



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

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

### Summary record of the 2078th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 24 May 2024, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia (Vice-Chair)

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*In the absence of Ms. Peláez Narváez, 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 Rwanda (continued)* (CEDAW/C/RWA/10; CEDAW/C/RWA/Q/10; CEDAW/C/RWA/RQ/10)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Rwanda joined the meeting.*

*Articles 10–14*

2. **A representative of Rwanda**, responding to questions raised at the previous meeting, said that Law No. 01/2007 relating to the protection of disabled persons in general provided for the equal rights of persons with disabilities and prohibited discrimination and violence against them. Health facilities were required to treat persons with disabilities no differently from other persons and to provide them with the support and services that they needed.

3. The Ministry of Health was currently implementing a strategy with the aim of quadrupling the number of health workers in the country within four years and thus improving access to all health services, including abortion. To meet its target, the Government was providing support for educational institutions that trained health professionals. Regarding the matter of who could perform abortions, the law was not under review. However, the Government would be willing to undertake such a review if it determined that it was necessary to authorize mid-level health professionals to assist in the procedure.

4. HIV testing was usually voluntary; the only people subject to compulsory testing were pregnant women – a requirement that protected mothers and their unborn children. Health professionals were bound by confidentiality and did not disclose HIV status or any other information concerning patients' ailments or diseases.

5. The Government aimed to provide a safe space for and to alleviate the suffering of the asylum-seekers who arrived in Rwanda. Any mental health issues they experienced would have been developed prior to arrival, in those countries where they had not been well received. The Government took issue with the misplaced criticism of the partnership between Rwanda and the United Kingdom. Solving the global migration crisis called for bold steps such as the agreement reached by the two countries. Measures were being taken to ensure that those who came to Rwanda would live a dignified life, just as Rwandans did. In the past, Rwanda had provided a safe haven for people in need, for example through the emergency transit mechanism for migrants stranded in Libya, established in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Rwanda was one of the safest places in the world to be a woman.

6. **The Chair** said that, while Rwanda had taken innovative measures to realize women's rights, economic inequalities and feminized poverty persisted and the potential of Rwandan women was underutilized. She would therefore be interested to know what progress had been made towards the goal, defined in the National Strategy for Transformation, of achieving universal financial inclusion by 2024. She wondered how effective the Strategy had been in addressing gender disparities in financial inclusion. She would welcome information on the number of beneficiaries of the Government's initiative to support women in cross-border trade, under which they received loans from savings and credit cooperatives. She wondered whether that initiative was a permanent one; whether the number of women-run export businesses had increased since its inception; and whether savings and credit cooperatives operated throughout Rwanda. It would be useful to know whether the Government had evaluated the effectiveness of the "Unlocking Opportunities for Women in Informal Cross-Border Trade" project. She wished to know what laws, strategies and safeguards enabled women to overcome barriers to participation in cross-border trade and benefit from international trade agreements.

7. The Committee would be grateful for statistics on the number of commercial units for women that had been constructed in the country. It would be useful to know whether such

units were appropriately equipped to meet the needs of female vendors and what share of businesses were owned by women. The delegation might describe any steps taken to increase the percentage of the population that held a bank account and to narrow the gender gap in that regard. She wished to know how effective the transition to formal financial services had been for rural women. She wondered whether the Government would consider joining the Global Campaign on Gender-Responsive Public Procurement. Information might be provided on future financial inclusion strategies and plans and measures to increase women's economic security through improved social protection for self-employed women working in the informal economy, paid maternity and parental leave, tax credits and pension benefits. She would be interested to know whether the Government had taken steps to calculate the value of unpaid care work by women and whether it collected data, disaggregated by gender, on citizens' purchasing power.

8. Lastly, she would be interested to know the level of investment by the State and the private sector in promoting the sporting, recreational and cultural activities of Rwandan women, and what steps the Government might take to fulfil women's sporting potential and boost their careers in sport and entertainment.

9. **A representative of Rwanda** said that gender equality was essential for an inclusive socioeconomic transformation. As she had stated previously, over three quarters of Rwandan women relied on agriculture as their primary source of income. Women experienced a higher rate of underemployment than men. More men occupied managerial positions, with women accounting for less than a third of administrative and commercial managers. Men represented the bulk of those employed in mining and construction, while women accounted for the majority of persons employed in health and social work, the wholesale and retail trades, and agriculture, fishing and forestry.

10. Women's access to finance had improved, and it had been reported that significant numbers of women were taking out formal bank loans. It was important to increase the rate of smartphone ownership among women and to train women in digital skills, as many services were provided online. Statistics on the financial inclusion target under the National Strategy for Transformation would be provided in writing. The Government recognized the importance of initiatives for the advancement and empowerment of women, such as the Global Campaign on Gender-Responsive Public Procurement, and was willing to participate in them.

11. In 2023, Rwandan women had spent an average of 7.9 hours per day looking after children and older persons. Unpaid care work was a new concept for Rwanda that was addressed in the bill governing persons and families that was under review by Parliament. The next step would be to develop a clear strategy to clearly distinguish unpaid care work from other forms of domestic work and to measure it in terms of gross domestic product.

12. **The Chair** said that she would be interested to know how successful the "One Cow per Poor Family" programme had been in empowering women. Noting that the State party planned to measure the care economy, she recommended that it take a market approach that clearly recognized the contribution to society made by women who cared for children, older persons and persons with illnesses or disabilities, taking into account the time spent on care and calculating the income that could have been earned during that time.

13. **A representative of Rwanda** said that the "One Cow per Poor Family" programme, which had originally been launched by the President of Rwanda, had been very successful. The programme had improved health outcomes by ensuring that families had milk to drink. The programme had also delivered economic benefits, as families were able to sell the milk that they did not consume and use the proceeds to improve their standard of living. The Government had decided to supplement the school feeding programme, under which it provided about 3 million school meals a day, by providing a daily cup of milk for every child.

14. **Ms. Akia** said that she would be particularly interested to know how the Government's economic empowerment programmes benefited persons with disabilities and refugees, and how many women with disabilities benefited from such programmes.

15. **A representative of Rwanda** said that disaggregated data on programme beneficiaries would be providing in writing.

16. **Ms. Reddock** said that, while she commended the State party on the agriculture programmes it had introduced, notably the school feeding programme, the rural population still had less access to resources, infrastructure and services than the urban population. Furthermore, although it was primarily women who engaged in subsistence farming, they still tended to own small plots of land, of under 0.3 hectares, due to customary practices and household inequality, and women and girls also tended to provide unpaid labour on commercial farms owned by men. Most rural women lacked the 25 per cent collateral needed to access the various available social protection funds. Against that backdrop, she wished to know what progress had been made in implementing the relevant recommendations in paragraph 43 of the Committee's previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/RWA/CO/7-9), specifically, with regard to how rural women were made aware of their rights, including land rights. She also wished to know whether rural women had access to legal assistance in claiming those rights; what the status of land registration and land reform was; and how many women farmers had benefited from agricultural extension services in the past year.

17. The delegation was invited to clarify whether it remained true, under national law, that men and woman had equal opportunity to exercise their parental authority only over their legitimate or legally adopted children. It was also invited to describe the measures being taken to eliminate the stigmatization and discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities, as well as the infrastructure, specialized education and employment opportunities available to women and girls with cognitive and mental disabilities.

18. Lastly, while the Committee recognized the State party's decision to avoid any form of ethnicity-based categorization following the genocide, it remained concerned that the decision obscured the specific problems experienced by Batwa women and girls.

19. **A representative of Rwanda** said that eligibility for social protection programmes was based on household income, not ethnicity. Men and women had equal land rights, including in inheritance matters. Where married couples were in a common property regime, which was the most frequent scenario, land was registered under both spouses' names. However, a considerable number of women owned land that had been registered prior to marriage and were therefore free to use the land as they saw fit.

20. In recognition of the fact that women in extreme poverty were often unable to raise the 25 per cent collateral needed to obtain loans, the Government encouraged them to join cooperatives or savings schemes through which to accrue the missing amount. It also provided them with financial literacy training to help them to overcome the fear of contracting debt and ensure that they remained solvent.

21. **Ms. Reddock** said that it would be helpful to receive data on land registration to gauge the impact of the relevant laws on women's land ownership. It would also be helpful to hear more about any social protection schemes for women in unpaid work or self-employed women who, for example, jointly owned land with their spouse but did not have a say in the allocation of the proceeds from that land and therefore had no pension.

22. Pointing out that the issue of the Batwa people had also been raised by another treaty body and during the universal periodic review, she asked whether the State party might be open to establishing, for a period of 10 years, temporary special measures, in keeping with article 4 of the Convention, aimed at ensuring access to education at all levels for Batwa persons, including women and girls, to improve their socioeconomic status. Clear channels for their integration, inclusion and participation in State policies and programmes on, inter alia, poverty reduction, education, health, housing and disability rights were also encouraged.

23. **A representative of Rwanda** said that measures for persons working in the informal economy included the Better Tomorrow savings scheme, which was promoted by local authorities and the media and was implemented by central and local government institutions in partnership with the private sector and civil society, a digital long-term savings scheme accessible via mobile telephone and a programme focused on women and youth that was delivered through cooperatives.

24. The decision that all State support should be inclusive and allocated on the basis of economic status had been taken as a country and, 30 years on from the genocide, she did not

believe that the country was prepared to return to a system where people were categorized by ethnicity.

25. **Ms. Akia** asked what steps the Government was taking to advance rural electrification and to what extent State funding for climate action was focused on women given that, owing to their involvement in the agricultural sector, they bore the brunt of the effects of climate change.

26. **A representative of Rwanda** said that, since the problem of energy in rural areas was often not one of proximity but of affordability, government social projects included support for gaining access to the electrical grid. The Government would, moreover, continue to invest in infrastructure to facilitate access to electricity and achieve the target of 100 per cent coverage. The measures the Government was taking to mitigate climate change included reforestation, the provision of non-wood-burning stoves and the introduction of incentives to switch to electric vehicles.

#### *Articles 15 and 16*

27. **Ms. González Ferrer** said that the Committee would appreciate an update on the measures taken to protect the economic rights of women in informal unions or marriages, for which there was often no dowry or marriage contract. How could women in such unions prove co-ownership of common shared assets or a right to inheritance if they had no ownership title? According to information received by the Committee, some 8 per cent of married women reported that their husbands had more than one wife despite the fact that polygamy was illegal. While the legal age for marriage was 21, the Government had reported that 5.5 per cent of women had married before the age of 18 and some even before the age of 15. The Committee had received reports that adolescent refugee girls were especially at risk of sexual exploitation and early marriage and that some families agreed to forced marriages in order, for instance, to protect victims of gender-based violence against ridicule. What action was taken by the Government to block such marriages, and what were the consequences for people who violated the law and entered into such unions with minors? The Committee would like to know what action was being taken to change such patriarchal cultural norms; how the Government enforced marriage laws and the rights of women in consensual unions; what sort of reforms were currently under consideration to strengthen family law and bring it into line with the Convention; and whether civil registries were easily accessible to people wishing to formalize their unions.

28. **A representative of Rwanda** said that marriage practices were not always in line with the law. Polygamy was illegal, but some cases still existed, and couples sometimes lived in informal unions even before reaching the legal age of marriage. The Government was aware of the risks involved in informal unions, including the lack of property and inheritance rights, and encouraged people in such unions to formalize their relationship through legal marriage.

29. Women and men in legal marriage had identical rights to inheritance and property. The failure to pay a dowry was not an impediment to marriage. A number of people had been convicted for marrying minors, and the Government and civil society carried out prevention and awareness campaigns, including at schools, to address the problem of early marriage. As girls who entered into unions before the legal age of marriage often did so because of pregnancy, the Government conducted training activities on reproductive health.

30. **The Chair** said that, despite the progress made in advocating for gender equality and the efforts of the national gender machinery, there seemed to be a lack of interaction between the machinery and various other sectors.

31. **A representative of Rwanda** said that the budgeting process was important in ensuring interaction and partnership. Budget outlay proposals could not be approved by Parliament if they did not include gender mainstreaming. As gender was a cross-cutting issue, both public and private institutions must, by law, have a gender mainstreaming strategy, and every government ministry employed a high-level gender expert who ensured gender mainstreaming. The National Women's Council had branches at all levels, including the grass-roots level, and there was thus a presence at each level advocating for gender mainstreaming. Private sector bodies, including financial institutions, too had adopted suitable policies. Encouraged by the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, some had

established early childhood development and mothers' care rooms for their employees with small children.

32. **The Chair** said that the Committee had appreciated the rich interactive dialogue with the delegation. It would have been desirable for the Committee to have had the opportunity to interact directly with representatives of the private sector and the national human rights institution, as that would have made it possible to strengthen their sense of ownership of gender issues. She encouraged the State party to accept the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention concerning the meeting time of the Committee.

33. **A representative of Rwanda** said that the dialogue had drawn attention to gaps and areas for improvement in ensuring the rights of women in her country. The Government would give due consideration to the Committee's recommendations.

*The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.*