



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Sixty-fourth session**

Summary record of the 1413th meeting*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 12 July 2016 at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Hayashi

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* No summary records were issued for the 1411th and 1412th meetings.

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

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

Fourth periodic report of Albania (CEDAW/C/ALB/4; CEDAW/C/ALB/Q/4 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Albania took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania), introducing the State party's fourth periodic report (CEDAW/C/ALB/4), said that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Committee's general comments and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) together constituted the road map for the Government's efforts to promote gender equality and harmonize its national legislation, and that, having been elected as a member of the Human Rights Council for the period 2015-2017, the State was firmly committed to fulfilling its human rights obligations. The report under review had been prepared with the participation of State, civil society and international bodies, and with financial and technical support from United Nations agencies.
3. Updating the Committee on measures taken to improve the legal framework, she said that the introduction of marital rape as a criminal offence attested to the progress being made in areas previously considered taboo. The Act on Measures against Violence in Family Relations and the Legal Aid Act had both been amended to enhance and expand the protective and support services available to victims of gender-based and domestic violence, while the ratification of the Istanbul Convention had provided the impetus for the creation of a toll-free counselling hotline. In addition, restrictions on the criteria for admission to the national centre for the treatment of victims of domestic violence had been lifted.
4. Following recent amendments, the Electoral Code now required that at least 30 per cent of candidates on party lists should be women and, after the adoption of an alternating list system, women's representation on city councils had increased to almost 35 per cent, up from 12 per cent in 2011. Amendments made to the Labour Code in December 2015 had included the reversal of the burden of proof for sexual harassment, as recommended by the Committee in 2010. In addition, a recent decision of the Council of Ministers had increased protection for pregnant women at work, in line with European legislation, while the Act on Social Housing Programmes for Residents of Urban Areas, as recently amended, now gave priority to women in vulnerable situations.
5. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth was currently drafting a new gender equality strategy for the period 2016-2020, based on the outcome of a legislative review exercise supported by the United Nations Development Programme. The National Action Plan for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Persons and the Action Plan for the Integration of the Roma and Egyptians, both recently approved, would ensure extra protection for women belonging to those groups. The role of the National Council of Gender Equality in approving key documents and recommendations had been extended, and the newly formed Alliance of Women MPs and Alliance of Women Councillors were also working to empower women. Civil society was heavily involved in all aspects of the various endeavours to improve the status of women and girls.
6. Gender-sensitive budgeting had been implemented for approximately 20 medium-term budgetary programmes for the period 2016-2018, and recent amendments to the Budget Act had introduced gender equality as a core principle.

7. The Government had been using temporary special measures to improve women's participation in economic life. Secondary legislation had been passed to create a fund for women entrepreneurs and economic aid could now be disbursed directly to women. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection gave priority to women applicants for financial support schemes, under which 1,200 women farmers were set to receive assistance. The sector strategy for agriculture and rural development for the period 2014-2020 was focused on compliance with national gender equality legislation, and the Ministry intended to extend its various support services in order to better promote women's economic empowerment. As a result of those and other initiatives, the proportion of businesses owned by women had edged up to slightly more than 30 per cent, while the number of self-employed women had risen by 5 per cent between 2010 and 2015. However, although women engaged in farm activities outnumbered men, the number of family farms owned by women remained small.

8. As a result of the Government's zero-tolerance approach to domestic violence, the number of criminal proceedings brought in such cases had increased, as had public sensitivity to the issues involved. With support from civil society and international organizations, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth had organized a number of awareness-raising campaigns under the umbrellas of the HeForShe campaign and the "Orange the World" initiative to end violence against women led by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). The Government had also adopted a national strategy to combat trafficking in persons and an action plan for the period 2014-2017 that were in full compliance with the Convention, and had established a task force to conduct an integrated review of cases of human trafficking that had not yet been duly investigated.

9. Gender initiatives adopted by the State Police had resulted in one woman being appointed as chief of a police commissariat, and four other women officers taking up senior positions and, in fulfilment of the concluding observations issued by the Committee in 2010, training to ensure a safe working environment for all had been delivered in 12 police directorates.

10. One of the goals of the national strategy for employment and skills for the period 2014-2020 was to increase access for women and girls to employment in male-dominated domains and, to support that goal, the Social Enterprises Act, passed in June 2016, included provisions to facilitate women's access to the labour market. Government efforts to address the disparity between the wages and pensions of women and men had reduced the pay gap from 18 per cent in 2011 to just under 7 per cent in 2015, while amendments to the Social Insurance Act had established a social pension for all persons over the age of 70, for which 90 per cent of the beneficiaries were women. A strategy to address work in the informal economy was due to be drafted in 2017.

11. Other advances achieved in the period under review included reforms of the economic aid system which meant that women in divorce proceedings could now apply for financial assistance in cases where no final decision had been taken; the introduction of new eligibility rules for educational scholarships which meant that female students were prioritized over their male peers and had helped to take the proportion of female university graduates up to 64 per cent; and health sector reforms which meant that 20,000 women and girls were now receiving free medical check-ups every month, and 5,000 women were benefiting from free mobile mammography services each year. The Government of Albania intended to use its dialogue with the Committee and the recommendations subsequently issued as a roadmap for further improving women's economic, social and cultural development and their participation in public life.

Articles 1 to 6

12. **Ms. Pomeranzi** asked what legislative measures the State party had taken to harmonize domestic legislation with international treaties, especially the provisions that provided protection for women who suffered multiple forms of discrimination such as Roma and older women; whether any reports examining the application of such treaties had been drafted; and whether the Government intended to implement any of the recommendations made by the Office of the People's Advocate in its submission to the Committee (INT/CEDAW/IFN/ALB/21838).

13. **Ms. Patten** asked whether, in the event of a conflict between the provisions of the Convention and those of domestic law, the Convention would take priority; what measures were in place to improve oversight of the implementation of the legal framework; whether more resources were being allocated to support implementation at the local and national levels; and whether evaluation and monitoring mechanisms were envisaged in the recently enacted laws. She wished to know what specific measures had been adopted to facilitate access to justice for women, particularly those from vulnerable groups, to implement the Legal Aid Act, and to address obstacles in applying for legal aid; what efforts the Government intended to make to ensure that the Office of the People's Advocate and the Office of the Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination had the financial and human resources necessary to perform their mandates effectively; and what efforts were being made to give due consideration to the recommendations made by those institutions. She would also like to know whether the remit of the Institute of Statistics would be expanded so that more information became available about the situation of older women, and whether progress had been made in drafting a law on the third age.

14. **Ms. Sheshi** (Albania) said that all domestic legislation had been assessed for compliance with international standards, and that the outcome of that assessment had been discussed in the Parliament and by the Alliance of Women MPs. The resultant amendments were now being enacted, including those made to the Act on Measures against Violence in Family Relations, and would be reflected in the new gender equality strategy currently being drafted. The recommendation of the Office of the People's Advocate relating to discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity had been incorporated in the newly adopted National Action Plan for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Persons for the period 2016-2020.

15. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) confirmed that the provisions of the Convention took precedence over those of domestic legislation.

16. **Ms. Sheshi** (Albania) said that although final judgments concerning the implementation of international instruments were the purview of the Constitutional Court, all judges were competent to interpret international norms. The lack of a reference to self-enforcement in the Convention's instrument of ratification was deemed to imply that the Convention was self-enforcing, although several laws, such as those on gender equality and legal aid, served to reinforce the rights enshrined therein.

17. **Ms. Lubonja** (Albania) said that the State Commission for Legal Aid assessed whether the eligibility criteria for legal aid and other social protection programmes were met on the basis of regulations that guaranteed transparency. Financial resources for legal aid were limited, but the number of applications had declined in recent years and most applications were granted. Increased funding for legal aid was being considered as part of the ongoing legal reforms.

18. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) said that the Integrated Policy Management Group monitored the implementation of laws, policies and action plans at the central and local levels, including measures taken to improve gender equality and promote the economic empowerment of vulnerable groups including women and girls. All policies and plans were

costed, and specific budgets were allocated to different indicators and activities. Up to 60 per cent of costs was covered from the State budget, with the remainder being provided by non-State donors. The Ministry of Social Welfare had collected data on older persons, which had been used by the Institute of Statistics to develop a profile of women in that category, but more work was needed in that area.

19. **Ms. Galanxhi** (Albania) said that recent demographic developments had prompted the Institute of Statistics to consider including specific indicators for older persons in the five-year programme that it was currently drafting. The Institute was also planning targeted research into persons of the third age and a study into the situation of women that would focus particularly on younger women.

20. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) said that the newly drafted gender equality strategy for the period 2016-2020 and the associated action plan addressed all forms of discrimination against women, including discrimination against vulnerable groups. Specific budget allocations were established for the different activities envisaged, which would be implemented by the relevant State institutions in coordination with the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and the Office of the People's Advocate. The budgets of the latter two institutions would be negotiated and agreed according to their respective needs.

21. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that she would like an explanation as to how the decentralization and legal reform processes under way would make it easier for women to file complaints of discrimination and reduce the impact of corruption on the effectiveness of complaints procedures.

22. **Ms. Patten** asked what specific measures had been adopted to enhance the implementation of the Convention at the national and local levels, since the courts' failure to invoke its provisions suggested that judges were not aware of its content. She also wished to know whether the State party would draw up an action plan to implement the Committee's concluding observations.

23. **Ms. Lubonja** (Albania) said that the reform of the justice system was an ongoing process overseen by a high-level group of experts that drew on various recommendations, including the Committee's concluding observations and European Union directives on integration, with a view to improving access to justice for women.

24. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) said that the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth led efforts to implement the Convention and had been involved in drafting the strategy for decentralization and territorial administration reforms. Gender equality and protection against gender-based violence, particularly for vulnerable groups of women, were among the priorities of central and local authority structures, both existing and newly established, and all structures worked closely with civil society, which provided advocacy and support services for women filing complaints and seeking legal aid. The Ministry also funded reception centres and shelters for women affected by gender-based violence at which victims could access the necessary legal assistance, obtain help with complaints and seek protection orders.

25. **Ms. Sheshi** (Albania) said that the School of Magistrates provided training on the Convention and gender equality and gender-based violence were both covered in the relevant textbooks. In addition, the School of Public Administration had adopted a human rights curriculum that would be used to train public officials and increase familiarization with the Convention. The Parliamentary Committee on Gender Issues would consider the Committee's concluding observations with a view to ensuring their effective implementation and the gender equality strategy would draw on the recommendations as well as on the provisions of the Convention itself.

26. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) said that the fight against corruption was a priority for the Government. The public could report corruption online, all reports were followed up, responses were issued within set timeframes, and administrative proceedings were launched against any public officials involved. Most cases related to misconduct towards vulnerable persons.

27. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that reports from alternative sources indicated that the restructure of the Department of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality had diminished its decision-making capacities. Furthermore, the Department's gender mainstreaming programmes appeared to be sustained mainly by international donors rather than from the State budget. She would like to know more about that situation, including information on the impact of gender mainstreaming on medium-term budget plans; the coordination of gender equality mechanisms; any plans to strengthen those mechanisms in order to ensure Government accountability for the implementation of gender equality policies; and the political positioning of the gender equality mechanisms. She also wished to know whether gender equality officers were engaged full-time in gender issues or assumed such duties in addition to other functions. Lastly, she would like statistics and information on the impact of temporary special measures, including any specific measures taken to promote gender equality in areas in which women were underrepresented or disadvantaged.

28. **Ms. Sheshi** (Albania) said that, although the Government had decided to reduce the number of public servants by almost 30 per cent after the 2013 elections, most gender equality officers had remained in their posts and were extremely experienced. Although they had other parallel duties, their gender-related responsibilities were included in their job descriptions and their performance was assessed against gender-related indicators. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, in close cooperation with the School of Public Administration and with support from international agencies, was working continuously to enhance their capacities and professional skills by familiarizing them with legislation on gender equality and non-discrimination and training them in new processes such as gender budgeting.

29. With the support of UN-Women, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and the Ministry of Finance had made great strides in mainstreaming gender in medium-term budget plans. In addition to the funds allocated to gender mainstreaming in individual ministry budgets, around 20 specific gender equality programmes, led by various ministries, were funded from the State budget. Work to introduce participatory budgeting at the local level had recently begun, a pilot project having been launched in several municipalities, and municipal council officers had been trained to ensure that the specific needs of men and women were reflected in local budget planning.

30. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) said that, while the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth was the central element of the national gender equality machinery, gender equality was a cross-cutting issue and all government ministries and central institutions were required to mainstream gender in their policies, plans and budgets.

31. **Ms. Galanxhi** (Albania) said that all the statistical data collected by the Institute of Statistics were disaggregated by sex. Each year, the Institute published a report containing a compilation of the bills, new laws and amendments to existing laws adopted, as well as statistical data collected by State institutions and through surveys.

32. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania), undertaking to provide the Committee with a copy of the report for 2016, said that the statistical data contained therein served to illustrate the progress made in areas such as women's economic empowerment, participation in education and access to health care.

33. Considerable efforts had been devoted to building the capacity of local gender equality officers, who also served as local coordinators for the prevention of domestic and

gender-based violence. The mechanism for coordinating the implementation of the national gender equality policy at the central and local levels had, to date, proven effective. A large-scale campaign against gender-based violence would be conducted in the second half of 2016. The Government was grateful to UN-Women and other United Nations agencies for their assistance and had now taken the steps necessary to introduce gender-sensitive budgeting and to improve its system for collecting statistical data. While much progress had been made towards achieving gender equality in the two years following submission of the country's periodic report, efforts in that area were often hampered by a lack of financial resources.

34. Women's participation in decision-making and policy development had increased considerably, as demonstrated by the fact that at present nine cabinet ministers, as well as the Minister of Defence, were women. The Alliance of Women MPs assisted the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth in dealing with gender equality issues and giving effect to the Committee's recommendations.

35. **Ms. Sulaj** (Albania) said that, during the period 2011-2013, a number of temporary special measures had been adopted to increase the number of women serving in the national police force. While the number of female officers had risen considerably in that period, the trend was difficult to maintain. In an attempt to prolong it, additional measures had been adopted in the past two years, which had included the introduction of a policy against sexual harassment and the provision of training for police officers in how to combat such harassment. With the assistance of UN-Women, a programme to support women serving in the national police and facilitate their access to leadership roles had been rolled out. To date, five women had completed the necessary training and had been appointed to leadership roles. The post of gender equality officer, which had been abolished in 2012, had since been reinstated.

36. **Ms. Sheshi** (Albania) said that the amendments to the Electoral Code introduced prior to the 2015 local elections had included a quota of 50 per cent representation for each gender in the list of candidates for municipal elections, which had led to a significant increase in the number of women serving on municipal councils. The economic position of women in the family had been greatly enhanced following the Government's decision to grant women the right to receive and administer financial aid on behalf of their family. That measure, which had elevated the status of women in the home, had also served to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence. Moreover, women and girls belonging to minority groups and victims of trafficking or domestic violence could now benefit from vocational training free of charge and were provided with assistance in accessing the labour market.

37. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) said that the Electoral Code also imposed penalties on political parties that failed to comply with the aforementioned gender quota. The delegation could send the Committee further information on the steps taken to implement decisions and laws intended to boost the participation of women in the political life of the country in due course.

38. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that the Committee had received information indicating that fewer resources had been allocated to the national machinery for the advancement of women in 2016 than in previous years. She wondered whether the State party could not leverage the country's improved economic growth to invest more in the national machinery with a view to expediting the achievement of gender equality on the ground.

39. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) said that the gender focal points working within the various line ministries were committed to achieving gender equality and had been assigned concrete responsibilities to that end. The introduction of gender quotas in political and decision-making bodies and in the public administration in particular constituted a significant step forward. However, the Government recognized that more needed to be done

to deliver better services to women in general. A new law on social services currently under discussion and awaiting adoption by Parliament would, once enacted, provide for the establishment of a social fund to cover the cost of services for victims of human trafficking or violence. It was hoped that the toll-free counselling hotline for female victims of gender-based violence would soon be operational and that services for female victims of human trafficking and violence, including shelters, could be improved and expanded. The Committee's concluding observations could serve to further strengthen the national machinery for the advancement of women. A timeline would be drawn up for implementation of the Committee's recommendations and systematic gender-sensitive budgeting.

40. **Ms. Al-Dosari** asked what measures the State party had taken to ensure the successful roll-out of the initiatives to address gender stereotypes mentioned in paragraphs 43 and 44 of the periodic report. She wished to know what role NGOs and civil society organizations had played in devising and implementing the national strategy for gender equality and the reduction of gender-based and domestic violence for the period 2011-2015. It would also be useful to receive additional information on the role of the media in addressing gender stereotypes.

41. She invited the delegation to outline the measures, including those of a legislative nature, taken to combat harmful traditional practices such as forced or arranged marriages and honour-based violence, especially in rural areas, as well as discriminatory practices such as the obligation for a bride's family to pay her husband a dowry. The Committee was also concerned by the high number of forced abortions performed on account of the strong traditional preference for boys in Albanian society, which was linked to matters of inheritance. She asked what measures the State party envisaged taking to reduce the number of involuntary abortions performed in the country. Noting that rural and Roma women often struggled to access essential services, she enquired whether any of the new laws adopted by the State party addressed that problem. Lastly, she asked whether the Government planned to amend laws which did not recognize women's ownership rights.

42. **Ms. Patten** said that, while the State party was to be commended for having ratified the Istanbul Convention, there appeared to be many obstacles to its effective implementation, with the result that many women and children were still exposed to acts of violence in the home. The Committee had received reports that, despite the awareness-raising campaigns conducted by the State party, gender-based violence was still underreported; legal redress mechanisms were not widely known; fear of stigmatization, reprisals and revictimization in the justice system was rampant; and there was a general lack of confidence in the ability of the police force and justice system to handle cases of that kind. Moreover, it was reported that shelters continued to apply restrictive admission criteria. She asked how the State party intended to overcome those obstacles. She also wished to know when the State party planned to conduct an in-depth analysis of the causes and consequences of violence against women in Albania, as the findings of that analysis could help it to formulate new measures to combat that phenomenon.

43. Noting that the amendments brought to the Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations provided for the establishment of a coordinated network of local and central bodies for the protection, support and rehabilitation of victims of domestic violence, she asked how the State party would guarantee the effective delivery of services and whether it planned to introduce a referral mechanism for cases of domestic violence in all municipalities. She enquired as to whether the State party intended to open more shelters and treatment centres for victims of domestic violence and how it planned to address the problems most frequently encountered by survivors. She would also appreciate statistical data on the number of victims that had claimed and benefited from legal aid. What was the

State party doing to raise awareness among the victims of domestic violence of their entitlement to such aid?

44. Noting lastly that the Committee had received information pointing to serious deficiencies in the courts' approach to handling cases of domestic violence, including a systematic failure to respect procedural time limits for considering applications and handing down decisions and to take action when confronted with violations of protection orders, she asked how the State party intended to address those deficiencies; whether it would consider setting up courts specializing in cases of domestic violence; and whether it collected, or planned to collect, statistical data on cases of domestic violence disaggregated by sex, age, disability, ethnic origin and rural and urban areas.

45. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that, despite the measures taken by the State party to combat human trafficking since its last dialogue with the Committee, it remained a source and destination country for women and girls trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour, with the country's coastal regions becoming a hotbed for those phenomena during the summer months. Although the national referral mechanism for the protection and reintegration of victims of trafficking had been strengthened by the national strategy to combat human trafficking for the period 2014-2017, the Committee still harboured concerns about its overall effectiveness. She wondered whether the National Anti-trafficking Coordinator had conducted a midterm review of the aforementioned national strategy and, if so, what the outcome had been. She also wished to know how the State party planned to address the links between human trafficking and organized crime and whether it intended to strengthen existing anti-trafficking laws and enlarge the network of services available to victims, either by introducing mobile care units or increasing the funding allocated to NGO-run shelters.

46. Lastly, she asked whether the State party intended to act upon the recommendation of the Office of the People's Advocate that legal aid should be provided to victims of human trafficking, and its recommendation that certain articles of the Code of Criminal Procedure should be amended to afford victims of trafficking increased protection during criminal proceedings, particularly from traffickers. Amending those articles would also extend increased protection to women engaged in prostitution.

47. **Ms. Sheshi** (Albania) said that the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth had been conducting campaigns against gender-based violence alongside civil society organizations and other State institutions for several years within the framework of the United Nations 16 Days Campaign to Combat Violence against Women. A different approach, which sought to involve boys and men in the fight against gender-based violence, had been adopted in the last three campaigns. In addition, young people, celebrities and politicians had participated in the HeForShe campaign sponsored by UN-Women, in activities run within the framework of the national action plan for involving men and boys, in partnership with women and girls, in the fight against gender-based violence for the period 2014-2019, and in the national "Orange the World" initiative to raise awareness of violence against women and break down stereotypes. The involvement of high-profile role models strengthened the impact of such campaigns. Civil society organizations at all levels also contributed to the development of policies and campaigns for the prevention of violence against women, besides organizing support services for victims and training for officials and shelter staff involved in the provision of assistance.

48. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) said that court decisions and the legal provisions on which they were based were recorded by the Institute of Statistics. Most decisions concerning violence against women invoked articles of the Criminal Code.

49. **Mr. Barjaba** (Albania) said that a road map for safe abortion had been drawn up in 2015. Terminations were carried out in private or public hospitals in order to guarantee due

oversight and information leaflets were distributed to raise awareness of the need for the woman's consent.

50. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) added that improved family planning services were also helping to reduce the number of forced abortions.

51. **Ms. Lubonja** (Albania) said that awareness-raising campaigns had been launched to deter early marriages and NGO-led family planning workshops had been organized in Roma communities. Modules on early marriage were also included in the education syllabus at all levels. Other measures adopted included continuous training for the economic empowerment of women, projects to encourage female entrepreneurship, and microfinancing schemes. The recently approved bill on craftsmanship also focused on promoting productive activity among women and girls.

52. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) said that, with support from UN-Women and the National Chamber of Lawyers, government ministries had been reviewing legislation to determine the amendments necessary to improve women's right to property and had identified shortcomings in the Civil Code and the Family Code. Regional-level regulations would also be reviewed.

53. The National Council on Gender Equality oversaw the functioning of the national coordination and referral mechanism for the protection of victims of domestic violence within the framework of implementation of the Istanbul Convention. The mechanism was operative in most local government units and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, in conjunction with UN-Women, organized training sessions with a view to strengthening the mechanism's capacities and ensuring its effective implementation in all units. Cooperation between central and local governments was crucial to the mechanism's success and more time was needed to observe the results of current efforts. The number of police reports of violence against women had decreased, evidencing a growing awareness among women of existing services, which included counselling and advice on microloans, entrepreneurship and employment. Although providing access to services for victims of gender-based violence in remote, rural regions remained a challenge, NGO-run counselling services were available in many areas. There were also plans to establish additional shelters, including day centres at the local government level, to afford better protection for victims. Because the lack of sufficient resources was frustrating attempts to provide free legal aid, the funding gap was often met by civil society organizations.

54. **Ms. Lubonja** (Albania) said that the State Commission for Legal Aid had been established under the Ministry of Justice and that legal surgeries had been set up to provide information and advice for citizens, enhance their access to justice and combat corruption.

55. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) said that the judicial reforms were ongoing and included amendments to the Act on the organization of the judiciary and changes to the procedures for overseeing trials and lawsuits. More information would be available once the amendments had been adopted.

56. **Ms. Trimi** (Albania) said that the anti-trafficking strategy had been evaluated with support from the International Organization for Migration. Based on the recommendations deriving from that evaluation, an inter-institutional action plan to combat trafficking in persons was being drafted, which would define specific actions and timelines for all relevant institutions. Recommendations designed to support the work of law enforcement agencies had included amendments to the provisions of the Criminal Code concerning the exploitation of children and access to justice for trafficking victims. Albania had ratified the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs and a new legal provision was being drafted that would establish trafficking in organs as a separate offence. Four shelters for trafficking victims had been set up to provide targeted support services and public funds were allocated to those shelters to cover salaries and food provisions. The

Agency for the Administration of Confiscated and Seized Assets had earmarked €20,000 for the renovation of a shelter for victims of trafficking in persons, as well as other resources to fund further NGO projects in the area. Health service cards that guaranteed free and confidential access to health care were distributed to all victims.

57. **Ms. Lubonja** (Albania) said that, while the Ministry of Justice always took into account the recommendations of the Office of the People's Advocate, particular complications, including lack of resources, had thus far prevented implementation of its recommendations regarding free legal aid. However, the recommendations should be given effect within the framework of the ongoing judicial reform process.

58. **Mr. Barjaba** (Albania) said that institutions providing assistance to victims of trafficking worked closely with primary health-care establishments and exchanged knowledge with them in order to ensure that victims received full and adequate care and treatment.

59. **Ms. Al-Dosari** said that more details about forced and selective abortion practices whereby female fetuses were aborted due to the preference for male offspring would be appreciated. She would also like to know how many cases of domestic violence had been prosecuted under article 130 (a) of the Criminal Code, as amended, and, in view of the more stringent legislation now in place, what accounted for the decrease in the number of police reports of such violence.

60. **Mr. Barjaba** (Albania), noting that the level of selective abortions was not considered a problem in the State party, said that the practice persisted in spite of the legislative and institutional framework in place because of deeply-entrenched cultural attitudes that were especially prevalent in poor areas of the country. However, improvements to family planning services and a new reproductive health-care strategy should help to reduce the number of selective abortions.

61. **Ms. Galanxhi** (Albania) said that sex selection had always been a problem in the State party, even before the introduction of the advanced technologies used to determine the sex of the fetus. Recent surveys undertaken by the national authorities with support from the United Nations Population Fund with a view to identifying and addressing the reasons for son preference had not borne fruit.

62. **Ms. Xhafaj** (Albania) said that, while strict eligibility criteria had been established for the provision of legal aid, the Bailiff Service gave special consideration to victims of domestic violence and their families. In 2015, some 100 protection orders for women had been enforced; around 6,000 court decisions had been taken on alimony payments for children; and 10 custody cases had come before the courts, 8 of which had been heard within the proper time frame and 2 of which had been suspended.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.