



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

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Eighty-ninth session

### Summary record of the 2092nd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 8 October 2024, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia

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*Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

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

*Tenth periodic report of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (continued)*  
(CEDAW/C/LAO/10; CEDAW/C/LAO/Q/10; CEDAW/C/LAO/RQ/10)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair** invited the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to continue replying to Committee members' questions.

*Articles 7–9*

3. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that women played a significant role in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the country's diplomatic services. In 2024, women accounted for over 35 per cent of diplomats in the Ministry and its embassies, consulates and permanent missions abroad. Women also accounted for 5 of the country's 27 ambassadors and 4 of its 10 consul generals. A total of 30 per cent of the staff employed in the Ministry were women, which was in line with the target established by the National Assembly.

4. Measures were being taken to further increase the participation of women in the country's diplomatic service. Women diplomats were prioritized in the allocation of fellowships and other opportunities. In line with the guidance issued by the country's development partners, women officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were given priority access to training.

5. Lao women played an important role at the regional and international levels. For instance, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children was currently chaired by a Lao woman. On 4 October 2024, the Lao Women's Union had hosted the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Conference 2024 and the associated awards ceremony. Lao women had also attended the World Women's Forum 2024 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, and the fourth Eurasian Women's Forum in Saint Petersburg, among other international events.

6. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the rate of birth registration had reached 65 per cent following the implementation of an electronic system for managing information on citizens. A wide range of awareness-raising activities had been conducted with a view to increasing compliance with laws governing birth registration. Mobile registration campaigns were organized on important days every year, including International Women's Day and International Students' Day. In 2023, over 62,000 births had been registered.

7. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that a child born to a stateless mother and father could obtain Lao nationality upon request if his or her father and mother were fully integrated into Lao society and culture. In order to obtain Lao nationality, stateless persons were required to speak and understand Lao, to respect the Constitution and to have lived in the country for at least 10 years, or 3 years in the case of experts who had contributed to the development of the country. There were relatively few stateless persons in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

8. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that it was still not clear whether data on registration of children under 18 were disaggregated by area of residence and disability, and whether such data were linked with those held by the education and health services. She would be grateful to know how many male and female stateless persons were living in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

9. **Ms. Ameline** said that she would welcome further information on any measures being taken to promote women's participation in national elections, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and all public authorities.

10. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that information on the number of stateless persons would be communicated to the Committee in writing. The Government had developed a policy to increase women's participation in public affairs. In 2026, the twelfth National Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party would be held to elect the senior members of the Party. Women currently accounted for only a small proportion of members of the Party's Central Committee but plans were in place to increase the number of women members. Efforts would also be made to increase the number of women in the National Assembly, the national Government, local authorities and the foreign service.

*Articles 10–14*

11. **Ms. Akizuki** said that she wished to know what measures had been taken to encourage parents to send their girls to school and to raise parents' awareness of the importance of education in ensuring girls' access to employment. She wondered whether gender-sensitive curricula were developed to challenge harmful gender stereotypes from the earliest level of schooling, particularly in rural and ethnic minority communities, and to promote shared responsibility for domestic and professional roles.

12. She would be interested to hear about any steps being taken to increase girls' access to education, including access to secondary and higher education for ethnic minority and Indigenous girls who wished to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics. She would like to know what plans were in place to provide education in languages other than Lao in order to increase literacy rates among rural women. She would be grateful to learn whether the State party monitored the implementation and assessed the impact of Decree No. 208/GOL/2020 on lifelong learning. It would be useful to hear about any steps being taken to improve the infrastructure and resources of schools in remote and rural areas. What efforts was the State party making to ensure access to quality education for girls and young women with disabilities?

13. She wished to know whether the State party would maintain and expand the School Lunch Programme in rural and remote areas in order to reduce the school dropout rate among girls. She wondered how the State party monitored and addressed child marriage and its impact on girls' education, especially in remote areas. She would welcome more information on any measures being taken to increase access to sexual and reproductive health education and services with a view to reducing child marriage and unwanted pregnancies. Were any strategies in place to provide learning opportunities for pregnant adolescent girls and adolescent mothers?

14. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that groups of parents and teachers had been established to raise awareness of the importance of education and school enrolment for boys and girls. Lunches were provided to poor families, especially those living in remote areas, resulting in an increase in the school enrolment rate among younger children. The Government had published textbooks, provided teaching equipment to primary teachers, developed a new curriculum and trained teachers in how to use it.

15. New schools had been built and existing schools had been renovated, including in remote areas. School infrastructure had been improved, especially at the lower secondary level. The subject of reproductive health was covered in the secondary curriculum. Information and communications technology equipment had been provided to schools, and training had been given to teachers to enable them to upgrade their skills.

16. Students on low incomes were provided with scholarships, leading to a reduction in the school dropout rate. Efforts had been made to improve the early education system and to provide vocational training in order to improve students' access to the labour market. The curriculum for vocational training had also been improved, as had the various higher education curricula.

17. The Law on Persons with Disabilities provided that children with disabilities had the right to access any educational institution on an equal footing with able-bodied persons. Special equipment was provided to children with visual or hearing impairments, and some children with disabilities were granted exemption from school fees.

18. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the Government aimed to reduce the adolescent birth rate and the early marriage rate to zero by 2030. Although both rates were currently falling every year, they would need to fall at a faster rate if the targets were to be met. Efforts would be made to increase access to contraception for adolescent girls and young women. Healthcare services for adolescents and young people would be expanded, and national guidelines on such services would be improved.

19. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that, in order to reduce early marriage, subjects such as the prevention of communicable diseases and HIV infection, gender equality and the safe use of information and communication technology had been incorporated in the university curriculum.

20. **Ms. Akizuki** said that it was still not clear what measures were being taken to raise parents' awareness of the importance of education for girls and of the link between girls' education and employment prospects.

21. **Mr. Tisheva** said that she wished to know what legislative measures were being taken to ensure equal pay and working conditions for women and to improve their access to social security and welfare. She wondered whether the bill on labour skills development and the bill on social protection had been adopted and, if not, when they would be.

22. She would welcome an explanation of the reasons for the sharp decline in women's participation in the labour market and information on any measures being taken to reverse that trend. It would be useful to know how the Government's plans and policies on employment addressed the barriers to employment faced by women belonging to vulnerable and minority groups, including Indigenous women. In view of the very severe inequalities in the labour market, it would be interesting to learn whether the Government would consider adopting a special strategy and programme to promote women's employment, including by introducing temporary special measures.

23. Information on any measures being taken to protect women against sexual harassment in the workplace would be welcome. She wondered whether severe forms of sexual harassment were criminalized; whether women were provided with free legal aid so that they could protect their rights; and whether the State party's anti-discrimination and labour laws provided for protection against discrimination on the basis of family status. She would like to know whether a law to promote a work-life balance for men and women would be adopted, and whether the right to take paternity leave would be established for men working in all sectors of the economy.

24. She wished to know what legislative and policy measures would be taken, and within what time frame, to provide additional protection to migrant women workers. In particular, she wondered whether the Migrant Worker Assistance Centre had been established under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and, if so, whether it incorporated the gender perspective in its work. She would be interested to hear whether an integrated and systematic approach would be taken to combating forced labour in the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone. Lastly, she asked whether any plans were in place to restructure and reduce the State party's international debt, with a view to increasing the resources available for the reform of the labour market and the protection of women workers.

25. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the Government had developed guidelines on employment and was taking measures to develop the skills of the Lao labour force in a wide range of sectors; in the agriculture sector, the skills of 40,000 women had been developed. Vocational training was provided to young people and women living in remote areas. The network of employment services had been improved and extended, and employment centres had been established in 18 provinces. In 2023, employment had been provided to 200,000 people and employment abroad had been found for 95,000 people, including 50,000 women.

26. Efforts had been made to address the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace. For example, the Decision on the Management of Domestic Workers of 2022 provided for the termination of a contract in cases where persons abused their authority, committed sexual harassment or violated the fundamental rights of the employee. The Decision also outlined the process for investigating alleged perpetrators and defined the penalties that could be

imposed. Additional information on other aspects of the implementation of article 11 of the Convention would be provided in writing.

27. **Mr. Safarov** said that he would welcome information on the State party's implementation of health-related strategies and, in particular, its national strategy 2021–2030 and action plan 2021–2025 to prevent and control HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, including statistical data on the results achieved over the previous four years. The delegation might also indicate whether any steps had been taken to adopt legislation to strengthen protection against discrimination for women and girls living with HIV/AIDS and expand their access to services.

28. In the light of reports indicating a rise in the number of victims of domestic violence, the persistence of harmful practices and a reduction in the uptake of sexual and reproductive health services, leading to unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions, he would be grateful for information and data on victims' access to relevant health services. He wished to know whether there was a significant urban/rural gap in terms of women's health and, if so, what measures had been taken to address it, what results had been achieved and what obstacles remained. He would appreciate updated information, including data, on rural women's access to adequate sexual and reproductive health services, including maternal health services. He wondered what action the State party was taking to address the socioeconomic and cultural factors that were at the root of healthcare disparities and to ensure that women and girls from marginalized groups, including Hmong women and women from ethnic minority groups, had access to free health insurance, adequate maternal and child health services, and vaccinations. The delegation might also explain why so-called illegal abortions continued to be criminalized in the State party and provide associated data.

29. He would be interested to know what barriers prevented women and girls living in poverty from gaining full access to the full range of health services; whether those women and girls, including those working in the informal sector, were covered by free health insurance schemes; and what sexual and reproductive health services were provided to women in places of detention. He would appreciate receiving statistical data on the use of such services.

30. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that activities to address discrimination against women and girls living with HIV/AIDS were being carried out under the relevant national strategy and action plan. For example, workshops for medical staff were held to reduce stigma and discrimination against HIV/AIDS patients in health facilities; user-friendly services were provided in counselling centres nationwide; and capacity-building programmes for medical staff were being expanded.

31. In rural and remote areas, which often lacked large hospitals, healthcare workers, village volunteers and village facilitators provided women with information on various health matters, such as hygiene, sexual health, nutrition, pregnancy and childbirth. Rural women and women living in poverty could give birth and receive care in public hospitals free of charge. Other information and data, including on the healthcare services provided to women in places of detention and to victims of violence, would be provided in writing.

32. **The Chair** said that she wished to know how the Law on Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises had benefited women in the State party, with particular reference to the progress made in promoting women-led micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises operating in the commercial goods, trade and services sectors, and whether promotional activities in fields such as e-commerce, robotics and digital marketing had been specifically targeted at women. The delegation might also provide comprehensive statistical data on the subject.

33. She wondered whether the State party was implementing any targeted measures and policies to increase women's access to financial services; what proportion of the beneficiaries of the Rural Micro-Finance Inclusion for the Poor project were women; and how that project had improved the livelihoods and economic resilience of women from vulnerable groups, such as widows, women with disabilities and women migrants. She would like to know whether training on gender equality in the banking sector had strengthened women's financial inclusion and access to credit; whether the State party had taken steps to adopt specific legislation on women's right to land and economic assets, including measures to eliminate

discrimination and strengthen their access to income-generation opportunities in the digital economy; and what was being done to increase women's productive capacities at the village and community levels and in agro-allied industries.

34. She would welcome updated information on the measures that had been taken to enable women working in the informal sector to access the social protection system, including maternity, disability and old-age cash benefits; and the impact of programmes designed to guarantee gender-responsive social protection floors and ensure access by rural women and women from ethnic groups to essential healthcare, childcare and income security. Lastly, she would appreciate more information on the Ministry of Education and Sports vision and goal for gender equality in the education and sports sector, including the level of investment allocated to achieve that goal, and on any plans to expand women's opportunities in sport and strengthen the Lao Women's League.

35. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that efforts to promote women's access to land included Land Law No. 70 of 2019, pursuant to which individuals, legal entities and governmental and private organizations had equal rights to land use, without discrimination on the ground of gender or ethnicity.

36. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that his country was undergoing a digital transformation and transitioning towards a digital economy. Women's access to the banking system and to credit were guaranteed by law. The recent adoption of the Global Digital Compact offered potential benefits for the country in general, and for women in particular.

37. A specific policy had been developed to increase the number of women village chiefs over the coming five years. Activities such as capacity-building and training would be carried out, to enable women to take up leadership positions in their villages and communities.

38. Special measures were being taken to ensure that women, especially women in vulnerable situations, women from ethnic groups and rural women, were covered as a priority by the social protection system. Cooperation with international development partners contributed to meeting the needs of vulnerable groups, including women. Moreover, women were one of the priority groups targeted in the Government's efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Information in that regard could be found in the Government's third voluntary national review, which had recently been submitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

39. The Government recognized the need and was taking action to ensure that women could contribute meaningfully to the country's development, including by ensuring their access to land, which was critical given that women were often engaged in agricultural and conservation activities. That action included issuing land titles in the names of both the husband and the wife.

40. **Ms. Hacker** said that, according to information she had received, up to 50 per cent of land in the State party was owned by foreign entities. If that was the case, she wondered how the State party reconciled that situation with the need to ensure women's access to land.

41. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the Government welcomed foreign investment to contribute to the country's socioeconomic development, including as part of its ninth five-year national socioeconomic development plan for the period 2021–2025. However, foreign ownership of Lao land was not permitted; instead, land concessions could be granted to foster foreign investment. The Government gave priority to protecting the environment and biodiversity and preserving Lao society and culture. For that reason, it carried out promotional activities to ensure that foreign investors abided by national laws and complied with international human rights and labour standards, such as the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

42. **The Chair** said that she wished to know whether there were components within the State party's environmental and social impact assessment framework that promoted gender-responsive foreign investment, protected women's rights and provided for gender-responsive budgeting and procurement, as well as mechanisms to monitor and address the impact of foreign investment on women, in particular in rural areas.

43. **Ms. Akia** said that it would be helpful to know what concrete actions the State party would take to ensure gender parity in the utilization of government initiatives and capacity-building in sectors related to agriculture, climate change and disaster risk management by rural women, women belonging to ethnic minorities, women with disabilities and older women, and their meaningful participation in developing, monitoring and evaluating those initiatives. It would be useful to know how gender-responsive climate financing was integrated into the national budget, in order to support women in adapting to the climate crisis and environmental degradation. She would appreciate receiving disaggregated data on the positive impact of integrating gender equality into the sectors of agriculture, forestry, climate change and disaster risk management.

44. It would be helpful to know what concrete steps were being taken to increase access to quality social services for women living in rural areas, older women, women with disabilities and migrant women. Moreover, she wondered how women living in rural areas and women belonging to ethnic minorities were protected from being trafficked and recruited into sex work.

45. In view of reports of forced evictions resulting from government and private sector investment in development initiatives, it would be useful to know how the State party would preserve ancestral land to prevent environmental and human rights violations and mitigate the impacts of the climate crisis on women; protect ethnic groups from being forcefully evicted from their land and address related discrimination and rights violations; provide effective and adequate compensation to women forcefully evicted from their land; and improve the political, social, cultural and economic rights of women living in rural areas, older women, women with disabilities and women belonging to ethnic minorities, and address rights violations, including the arbitrary arrests of female environmental rights defenders.

46. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that women living in rural areas and belonging to ethnic minorities had participated in the development of the National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction and related legislation. Women would be involved in implementing the national strategy on climate change, for which human resources, funding and a central steering committee had been organized. Provincial committees on natural disasters had been set up, and workshops and training on risk management and assessment and natural disasters had been provided at the provincial level. Risk management and preparedness measures were being developed, such as the creation of committees at the village level and the provision of training on the use of ambulances to transport women during disasters. The national disaster preparedness plan had been piloted.

47. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that gender equality had been mainstreamed in the agricultural sector, including in agricultural production for export, responsible agricultural management, and the National Forestry Strategy 2050 and the National Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Strategy 2040. Women were provided with land, equipment and access to credit and cooperative schemes in order to alleviate poverty and develop agricultural activities. Farmers had established small and medium-sized enterprises in 21 districts, and relevant training had been provided to approximately 6,000 households in over 50 villages, with women constituting 50 per cent of participants. Other services established at the village level were nutrition groups, which had around 19,000 members, including pregnant women, and production units.

48. Information on reproductive health, midwifery services and pharmacy services was provided to the population over 15 years of age, and reproductive healthcare was available to young women, including in rural areas. Targeted awareness-raising campaigns had been conducted on reproductive health, immunization and the prevention of early pregnancy and communicable diseases. Guidelines on healthcare standards, access to healthcare and increasing the quality of healthcare coverage had also been developed.

49. The Lao Women's Union was reviewing the Law on the Development and Protection of Women. The right of women to safe occupations and proper compensation in the labour market was enshrined in legislation. Women's rights to access health services, obtain healthcare information and receive vaccinations were defined in law, as were their rights and obligations in the family sphere.

50. Women's rights had been mainstreamed in the National Strategy for Employment in Rural Areas. A 2018 law on settlement and occupation guaranteed accommodation and stable occupations for people in resettlement areas, in order to reduce irregular migration and alleviate poverty. Moreover, a decree on lifelong learning had been issued in 2020 to enable women and girls, particularly those in rural areas, to access education.

*Articles 15 and 16*

51. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she would appreciate receiving information on training for officers of the People's Supreme Court on the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and the use of the Convention in judicial decision-making. She wished to know whether women human rights defenders, including political dissenters and others charged with criminal conduct, had access to free legal counsel. Under article 89 of the Constitution of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, village chiefs, who did not necessarily have legal training, were responsible for implementing laws and regulations; it would therefore be useful to know whether that process was transparent, independent and free from interference, and whether the chiefs' actions were monitored.

52. Under article 9 of the Family Law, marriage was permitted for young persons between 15 and 18 years of age in special and necessary cases, without defining what constituted such cases; as 30 per cent of women were married before the age of 18, that provision should be reviewed. The provision in article 8 of the Law, stating that a man who did not marry a woman with whom he had had sexual relations should make offerings to restore the spirit of the woman or her family, should also be reviewed as it could stigmatize women. Moreover, it would be useful to know if there were plans to establish social security and childcare arrangements for divorced women, as the Family Law did not provide for maintenance or alimony.

53. Under the 2019 Land Law, it was no longer indicated that land titles should be jointly allocated to both husbands and wives; women must be made aware of joint land titling in order to preserve their ties to the land.

54. Lastly, under article 37 of the Constitution, citizens of both genders had equal rights in social fields and family affairs. Clarification was requested as to whether that legal framework covered all women, including lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women.

55. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the mainstreaming of gender equality in agriculture allowed women to receive training, technical assistance and funding to develop their activities. Women were encouraged to conduct small-scale business activities to support their families. Membership of cooperatives enabled female farmers to generate income.

56. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the country did not have a specific law that prohibited all forms of discrimination. All civil and criminal legal proceedings were conducted on the basis that men and women had equal rights and duties before the law. In criminal proceedings, the investigating organizations, public prosecutors and People's Court created conditions for citizens to exercise their legal rights, in order to ensure that proceedings were conducted correctly and objectively. In civil proceedings, the People's Court created favourable conditions for citizens, foreigners, aliens and stateless persons, to guarantee equality and ensure that the proceedings were based on true and objective circumstances. Citizens had the right to propose laws and bring complaints and petitions to State institutions in connection with issues of public interest or their own rights and interests; those must be examined and resolved as provided by the law. Under the Law on Criminal Procedure, suspects, accused persons and defendants had the right to a defence and to prove their innocence. In the absence of a conviction from the People's Court, the presumption of innocence was maintained.

57. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Family Law, regarding marital customs and sexual relations, were often not followed in practice, particularly among young people and in urban environments.

58. A unit was working to inform women, especially those in rural areas, about their right to inherit and bequeath land and put their name on a land title, and about the risks of placing

their land with the private sector as a deposit in order to obtain credit. The issue of whether the Land Law required both spouses to be named on a title would be verified; such a provision existed in another law.

59. The problems of divorced women left to raise children alone without maintenance payments were alleviated when those women were able to earn an income.

60. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the allegation that forced evictions took place in the country was categorically rejected. The Government and the population cooperated during the implementation of large development projects; those affected were consulted on the impacts in advance. Legislation on relocation, employment and environmental impact assessments was in place.

61. Regarding the independence of the judiciary, the Government had implemented the Legal Sector Master Plan, which had covered all judicial institutions, the National Assembly and the Ministry of Public Security. Training on implementation of the Convention had been provided. The Government and civil society organizations had organized legal aid and outreach activities for women in remote and rural areas in various provinces.

62. The Government would review legislation on divorce and childcare maintenance, with a view to considering relevant social security provisions. Society was tolerant of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community; LGBTQ people had the same rights and obligations as all other citizens and could act freely, within the framework of the law.

63. **The Chair** said that it was not clear whether mechanisms existed to protect women from forced evictions, such as provisions in land acquisition contracts or a redress mechanism in the economic and social impact assessment framework.

64. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the delegation was grateful for the Committee's constructive engagement and encouraged its members to visit the State party in the future. The promotion and protection of human rights should be based on dialogue and cooperation with the country concerned, in line with its priorities and needs. It was critical to address gender-based discrimination within a broad human rights framework, particularly in times of geopolitical tension, armed conflict, economic difficulties and frequent natural disasters. Owing to its limited resources, the Government would welcome support from the international community to promote and protect women's rights and gender equality.

65. **The Chair** said that the State party was commended for its efforts and encouraged to take all necessary measures to implement the Committee's recommendations.

*The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.*