



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
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Summary record of the 643rd meeting

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Chairperson: Ms. Açar

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

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

Combined fourth, fifth and sixth periodic report of Belarus (CEDAW/C/BLR/4-6; CEDAW/PSWG/2004/CRP.1/Add.1 and CRP.2/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Belarus took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Ivanou** (Belarus), introducing the combined fourth, fifth and sixth periodic report of Belarus (CEDAW/C/BLR/4-6), said that his Government had developed and implemented a national gender policy for the period 2000-2004 based on the recommendations of the Committee on the previous periodic report in January 2000. Virtually every sphere of life in Belarus had been affected by the tremendous economic and social changes that occurred during the first half of the 1990s, which witnessed the establishment of a market economy, the emergence of the private sector and new labour market relations. For the first time in its history, Belarus, a European country undergoing dynamic growth, ranked among the States with a high level of development according to the Human Development Report 2003.

3. Change had brought women greater autonomy and increased participation in the workplace and in political and social life. Women were more deeply involved in business and civic organizations. Their active part in bringing about change in the country had reduced the level of stress, uncertainty, dissatisfaction and despair that they had experienced at the start in the past decade. In short, his Government had made clear progress in promoting the advancement of women and women's rights throughout the 1990s.

4. His Government had implemented a national plan of action to improve the situation of women for the period 1996-2000 and a national programme entitled "Women of the Republic of Belarus". Efforts had been made to bring national legislation in accordance with international legal standards, particularly with respect to the new Civil Code, Marriage and Family Code and Labour Code. He was pleased to note that his Government had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention and had adopted corresponding national legislation on 30 October 2003. It had also ratified the

Convention concerning the revision of the Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952, of 2002.

5. The national machinery necessary for eliminating discrimination had been put in place. In accordance with the recommendation of the Committee to strengthen the national machinery, the Council of Ministers created in May 2000 the National Council on Gender Policy, which included representatives from the executive and legislative branches of government, civil society and academia. The Council conducted scholarly conferences, round tables and training seminars at the national and local levels to raise awareness and formulate strategies to raise the status of women.

6. Special programmes had been established at the local level, *inter alia*, to eliminate discrimination against women, address the social problems of women, families and children, provide employment assistance and health care and guarantee reproductive rights. At the regional level, specialists from government bodies dealing with labour, education, health, internal affairs and other areas as well as civic associations worked with local councils on matters concerning the family, women and social welfare.

7. The development of a women's movement, broadening of partnerships between women's civic organizations and government agencies and exchange of information and cooperation with international women's organizations had all played a positive role in enhancing the status of women. Improvements in gathering gender-specific data had made it possible to conduct comparative analyses of the situation of men and women, resulting in three statistical studies entitled "Women and Men of the Republic of Belarus". The national media was becoming increasingly aware of the status of women, and a system of gender education was being formulated.

8. Several factors, however, had impeded the improvement of the situation of women, including inertia, the slow pace of establishing protection mechanisms, the lack of adequate resources to implement the national gender policy, enduring stereotypes about the role of men and women and weak involvement of men in efforts to guarantee women's rights and equal opportunities. Although Belarusian legislation in no way discriminated against women, the protections against discrimination were not always fully implemented. In accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action and the Committee's

recommendations, the national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005 addressed several priority areas, including human rights; social welfare; education; health; women's participation in decision-making at all levels of government; and violence against women.

9. With respect to women in leadership positions, the participation of women in the legislative and executive branches of government had increased. For example, following the 2000-2001 elections to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly, the Belarusian Parliament, the proportion of women had more than doubled since the previous vote, from 4.5 per cent to 12.7 per cent. A quota system had been applied to the composition of the Federation Council, the upper house of Parliament, of which women made up 28.1 per cent of the members. Although participation of women in local councils was gradually increasing, the proportion of women was lower than in the Council. With respect to the executive branch, the Council of Ministers had two women, the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare and the Minister of Health, an increase from one woman minister in 2000. In 2003, the proportion of women working as deputy ministers and heads of ministerial departments had also grown.

10. Women made up 46.4 per cent of judges in the judicial branch. They were even better represented in the legal profession, in which they accounted for 62.9 per cent of lawyers and 93.4 per cent of notaries. The number of women on the Supreme Court had increased from 3 in 1990 to 11 in 2003, roughly doubling the share of women judges to 27 per cent. The Government of Belarus considered the advancement of women in government decision-making positions to be a priority and recognized the need for gender mainstreaming of State personnel policies. To that end, it had cooperated with UNDP and the European Humanities University to train women for leadership and management positions.

11. National legislation guaranteed the protection of labour rights and equal opportunity employment for all able-bodied citizens, regardless of race, gender, faith, age, political conviction, nationality and social status, as well as the following benefits: free vocational training and retraining; opportunities to participate in public works; and information on job openings. On the recommendation of the Committee, his Government was devoting more and more resources to addressing unemployment among women through, inter alia, job fairs; vocational training for occupations for which

there was a high demand; social and psychological counselling to help women to adapt to the changing labour market; and encouraging self-employment and entrepreneurship in such areas as sewing, knitting, hairdressing, massage therapy and clothing repair. More than 1,000 women, or 55.5 per cent of the total beneficiaries, received grants to start up their own businesses.

12. The Labour Code currently included provisions to grant fathers or other male relatives who were primary caregivers leave from work to care for their children, up to the age of three. A bill was under consideration to extend to men the same right enjoyed by women to take one day off during the workweek to care for their children in families of three or more children under the age of 16 or with a handicapped child up to the age of 18. Families with child dependants accounted for 36.7 per cent of those living beneath the national minimal standard of living. Legislation had provided for support to such families in the form of tax abatements, subsidies for pre-school care, school supplies and textbooks and free school meals. Funds had also been earmarked for single parents and parents from particularly vulnerable sectors of society.

13. The Ministry of Labour had established 121 social protection centres in 156 regions and cities to provide social, economic, psychological, educational and other kinds of assistance to the population. Every effort was being made to assist people in need to become independent and avoid being lost in the social security system. His Government had also made efforts to incorporate the Committee's recommendations on gender mainstreaming the health-care system. The previous years had witnessed a decrease in the birth rate, a high mortality rate among able-bodied men, a deterioration in the health of the population on the whole, a rise in alcoholism and drug abuse and the spread of tuberculosis and venereal disease, among other diseases.

14. There were, however, some positive developments that improved maternity care and the reproductive health of women. The introduction of modern medical technology had allowed for greater early diagnosis of gynaecological problems. To ensure good prenatal and maternity care, which his Government considered a priority, efforts had been made to improve the nutrition and health care of pregnant women. Greater attention had also been given to protecting reproductive health and providing

necessary information on family planning, which had led to a decrease in the number of abortions and a rise in the number of women using modern contraceptive methods. Budget funds had been allocated to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS by making voluntary testing available to all pregnant women. His Government was working with international organizations and civil society to address the problem of HIV/AIDS. However, like many countries with economies in transition, Belarus did not have adequate funds to solve that problem on its own and hoped for further assistance from international organizations.

15. He drew particular attention to the problem of violence against women, which was a serious obstacle to attaining gender equality. According to studies, some 29 per cent of women who were polled had been victims of spousal abuse. To combat such violence, the Ministry of the Interior had identified more than 17,000 perpetrators of domestic abuse, and the police and civic organizations were working with them to prevent further occurrences of it. Sanctions against such offenders included warnings, administrative measures, confinement in correctional facilities and revocation of parental rights. Belarus had participated with eight other States of the Commonwealth of Independent States in a UNIFEM-sponsored campaign to raise awareness about violence against women entitled "A Life Free of Violence". Since a peaceful family life was the basis of a secure society, his Government had incorporated the prevention of violence against women into its national security strategy.

16. Belarus, which had fully accepted the Committee's recommendations on prostitution and the exploitation of children and women, was working with UNDP and the European Union TACIS programme, technical assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States, by strengthening national institutional capacities and developing cooperative transboundary relations between Belarus and the European Union to combat trafficking in women. Efforts were also being made to increase awareness in society about the problem and strengthen the protection and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking. In conclusion, he hoped that the Committee appreciated the efforts that his Government had made to achieve gender equality, and looked forward to open and constructive dialogue with the Committee.

17. **The Chairperson** congratulated the delegation of Belarus on its report and introduction, which provided further information on its policies to implement the Convention. She welcomed the good news concerning steps to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention and urged the Government of Belarus to submit the instruments of ratification so that it could come into force. She also encouraged the delegation of Belarus to ratify article 20.1 of the Convention, which would allow for more effective monitoring of the Convention.

Articles 1-6

18. **Mr. Melander** asked whether women's non-governmental organizations had participated in the preparation of the report. The responses to the list of issues and questions (CEDAW/PSWG/2004/I/CRP.2/Add.1) referred to involvement by women's public associations. However, it was not clear whether such associations were the same as non-governmental organizations. He requested more information on the procedure for registering non-governmental organizations, which seemed unduly cumbersome and time-consuming. In his view, mandatory registration constituted an obstacle to the establishment of such organizations and might even violate the right to freedom of association. Lastly, the delegation should indicate whether the Convention was directly applicable in Belarus, whether the judicial authorities were familiar with it, and whether it had been invoked in litigation.

19. **Ms. Popescu** welcomed the progress made by the reporting State since the submission of the third periodic report. In that connection, she noted the ratification by Belarus of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, the adoption of new Labour and Marriage and Family Codes, and the inclusion in the new Civil Code of definitions of direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of sex. The reporting State's intention to elaborate and adopt a new law on gender equality was commendable. However, she wished to have more information on the law's objectives, as well as on the practical steps taken to implement the national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005.

20. She noted with regret that many of the concerns raised by the Committee in its concluding comments on the third periodic report were still valid. For example, Belarus's legislation remained overly protective of women as mothers, thus creating obstacles to their

participation in the labour market and in society and contributing to the perpetuation of stereotyped roles for men and women. It would be helpful to know to what extent that tendency was attributable to the demographic situation. The reporting State should also provide the information requested in questions 28-32 of the list of issues and questions (CEDAW/PSWG/2004/I/CRP.1/Add.1), which pertained to health and to the situation of Roma and migrant women.

21. **Ms. Morvai** asked why the women's movement in Belarus was not yet a mass movement with influence on political decision-making (CEDAW/C/BLR/4-6, p. 29). While the Government's frank admission was to be commended, the situation itself was regrettable. It would be useful to know whether the number of women's non-governmental organizations had increased since the adoption of the national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005, how such organizations were funded, whether the Government took account of their views, and whether they would participate in the elaboration of the next national plan of action for gender equality. In that connection, she asked whether the Committee's concluding comments would be reflected in the plan and which body would be responsible for monitoring the implementation of its recommendations. Lastly, noting with regret that the National Council on Gender Policy had ceased to function, she wished to know when it would resume its activities, who its members were and how it conducted its work.

22. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said that women in Belarus would continue to face discrimination in the labour market so long as they bore the primary responsibility for domestic tasks. She called for a concerted effort to change that situation, emphasizing that gender inequality should be tackled as a social problem, not a women's problem. It was cause for concern that so many projects for women were funded by international organizations since they might not be sustainable in the long term. In that connection, it would be interesting to learn how much funding had been earmarked for the implementation of the national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005 and what proportion of those resources came from the State budget.

23. Given the high number of women jurists, it was surprising that so few court cases had been brought by women facing discrimination. If women were not using

the available domestic remedies, they would be unable to seek redress under the Optional Protocol. The reporting State should indicate whether Belarusian women were adequately informed of their rights.

24. **Ms. Gabr** said that strong national machinery for the advancement of women was essential for the effective application of the Optional Protocol. She would appreciate additional information on the structure and activities of the National Council on Gender Policy. It would be particularly interesting to learn whether the Council was able to develop strategies to promote women's rights. Noting the low representation of women in decision-making positions, she asked whether non-governmental organizations were able to contribute to the formulation of policy on women. Lastly, she enquired whether the Government had introduced any temporary special measures to accelerate the attainment of de facto equality between women and men.

25. **Ms. Shin** said that the Government did not appear to recognize women as individuals whose rights should be promoted and protected. Its priority was the preservation of the family, which was described in the report as the natural mechanism for protecting its members and a key social institution in which gender roles were recognized and put into practice. She was not convinced that domestic violence could be tackled with due seriousness given such a scale of priorities, although she was pleased to note that it was now regarded as a social problem rather than a private matter. It would be interesting to know whether the recent studies on the issue had dealt with psychological, verbal and sexual abuse, as well as physical violence.

26. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** said that she shared the concerns expressed by the previous speaker regarding the Government's attitude to domestic violence. Noting that the list of sexual offences in the Criminal Code included both rape of a female known to be a minor and rape of a female known to be a child, she requested clarification of the terms "minor" and "child".

27. **Ms. Šimonović** said that the reporting State must honour its international commitments, even during the difficult transition period. She urged it, when reforming its legislation, to use the Convention as a set of guidelines. It was unclear whether the Constitution explicitly prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex or whether the principle of equality of men and women

was embodied in national legislation. The reporting State should also indicate whether it had amended its laws on domestic violence, as had been recommended in the Committee's concluding comments on the third periodic report. In addition, she wished to know whether the report under consideration had been formally approved and, if so, by which body. Lastly, the reporting State should provide data disaggregated by sex and ethnicity, as well as information on the situation of Roma and migrant women.

28. **Ms. Kwaku** said that, according to information from independent sources, there were few non-governmental organizations in Belarus and their activities were severely restricted by the authorities. In that connection, it would be helpful to learn which non-governmental organizations had participated in the drafting of the report under consideration and what the extent of their participation had been. The report referred to 20 national women's organizations that were implementing projects that sought to address problems facing women. The reporting State should explain what the projects entailed, whether they were being carried out in collaboration with the Government and what their impact on women's rights would be.

29. **Mr. Ivanou** (Belarus) said that his delegation would try to answer the Committee's questions as fully as possible. However, it did not have all the statistical data requested to hand and would have to revert to the related issues at the afternoon meeting. In accordance with national legislation, before international instruments ratified by the National Assembly could take effect a law must be adopted. In the case of the Optional Protocol, that requirement had led to a delay in the submission of the instruments of ratification. While the ratification procedure might differ from those in other countries, it did not undermine the primacy of international law. The international treaties to which Belarus was a party were directly applicable in the Republic.

30. Concerning the issue of non-governmental organizations, he said that public associations were the only such organizations recognized in Belarusian legislation. Their activities were regulated by the Act on public associations, which had been drafted in consultation with experts from the Council of Europe and was consistent with analogous legislation in other countries of the region. It was debatable whether the registration requirement was an obstacle to the formation of public associations, and one should expect

non-governmental organizations, given their independent nature, to be critical of the conditions in which they operated. The absolute number of non-governmental organizations was misleading; Belarus had more public associations per inhabitant than almost any other country in Europe, and they participated actively in political, economic and social life. Indeed, the co-chairperson of the Belarusian Women's Alliance was a member of his delegation.

31. The emphasis on women's reproductive function in national legislation was attributable to the demographic situation. The population of Belarus was forecast to decline by 10 per cent over the next 10 years owing to ageing, a trend common across Europe, and to the consequences of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant; the forecast did not take migration into account. The demographic situation constituted a national security problem, which must be addressed in legislation, policies and programmes.

32. **Mrs. Chutkova** (Belarus), responding to questions about the Government's efforts to promote gender equality, said that a basic component of the new draft law on gender equality dealt with women and human rights. Unfortunately, the various bodies working on the bill, in particular the National Council on Gender Equality, had not been able to agree on all of its provisions and it would not be ready for the current legislative session. The recent ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention would, she hoped, help convince those working on the bill that speedy action was imperative. The bill devoted particular attention to the protection of women's rights during the periods of pregnancy, birth and motherhood, including protecting women's rights in the labour market and their reproductive rights in conformity with the recommendations of the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development. Furthermore, the 2002 Demographic Security Act specified, inter alia, that all were free to choose their type of reproductive behaviour. A national strategy for sustainable development up to the year 2020 was in preparation and included a section on gender equality that sought, inter alia, to enhance the role played by fathers in the family and to ensure a more equal distribution of responsibilities at home. There was also a draft law on changes to the Labour Code that sought to eliminate differences in the treatment of women and men, while still protecting the particular reproductive role played by women.

33. With regard to the participation of non-governmental organizations in the preparation of the report, she said that there was as yet no legal basis for their role. However, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, which bore the main responsibility for Government action on gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women, worked closely with women's associations and such collaboration was becoming more frequent. As examples, she cited the United Nations Development Programme project on women and violence, projects on trafficking in women and projects aimed at enhancing women's knowledge of the law and their rights, all of which had included extensive participation of non-governmental organizations. Their contribution to increasing women's awareness and ability to assert their rights under the law and their access to redress was particularly important and assisted the Government in improving laws and bringing them closer to international standards.

34. Non-governmental organizations depended heavily on grants, mostly from overseas. She hoped that the draft law on social projects under the National Programme on Demographic Security would include mechanisms for the allocation of State funds to enable such organizations to execute social projects that were consistent with the Government's overall social programme, such as prevention of drug abuse, rehabilitation of drug addicts and rehabilitation of disabled children. On the subject of national machinery to promote gender equality, she cited the National Council on Gender Policy established in 2000, which was only just beginning to operate effectively owing to earlier bureaucratic shuffling of responsibilities following the merger of several ministries. One of the first items that would be taken up by the Council would be the Committee's comments and recommendations with regard to Belarus's report.

35. **Mr. Ivanou** (Belarus) said that the law currently did not allow State funding of non-governmental organizations, although some activities meeting certain criteria could be and were funded, where, for instance, there was an element of cost-sharing and the activity was consistent with the goals of State policy. He confirmed the previously cited examples of drug addiction and work with children with special needs. With regard to the question about the Roma people and the treatment of national minorities, he said that the Roma formed a tiny minority in Belarus, less than 0.1

per cent, and there were no Government statistics on the group. There had been no documented instance in recent years of inter-ethnic confrontation involving the Roma in Belarus, although he was aware of problems in other East European countries.

Articles 7-9

36. **Ms. Gaspard** noted, with regard to article 7 of the Convention, that the report indicated some relative scarcity of women in leadership positions in Belarus. Some of the language used in the report seemed to be loaded with stereotypical thinking, claiming that women had not prepared themselves sufficiently and were reluctant to get involved in the competitive aspect of striving for and assuming leadership positions, and yet, elsewhere, the report indicated, in apparent contradiction, that at the local level women were actively involved in leadership. The problem seemed most acute at the higher levels and she wondered whether any studies were being carried out to study the situation. She thought a parliamentary commission should be formed to investigate the problem.

37. **Ms. Zerdani** commended Belarus for its report and responses to Committee questions and for maintaining its determination to strengthen social policies during the current difficult period of political and economic transition and the burdens posed by foreign debt and the Chernobyl accident. She noted that the proportion of women elected to the National Assembly was as high as that found in a number of industrialized countries. The many women currently serving in the civil service, the judiciary and the diplomatic service would form the educated elite of tomorrow, fully aware of the country's problems and able to bring progress to the country.

38. **Mr. Flinterman** expressed his concern, in relation to article 7 (c) of the Convention, over the role of non-governmental organizations in Belarus and the rights of women to participate on an equal basis in public life. It seemed difficult to justify, for instance, the long delay in enacting legislation recognizing the partnership between the Government and such organizations and expanding their participation in social programmes. Furthermore, the Committee had received reports of difficulties faced by non-governmental organizations in Belarus with regard to funding and Government insistence that their programmes closely follow State policy. In particular, some of them had allegedly encountered interference in

receiving foreign grants and had had re-registration demands imposed on them by the State, which placed heavy financial and administrative burdens on them and jeopardized their independence. It had also been reported that non-governmental organizations had been barred from representing individual members in court actions. He asked that the delegation clarify the Government's position on their role and in particular those working on women's issues.

39. **Ms. Manalo** said that States parties to the Convention had an obligation to take steps to strengthen the role of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Convention, which meant that they must enjoy autonomy in their operation and be able to work freely without fear of repression. With regard to women's participation on an equal basis in public life, she asked about the vertical distribution of genders in the judiciary. What measures had been undertaken, for instance, to encourage women to aspire to the higher judgeships, including the post of Chief Justice? She noted that the Committee would soon complete its general recommendations with regard to article 4.1 of the Convention on temporary specific measures. She urged the delegation of Belarus to consult those recommendations, which sought to assist States in formulating policies that would create enabling environments for women to rise and convince men that such policies were desirable.

40. **Ms. Kwaku** noted that the report provided little information about women in the foreign service and diplomatic corps. She asked for some statistics on that subject and wondered whether any constraints, legal or otherwise, existed that prevented women from participating equally with men in those sectors. If so, what was the Government doing about the problem? She also asked whether women in Belarus could pass on their citizenship to foreign husbands and to their children with the same rights as men.

41. **Ms. Kapalata** said that, like Ms. Kwaku, she would appreciate further information about women's chances for advancement in the diplomatic corps.

42. **Mr. Ivanou** (Belarus) said, with regard to questions about the status of women in the foreign service, that 12 per cent of the staff of the 40 foreign missions of Belarus were women and that one quarter of the missions included women at the ambassador level. There was also one woman ambassador at large. Of the central staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

37 per cent were women. He assured the Committee that there was no discrimination against women in those services, neither de jure nor de facto. Women had the same rights as men to choose to work abroad. With regard to business, he noted that about 10 per cent of the 1500 private enterprises and the 3000 State enterprises were headed by women. The Central Electoral Commission was also headed by a woman.

43. Belarus had a very high number of non-governmental organizations. They enjoyed a number of protections. For instance, they could be terminated only through legal proceedings and the court decisions could be appealed. Such organizations could, like citizens, sue for protection of their rights and request the assistance of counsel. A recent presidential decree on citizens and judicial procedures had been heavily criticized by non-governmental organizations and was now being revised to better protect the rights of individuals and organizations in court. Furthermore, in certain civil cases specified by the law public associations and unions could represent individuals. There had been instances where, for instance, consumer unions and trade unions had represented members.

44. **Ms. Chutkova** (Belarus) said that problems would arise in the drawing up of national gender policy without the full participation of women in formulating strategies. Virtually every ministry had personnel responsible for monitoring the implementation of the national plan to ensure gender equality. After explaining the procedures followed by the ministries to ensure the promotion of women, she noted that, despite the Government's efforts, there were still long-lasting stereotypes in society and biases in terms of women becoming full-fledged participants in the decision-making process in Belarus. However, progress was gradually being made. The adoption in 1999 of a programme requiring the introduction of a human-rights information campaign in all educational institutions had generated considerable impetus. Subsequently, courses had been introduced with special emphasis on the human rights of women. When monitoring the National Plan, information was received regularly from the Ministry of Education concerning measures being taken to ensure that the courses of study made human rights issues a reality. Refresher courses were being organized for school teachers, and university instructors and textbooks were being reviewed.

45. A large number of women were represented in the judiciary, both on the Supreme Court as well as the Constitutional Court, the highest court in the land, where 5 out of 11 judges were women. There was no separate commission for women in the National Assembly; however, several commissions throughout the Government dealt with social issues, although a separate commission would help resolve concerns more easily. Efforts were being made to convince members of the National Assembly of the need to propose and adopt a law on gender equality.

46. Many high-level jurists believed that it was sufficient simply to make the necessary adjustments to individual legal instruments, such as the labour or civil codes, in order to incorporate more fully issues of gender equality therein. In 2003, the House of Representatives had held two round tables to consider the implementation of the law on gender equality. Efforts made to increase awareness of the need to adopt such a law included an invitation extended to the Lithuanian ombudsman on gender equality and a visit by a number of very high-ranking Belarusian government officials to Sweden to see how gender-equality policies were implemented in Sweden.

47. Both men and women had equal rights to acquire and transfer citizenship to their spouses. A child born on Belarusian territory to parents, one of whom was not a citizen, automatically acquired Belarusian citizenship. If a child was born outside Belarusian territory, then it was up to the parents to apply for citizenship on an equal footing. Regarding domestic violence against women, available data had indicated that psychological violence was more widespread than physical violence; 70 to 80 per cent of women experienced it both in family and in public life. In that regard, the UNIFEM project and the consciousness-raising programme on a life free of violence had made it possible to introduce the topic into discussion. The project's results had also showed that both the State and the general population were giving greater attention to that problem.

48. The Ministry of Internal Affairs was continuing to work on refining statistics regarding violence against women. Thus, since 2002, it had been providing statistical data on murders, and there was a dedicated telephone line for murders committed in a domestic context. It was regrettable that the process of establishing social services to assist women and children victims of domestic violence had not worked

as well as expected. However, psychological and legal consultations were being greatly expanded, and social services would be established in each administrative region of the Republic. The work of psychologists and jurists could also help in disseminating information on those problems and motivating women. It was also hoped that all manifestations of violence would be duly recorded by law enforcement agencies, thus improving statistical analyses. Without a true picture of the extent of that phenomenon, it would be extremely difficult to implement practical measures.

49. By 2010, measures would be implemented to prevent violence against women and children. Of great assistance in that regard would be the introduction into schools of special courses to inculcate and develop behavioural models based on non-violent conflict resolution. The National Programme for Demographic Security also included actions to prevent domestic violence against women. It was gratifying to note that the social service institutions were expanding their partnership relations with the law enforcement agencies. Thus, social workers and psychologists who participated in prophylactic work were also assisting law enforcement officers and making their work more effective.

Articles 10 to 14

50. **Ms. Saiga** said that the fact that women retired earlier than men indicated discrimination, since early retirement affected women's pension payments. She wondered whether that issue was included in the draft amendment to the Labour Code or in another law. The responses to the list of issues and questions had failed to address a number of questions. For example, a question had been asked about migrant workers, but the Government had responded by discussing refugees. She wondered whether migrant workers were accorded refugee status. If not, she would appreciate some data on such workers.

51. **Ms. Achmad** said that the educational measures taken within the context of the national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005 to eliminate gender stereotypes among the young through school curricula was commendable; not many countries had done that. However, she would appreciate additional information about the attitudes and behaviour of boys and girls, which should be monitored. Indeed, she wondered whether there was a monitoring system with appropriate indicators in place.

She would also appreciate information on the master's degree course in women's leadership, especially its content, objectives and principles and on the number of women and men enrolled in the programme. In that regard, she referred to the Committee's recommendations at its previous session that gender equality efforts should target both women and men. Lastly, she emphasized the important role of non-governmental organizations in the educational review.

52. **Ms. Popescu-Sandru** sought information on measures taken by the Government to encourage women to work in less traditional areas of employment and on school dropout rates, especially among girls. She had noted with considerable concern that abortion continued to be the main method of birth control and sought clarification in that regard. The State party should also provide gender-disaggregated data on the number of people with HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases and on therapeutical measures taken to assist such people.

53. **Ms. Patten** asked what measures the Government was taking to address inequalities and how the principle of equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value was applied. Given the vulnerable situation of women in employment, she wondered what action was being taken to address sexual harassment in the workplace and whether the draft labour code included specific provisions on sexual harassment.

54. The delegation should indicate whether a study had been undertaken to identify the obstacles to the implementation of such legislation and what obstacles women faced. Indeed, were women aware of their rights and did they have access to legal assistance? It would be interesting to know whether the State envisaged carrying out a review of the role of the public prosecutor, whose function included not only supervision of the labour laws, but also detection of violations of women's labour rights. Lastly, she wanted to know whether specific measures had been taken to promote easy access to credit for women entrepreneurs and would also appreciate data showing the extent to which women were benefiting from job quotas as well as on the situation of women in public sector employment.

55. **Ms. Kapalata** said that women in Belarus were becoming more susceptible to HIV/AIDS and that poverty seemed to be a very debilitating factor in providing services to people affected with AIDS,

especially women. She wondered whether there were any programmes to raise women's awareness of the specific risks facing them with regard to HIV/AIDS. Information should be provided on services available to women who had been diagnosed as HIV positive and any programmes and plans in place to prevent mother-to-child transmission. It would also be interesting to know why, despite the lack of discrimination against them, there were so few women in the foreign service.

56. **Ms. Šimonović** sought information on the new special leave programme for parents, specifically on how many men and women were taking advantage of it and the types of benefits received thereunder. She also wanted more information on the types of measures that were going to be implemented under the national demographic strategy and security programme and asked whether gender perspectives had been taken into account in that regard.

57. **Mr. Melander** said that any change of attitude would be very difficult unless non-governmental organizations were allowed to work freely without any restrictions.

58. **Ms. Kwaku**, noting that several questions from the pre-session working group had not been answered, asked for information on family planning and sexual diseases, and the impact of the Chernobyl disaster and HIV/AIDS on women's health. She would be particularly interested in the health situation of older women.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.