 2023 and whether the State party intended to increase their use, given that there were reportedly over 200,000 victims of domestic violence in 2022, but only 1,153 such phones had been distributed in 2020. It would be useful to know whether the State party intended to use such phones in conjunction with electronic bracelets worn by perpetrators so that the burden of reporting a danger would be removed from the victims.

56. It would be useful to know whether the State party had established a mechanism to monitor any adverse effects of Act No. 2020-936, which allowed for health professionals to break medical confidentiality if they suspected that victims of gender-based violence were unable to alert the authorities. Lastly, she asked whether the State party intended to establish a sixth plan for preventing and combating all forms of violence against women.

57. **Ms. Leinarte** said that the number of investigations of human trafficking, the number of suspects prosecuted and the number of human traffickers convicted had dropped between 2019 and 2020. She wished to know whether that trend had changed in the period following the COVID-19 pandemic and whether the State party could provide statistics. It would be of interest to find out why the data on trafficking for sexual exploitation and trafficking for forced labour were not disaggregated. Up to 4,000 Comorian children were reportedly at risk of sex and labour trafficking in Mayotte. The Committee would like to hear how the French policy on protecting child victims of trafficking extended to the thousands of unaccompanied Comorian children.

58. **Ms. Couillard** (France) said that there had been more prosecutions for acts of female genital mutilation in France than in any other country and that there had been a significant decrease in the practice since 1979. Consequently, there was almost no risk of genital mutilation for girls born in France since 1995. Policies were now focused on prevention of the practice among families and young people who had recently arrived in France and on providing care to women who had been subjected to genital mutilation before their arrival.

59. **A representative of France** said that, in 2023, it was estimated that almost 140,000 women living in France had undergone female genital mutilation, compared to 125,000 in 2010. The increase stemmed from migration flows and the fact that asylum-seeking women were now included in figures on female genital mutilation. The French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons aimed to prevent female genital mutilation from taking place and to provide care to victims. In 2019, France had adopted a national action plan on female genital mutilation, the objectives of which were detailed in the State party’s report. The Government aimed to raise awareness of the practice among young girls through measures such as a yearly campaign run before the summer holidays and social media activism. Since 2020, a range of services had been made available to victims of female genital mutilation to aid their recovery, including access to reconstructive surgery. The MSF-PREVAL study – a new tool for collecting data on the prevalence of genital mutilation in the female population in three pilot French departments – Seine-Saint-Denis, Rhône and Alpes-Maritimes – had revealed a decrease in the risk of genital mutilation from 40 to 10 per cent for the grandchildren of immigrants and an estimated prevalence of genital mutilation of 7.2 per cent among women aged 18 to 44 living in Seine-Saint-Denis. Work was currently under way to draw up a plan to combat female genital mutilation in the Ile-de-France region.

60. **A representative of France** said that just over 20,000 girls were currently under the protection of the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons. They were given the status of refugees in application of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, since they belonged to a minority social group to which their country of origin was hostile. Refugee status could not be granted to accompanying mothers who had already been

subject to female genital mutilation, as they were not considered to be at risk of persecution unless they engaged in activism against that practice. Instead, to protect the integrity of the family, mothers were offered a 10-year residence permit. Women who had undergone reconstructive surgery were offered protection, since they were once again at risk of being subjected to genital mutilation upon return to their country of origin.

61. **Ms. Couillard** (France) said that the Ministry of the Interior had been collecting data on violent deaths within couples since 2006. In 2019, the number of femicides had risen to 146, which had triggered round-table discussions involving the Government and all relevant civil society actors. Five laws and 46 other measures had subsequently been adopted as part of the national strategy to combat domestic violence.

62. The Council of the Order, a doctors' association, had worked with the Government to draft a life-saving legislative text that would allow doctors to inform public prosecutors that a woman's life was in immediate danger, despite the breach of their oath of confidentiality. It was necessary to start by helping those women who were already suspected of being at risk of domestic violence, for example in cases known to the police. It was critical to continue training members of the police and the gendarmerie; over half had already received training on the handling of domestic violence cases. A set of questions had been developed to help women identify themselves as victims of domestic violence. It was now possible for women to file a complaint in a location that suited them, such as at a town hall or at home, rather than at a police station.

63. It was important to raise judges' awareness of tools such as the danger alert phones and protection orders. Some 5,000 danger alert phones were currently available for victims of domestic violence, and more would be ordered by the Ministry of Justice if needed. The speed at which protection orders could be obtained had already significantly improved. The aim was to reach a 24-hour turnaround time for the most urgent cases. Such a step would prioritize victims' safety by allowing judges to grant protection orders even before hearing the defence put forward by the accused.

64. There were 11,000 emergency shelters, including 427 shelters available to persons with disabilities. Women victims of domestic violence, and any children they might have, were given priority access to them. The network of shelters must continue to be expanded across the country. To prevent perpetrators from reoffending, psychological, social and professional support was offered to them through care centres, including help with recovering from an addiction.

65. In the French legal system, rape was defined as any act of sexual penetration committed against another person by violence, constraint, threat or surprise. The absence of an expression of consent was not included in the legal definition because persons might say yes in a context where they wanted to say no and because the four criteria defining rape effectively covered the issue of lack of consent.

66. Lastly, regarding the bill prohibiting sexual relations between adults and minors under the age of 15, in order to secure passage of the bill, it had been necessary to include a provision allowing sexual relations between a minor as young as 13 and a young adult who was no more than 5 years older. There was therefore currently no intention to reduce that age gap.

67. **A representative of France** said that data on the number of women and men killed by their partners was compiled and evaluated by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice each year. In 2022, 118 women had been killed by their spouses or former spouses. The qualification of "spousal homicide" made it possible to disaggregate data on victims by sex and also by sexual orientation. Criminal law on the matter allowed judges to take into account the particular vulnerability of women and children, a position strengthened by the recent circulars issued to the public prosecutor by the Ministry of Justice.

68. **A representative of France** said that a rigorous definition of rape and sexual assault allowed case law, and thus each court hearing a case, to recognize the absence of consent and to apply the law by citing the four criteria – violence, constraint, threat or surprise – even in the absence of an age gap.

69. **A representative of France** said that the Act on strengthening action to combat the prostitution system and support prostitutes, adopted on 13 April 2016, had four priority areas: combating human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and procuring; decriminalizing prostituted people and supporting those people who wished to leave prostitution; preventing prostitution and recourse to prostitution by increasing risk-reduction measures and better educating young people on the reality of prostitution; and prohibiting the purchase of sexual services and holding clients accountable. A prostitution exit programme offered social and professional support from approved associations, a temporary residence permit for foreign nationals and financial assistance to facilitate social and professional integration. Since 2017, 1,242 people had benefited from a prostitution exit programme, which lasted for a period of six months and could be renewed three times. An analysis of the action taken to combat prostitution would be presented at the end of 2023, following a three-month consultation with all relevant actors, in order to improve and reinforce the implementation of the Act.

70. **A representative of France** said that, in 2022, 2,027 victims of exploitation and trafficking had been identified by the police and gendarmerie. The country's statistics on trafficking included victims and perpetrators of both exploitation and trafficking. In the same period, there had been 1,518 criminal prosecutions, 1,000 convictions and 670 people sentenced to prison for trafficking and exploitation. A third plan to combat human trafficking and exploitation, which would cover the fight against sexual exploitation, including child sexual exploitation, would be announced by the end of 2023. The Government had committed to establishing a national mechanism for identifying, referring and protecting victims.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.