



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 2091st meeting*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 8 October 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Peláez Narváez

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* No summary record was issued for the 2090th meeting.

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.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 (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. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic**, introducing her country's tenth periodic report (CEDAW/C/LAO/10), said that over the previous five years, her country had been affected by the direct and indirect consequences of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The economic challenges that had faced its people had disproportionately affected women. The Government remained committed to improving women's living conditions and well-being. Unemployed persons and women factory workers were two of the groups who had been given priority in the allocation of financial subsidies during the pandemic; a total of 61,511 people had benefited from those initiatives. The Government had also adopted a new national agenda to address economic and financial difficulties, and measures continued to be taken, as part of the overall national development agenda, to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women. Over the previous five years, the National Assembly had amended or adopted more than 50 laws, several of which were aimed at strengthening women's rights and ensuring gender equality. As well as the Law on Gender Equality, they included the amended Law on Handling Petitions, which was designed to facilitate the submission and consideration of petitions by persons seeking redress, including women victims of rights violations.

3. The Government was committed to ensuring that its action plans on gender equality were implemented at all levels. National and local agencies were tasked with adopting gender-based approaches to development and introducing gender-responsive budgeting. New amendments to the national chart of accounts would come into effect in 2025, further enhancing the visibility of gender-responsive budgeting measures.

4. The Government had adopted a "no wrong door" approach to victim support, which was aimed at ensuring that women and girls who were victims of violence had access to essential services such as healthcare and legal aid. Front-line staff in 6 provinces and 10 districts had received training to enhance their capacity to deliver timely and effective assistance to meet the specific needs of victims. The Centre for Counselling and Protection of Women and Children of the Lao Women's Union currently operated in six provinces, and victim support facilities had been strengthened at Mahosot Hospital and the mother and child hospital in Vientiane. Each year, a 16-day campaign to raise awareness about eradicating violence against women and girls was conducted at the national and local levels. The Government had also initiated a study on the use of technology to address gender-based violence. Front-line staff, particularly women, had received training on safe Internet usage and how to deal with online fraud, exploitation and intimidation, and efforts were being made to strengthen effective response mechanisms and coordination among technology companies, service providers and front-line responders.

5. The Government was taking various measures to eradicate child marriage, including by strengthening legal and administrative frameworks, investing in education and encouraging communities to address the challenges posed by such harmful practices. A national study on early marriage was under way, and its results would be used to shape future government policies and action plans. Furthermore, a number of support measures had been made available for young mothers and early school leavers, including small grants and vocational training. Branches of the Committee on Child Protection and Assistance had been established in 684 villages across 23 districts and, to support that expansion, 1,554 people had received training.

6. Despite the efforts made to train women in leadership skills, the proportion of women in the National Assembly was less than 30 per cent and had fallen following the most recent parliamentary elections. The Government was conducting a comprehensive review to identify the barriers that women faced, and the results of that review would be used to

formulate strategies aimed at increasing the participation of women in the 2026 elections. On the other hand, the target set for women's representation in the People's Provincial Assemblies had been achieved, and women held high-ranking positions in the Government, local administrations, the armed forces and the judiciary.

7. Women farmers' access to economic resources and opportunities had been improved as a result of training programmes introduced by the Government. The Government had also adopted seven key policies to create favourable conditions for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, and it was encouraging the emergence of new entrepreneurs. Policies were being actively implemented to support women's participation in business activities through banking systems.

8. In line with the Government's commitment to enhancing access to education, the Ministry of Public Health had taken steps to ensure that schools had been able to reopen safely following the COVID-19 pandemic, including by making public announcements on television, radio and online platforms. The Government had set up an education database known as "Khang Panya Lao" and was actively promoting the use of digital educational tools to improve learning opportunities throughout the country. It was also committed to strengthening healthcare services and, as a result of its efforts to raise awareness about sanitation, nutrition and comprehensive prenatal and postnatal care, the maternal mortality rate had fallen to 36.6 deaths per 100,000 live births.

9. Vocational institutions, skills development centres and mobile training units offered vocational training in 37 occupations for unskilled workers, unemployed persons and people pursuing new job opportunities. Those measures had reached 14,034 persons, 38 per cent of whom were women. Furthermore, 15,436 women workers in various sectors had benefited from skills development programmes delivered by labour units, and 1,298 women had undertaken skills assessments to ensure compliance with national workforce standards. As a result of the Government's measures, 276,581 individuals had been trained for the labour market, including 118,043 women. The Government had also provided 181,497 female victims of natural disasters with assistance, many of whom were poor or in a vulnerable situation.

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10. Ms. Xia said that she would like to know whether any steps had been taken to incorporate a specific definition of gender-based discrimination into the Constitution, the Penal Code or other legislation. In the absence of such a definition, the delegation might like to explain how the State party ensured that those responsible for acts of gender-based discrimination were brought to justice. It would also be useful to know how many cases under article 224 of the Penal Code had been brought before a court, and what further measures had been taken to incorporate the Convention into the domestic legal order and how effective they had been. For example, had members of the judiciary been trained to apply the relevant pieces of legislation in their rulings? Were citizens able to invoke those laws before the courts to defend their own rights and interests?

11. She wished to know to what extent the Convention was addressed in the workshops held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to raise awareness of the human rights treaties that had been signed by the State party and the recommendations that had been received during the most recent universal periodic review cycle. It would be helpful to know how many times the Convention had been discussed and what role the workshops had played in ensuring that the Convention was implemented in the State party.

12. The Committee would welcome updated information on the measures taken to implement the Law on Gender Equality and the National Strategy on Gender Equality. In particular, she would like to know what support measures had been taken, including through the allocation of financial, human and technical resources, to assist women in rural areas, women belonging to minority ethnic groups and women with disabilities.

13. Lastly, it would be interesting to know whether the State party encouraged its citizens to avoid resorting to legal action and, instead, to use peaceful mediation channels to resolve problems relating to gender-based discrimination and gender inequality. If so, she would appreciate it if the delegation could explain how the State party ensured that those responsible

for acts of discrimination against women did not escape criminal punishment by having their cases resolved through a process of mediation.

14. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that, pursuant to article 224 of the Criminal Code, discrimination against women was punishable by imprisonment for between 1 and 3 years and a fine ranging from 3 million to 10 million Lao Kip. There had been no recent court cases in which the article had been invoked, partly because emphasis was placed on non-adversarial dispute resolution mechanisms such as mediation. In that regard, village mediation units played a unique role in settling non-criminal cases through the application of natural justice principles. Members of such units included the village elder, who was the most respected member of the community, and a representative of the Lao Women's Union. Efforts were made to avoid court proceedings, which were time-consuming and expensive, with the goal instead being to achieve harmony by non-confrontational means. Individuals who were dissatisfied with the outcome of a mediation process were free to pursue the case through the formal justice system. As part of preparations for the fourth universal periodic review cycle, the National Committee on Human Rights was focusing on the implementation of recommendations from the third cycle, several of which concerned the Convention and women's rights and empowerment.

15. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that his country would receive a visit from the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights from 19 to 29 November 2024, which would provide an opportunity to discuss gender mainstreaming and the effectiveness of workshops on gender equality.

16. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that steps were being taken to disseminate the 2019 Law on Gender Equality at the provincial and village levels through the Lao Women's Union, and that adequate resources were allocated to the Law's implementation, including through local policies and projects.

17. **Ms. Hacker** said that she would welcome a detailed description of the obstacles that were preventing the State party from establishing an independent national human rights institution in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles), together with an indication of whether political parties other than the Lao People's Revolutionary Party were permitted to field candidates in parliamentary elections, and if not, why not.

18. The Committee had received alarming reports of severe restrictions on civil society organizations, including information that women's rights groups were confined to working through the Lao Women's Union, a State-controlled body; that online expression was tightly regulated; that the Penal Code was used to restrict freedom of assembly and prosecute activists who questioned the Government; and that several women human rights defenders had suffered ill-treatment at the hands of the Government, the judiciary and the prison authorities. It would be useful to hear about recent efforts by the State party to review and amend laws, regulations and decrees that unduly restricted freedom of expression in order to ensure their compliance with international human rights standards, including article 3 of the Convention. She also wished to know measures were being taken to investigate the disappearances, ill-treatment in prison and deaths of women human rights activists, to prevent any recurrence of such cases and to provide compensation to victims. Noting that the State party did not appear to collect and publish comprehensive, disaggregated data on a systematic basis, she asked whether there was a public website through which detailed intersectional statistics on sex and gender were disseminated annually.

19. **Ms. Bethel** said that she would be grateful for a response to concerns that the State party was not making use of temporary special measures to promote substantive equality for women and girls, especially those who were systemically disadvantaged. She wished to know what was being done to demonstrate the value of such measures to relevant government officials, parliamentarians, members of the judiciary, employers, representatives of women's non-governmental organizations and the general public, and to raise public awareness of the impact on women's rights of failing to employ such measures. She wondered whether the State party would consider adopting temporary special measures and incorporating them into domestic legislation and national action plans in order to ensure women's full participation in all areas of life, including agriculture, business, climate change adaptation and leadership

roles. More generally, she would be interested to know what steps the State party was taking to collaborate with relevant stakeholders, including from civil society, in implementing temporary special measures to ensure respect for, and the enjoyment of, women's rights as an integral objective of national development.

20. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the Government had taken due note of the recommendations it had received from the international treaty bodies with respect to establishing an independent national human rights institution, had studied the Paris Principles and examples of institutions in other countries, and had organized workshops and seminars that had addressed the role of such institutions. Bearing in mind the fact that the establishment of an institution would require human and financial resources, the Government had decided that it instead needed to strengthen existing national bodies, which worked together to fulfil some of the main functions of an institution. For example, the National Committee on Human Rights played an important role in advocating the ratification and dissemination of human rights instruments and, with the support of a national network of human rights focal points, in responding to complaints of violations. In some cases, task forces or working groups were set up to investigate allegations. The Government was working to enhance the functioning, impartiality and independence of the judiciary and the effectiveness of the complaints procedure of the National Assembly. Only 118 of the 193 United Nations Member States had established an independent national human rights institution, of which a mere 15 were in Asia.

21. The very serious allegations made in the shadow reports submitted to the Committee by foreign-based civil society organizations were exaggerated and did not reflect the reality of the country. Such reports were not objective and amounted to disinformation or even hate speech from individuals who had never even set foot in the country. The so-called human rights defenders mentioned in some of the allegations had in fact used freedom of expression as a pretext to violate the law and had been rightly prosecuted and convicted.

22. **The Chair** said that civil society organizations and other stakeholders made a vital contribution to the Committee's consideration of State party reports and that the Committee took appropriate steps to cross-check all information sent to it.

23. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the Government planned to conduct a gap analysis of the domestic legal framework, with a particular focus on provisions governing the freedoms of expression and assembly. It was important to bear in mind that freedom of expression was not absolute and could be the subject of legitimate restrictions under international human rights law, including article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

24. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that measures had been adopted to strengthen the capacity of the Lao National Statistical Bureau to collect and use sex-disaggregated data: gender equality indicators had been included in national surveys such as the population and housing census, and sectoral guidelines had been developed on the effective use of disaggregated data.

25. The Government endeavoured to raise awareness of the importance of having women in leadership roles and encouraged women to stand in elections. One of the current Vice-Presidents of the National Assembly was a woman. The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce had prepared action plans to boost women's representation in high-ranking positions. In the business sector, specific training programmes had been developed for women, and steps had been taken to remove all legal obstacles to their advancement. Women accounted for 48 per cent of all employees in the business sector, 49.8 per cent in the sector of industry and commerce and 59 per cent in the service sector.

26. **Ms. Hacker** said that she wished to know how long the process of establishing a human rights institution based on the Paris Principles would take and how many cases concerning gender-based discrimination had been heard by the State party's civil, criminal or administrative courts over the previous five years, as well as the outcome of those cases. She failed to understand why someone had been imprisoned for criticizing the Government. In that connection, she would therefore like to find out how much time would be needed to amend the Penal Code with a view to enhancing freedom of expression. She would be grateful if the delegation could clarify whether the data from the various national surveys mentioned

by a member of the delegation were updated annually, where they were published and whether they were accessible to the public.

27. **Ms Bethel** said that she had not heard an answer to her question regarding challenges to the use of temporary special measures to advance women's rights. She wondered whether it had been explained to parliamentarians and other stakeholders that the use of such measures was not discriminatory. In particular, she would like to know whether temporary special measures could be incorporated in national development policy in order to promote women's rights in the agricultural sector or to reallocate technical, technological and financial resources with a view to improving the socioeconomic status of women and increasing food production and security.

28. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that he was unable to give an exact timeline for establishing a human rights institution based on the Paris Principles, as various models from other countries were being studied as part of an ongoing learning process. The person mentioned by Ms. Hacker had been imprisoned not for criticizing the Government but for violating article 117 of the Penal Code and spreading distorted anti-government propaganda to stir up social unrest. In 2025, a thorough review of amendments to the Constitution to bring it into line with the State party's obligations under international human rights law would encompass article 44 thereof on freedom of expression, which covered freedom of writing, speech and association within the limits established by the law. The statistics obtained from the 2025 population census would shed light on a wide range of gender issues and would serve as a basis for the preparation of the next five-year plan and for improving the legal system.

29. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that all data collected from national surveys were posted on the website of the Lao National Statistical Bureau. Since the State party had set itself the aim of increasing the number of women parliamentarians by 2036, a survey would be conducted to discover why more women were not elected to Parliament. The challenges to the implementation of temporary special measures stemmed from a lack of human and financial resources. In order to ensure gender equality, it would be necessary to change the mindset and behaviour of some people who still discriminated against women.

30. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that no cases concerning gender-based discrimination had been heard by the State party's courts because peaceful mediation channels were preferred.

31. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she wished to make it clear that article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights permitted restrictions to freedom of expression only on limited grounds, such as the protection of national security, public order (ordre public) or public health or morals.

32. In view of the fact that the State party had yet to promulgate a national action plan in pursuance of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and in accordance with the Committee's general recommendations Nos. 30, 35 and 37, she would be grateful for an indication of whether the State party would consider addressing the rise of artificial intelligence, along with the potential weaponizing of technology and its impact on women's security, in a national action plan under the women and peace and security agenda. Similarly, she wondered whether it would consider including in that plan subjects such as the impact of militarization and extreme security measures, the strengthening of full accountability under the law, and due process for women, including minority women and women human rights defenders.

33. She would appreciate a description of the action taken by the State party to counter harmful traditional practices that reinforced patriarchal attitudes and discrimination against women and girls, particularly those from rural areas and ethnic minority groups. She wished to know whether the Government would consider revising the Law on Combating and Preventing Violence against Women and Children to cover cyberharassment of women and online scams that targeted impoverished women, in order to bring it into line with the Global Digital Compact and the recently adopted United Nations Convention against Cybercrime. The Committee would welcome information on whether, when revising the Penal Code, the State party would be prepared to include the absence of affirmative consent as an element of

the crime of rape. The Committee was concerned by the fact that the law did not criminalize sexual harassment or obstetric violence.

34. In the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone, workers were often the victims of forced labour, debt bondage and forced sex work, and children were frequently subjected to sex tourism. She therefore wished to learn whether the State party was prepared to apply the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and enforce environmental, social and governance guidelines on transnational corporations so as to address the gender challenges in the zone. She was anxious to discover whether economic policies took account of the most vulnerable sectors of society, especially women from minority ethnic groups. Lastly, she would welcome information on any steps taken to assess the impact of the economic crisis on women and create pro-poor policies, in order to ensure that gender-based violence and food insecurity did not worsen the poverty of rural families.

35. **Ms. Rana** said that the Committee would like to receive updated information on the human, technical and financial resources allocated to the implementation of the Law on Anti-Trafficking in Persons and phase III of the National Plan on Trafficking in Persons. It would be further interested to hear about any key policies that had been introduced and implemented and how they had contributed to effective anti-trafficking measures. She wished to know how the implementation of the plan was monitored, whether it had been reviewed and whether it would be extended or renewed.

36. She would appreciate a description of the action taken to combat impunity for the sale and trafficking of women and girls in the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone and to ensure that the security forces were addressing the challenges effectively. She would welcome information on any plans to build the capacity of law enforcement and judiciary personnel to investigate, prosecute and secure convictions in trafficking cases.

37. She would be grateful for clarification of whether victims of human trafficking could access the counselling and protection centres mentioned by the head of the delegation in her opening statement. She wished to know whether there were any plans to strengthen survivor services and increase resources, for example by expanding shelters, legal aid services and vocational training programmes for women and girls from rural and ethnic communities, particularly in provinces where there were higher trafficking risks. The Committee was curious to know whether any alternative economic support mechanisms were available to trafficking survivors, especially those repatriated from other countries, to prevent their renewed trafficking.

38. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security was being translated into Lao. The Government had already drawn up a national action plan for gender equality and a national action plan for the prevention and elimination of violence against women, and it was in the process of formulating a women's development plan. The action plans would encompass women's participation in decision-making and the promotion of women's leadership positions in political and public sectors, gender mainstreaming, climate change, risk reduction, nutrition and food security. The current national action plan spanning the period 2021–2025 was being evaluated, and a plan of action for the period 2026–2030 was being drafted.

39. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that, in order to combat discrimination against women from minority ethnic groups, Lao women strove to work with local authorities at the provincial, district and village levels to disseminate laws and help women from such groups to understand the law and obtain access to legal services in order to protect their legitimate interests. Workshops had been organized in six provinces on women's reproductive health and the prevention of violence against women. As from 2026, men would be invited to participate in such workshops, in an effort to promote gender equality within families and communities and to alter behaviour, attitudes and stereotypes.

40. Anti-trafficking committees had been set up at provincial, district and village levels. Protecting the victims of trafficking was central to their work. A focal point had been established in the Ministry of Public Security to address the issue of trafficking in persons. Six programmes had been put in place to implement phase III of the National Plan on Trafficking in Persons. The government was endeavouring to create widespread awareness

of the dangers and harmful effects of human trafficking. Anti-trafficking events were held every year on 3 July. Information about the law against trafficking was disseminated on radio, television and the social media, along with advice about how not to fall prey to that practice.

41. The public was instructed in how to identify victims of trafficking and how to refer them to sources of assistance, such as law enforcement officers, the legal profession and village mediation units. The six counselling and protection centres assisted both victims of trafficking and victims of domestic abuse. A shelter for victims of trafficking had been opened in 2022. Women and children identified as victims of trafficking in persons were first rescued and then referred to the Lao Women's Union, which provided shelter and other services and helped to reunite them with their families and reintegrate them into society. Medical treatment was provided in cooperation with the public health authorities, while the Ministry of Justice assisted in ensuring access to legal services. The Lao Women's Union could provide legal support, attend police interviews, monitor investigations, help to ensure prosecution of traffickers and assist with applications for compensation. Vocational training was provided, based on individual needs assessments; the Union could also facilitate access to further education and provide grants for training.

42. The Government had made great efforts to address the problems of human trafficking, forced labour, forced prostitution and other human rights violations in the Golden Triangle. The Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone Labour Office monitored companies operating in the region, among other things to ensure that workers received medical examinations. Criminals were prosecuted in accordance with the law, in coordination with other agencies. The Government also worked with foreign embassies and international organizations in supporting and protecting the Lao labour force in the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone. Where necessary, individuals were repatriated to their villages of origin.

43. The secretariat of the National Committee for Anti-Trafficking in Persons was responsible for developing a legal framework on the detection of trafficking in persons. In the previous two years, it had also produced guidelines on the protection and referral of victims. The Lao Women's Union had issued standard operating procedures for its counselling centre, which were currently being revised. It had also developed guidelines on assistance to victims, their safe and effective repatriation or social reintegration and measures to prevent recurrence. The guidelines had been submitted to the National Committee and, once they had been adopted, the Lao Women's Union would arrange training on their application in the relevant sectors.

44. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic**, replying to questions on online or technology-facilitated gender-based violence, said that the National University of Laos had organized various initiatives in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). As part of efforts to improve women's online security, notably with regard to Internet scams and online sexual violence, the Lao Women's Union, in cooperation with the Ministry of Technology and Communications, the Department of Cybersecurity, a national telecommunications company and civil society, had recently organized a workshop on building a more inclusive and resilient cyberspace for the ASEAN Committee on Women.

45. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that an appropriate definition of consent in connection with cases of rape was a question that needed thorough study. The articles of the Penal Code criminalizing rape currently covered situations in which a woman was rendered defenceless by the use of force, weapons or chemical substances; rape and subsequent murder; and sexual intercourse with a child.

46. With regard to the suggestion to use the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to help deal with the problem of trafficking in persons in the Golden Triangle, he had recently attended a session of the Asia Pacific Forum in Bangkok, at which more than 2,000 participants from over 100 countries had discussed business and human rights. Plans were currently being made at the national level to work with development partners such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to draft a national action plan on business and human rights.

47. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that, in 2024, the Lao People's Democratic Republic had hosted the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime, which had adopted the Vientiane Declaration on Enhancing Law

Enforcement Cooperation Against Online Job Scams. The State made every effort to cooperate within the multilateral framework, for example the Mekong Cooperation Framework, and other bilateral mechanisms. Memorandums of understanding had been signed with Cambodia, China, Thailand and Viet Nam, and the Government worked closely with international organizations, civil society and non-governmental organizations on the issue.

48. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she would appreciate further information on the increasing feminization of poverty as a result of the economic crisis, a phenomenon that could be seen as a form of structural violence; and on forms of obstetric violence, as reflected in the pervasive nature of obstetric emergencies in the State party.

49. While she agreed that non-adversarial mediation had an important role to play in the justice system, she wished to remind the delegation that mediation and informal justice were not encouraged in cases of gender-based violence, which should be dealt with under criminal law.

50. **Ms. Rana** said that she wished to commend the State party's efforts to deal with trafficking in persons. Noting that the National Plan on Trafficking in Persons would run until 2025 and that challenges still persisted in that area, she would like to know whether it would be extended. Had the application of the Plan been monitored in accordance with the mechanism provided for and, if so, with what results?

51. She would also like to know how the State party worked with neighbouring countries to ensure the safe return and protection of trafficking victims. While welcoming the State party's commitment to learn from other countries in the region in strengthening its own mechanisms, she would be interested to know what action it had taken in pursuit of that goal. Lastly, she wondered whether the State party's COVID-19 response plan had taken account of the heightened risk of trafficking.

52. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the implementation of the National Plan on Trafficking in Persons 2021–2025 had indeed been monitored, and the Plan had been revised in 2023. The challenges were such that the objectives had not been fully attained and, owing to the economic crisis, there was a limited budget. The Government was working with international and non-governmental organizations in order to implement the programmes and projects under the Plan, and a plan for the period 2026–2030 was being drafted.

53. As to cross-border cooperation, the Ministry of Public Security was training immigration officials and front-line officers at checkpoints in order to enhance their understanding and awareness of trafficking issues. Any victims of trafficking in persons identified by officials could be referred to the Lao Women's Union, while perpetrators could be arrested and prosecuted.

54. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that village mediation committees could consider certain civil, commercial, environmental and labour matters but were not empowered to deal with matters relating to family relationships and conflicts, including domestic violence. Disputes within the family, including matters of custody, debt, affiliation, guardianship and violence, fell under the scope of the Civil Code.

55. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that COVID-19 had affected more than 200,000 people in his country; more than 60,000 had died. The impact continued to be felt and had been compounded by the other global crises that had broken out more recently, as well as by natural disasters and climate change. However, the country was beginning to recover, thanks to measures taken by the Government. Indeed, preparations were under way for the Lao People's Democratic Republic to graduate from the least developed country category, in accordance with a United Nations resolution adopted in 2021.

56. Two national agendas had been adopted, one to deal with drug trafficking and the other to address economic problems, in order to see the country through the current difficult period and enable its people to continue to participate in and benefit from development. The economy was gradually recovering, with a growth rate of around 4.5 per cent expected for 2024.

Articles 7–9

57. **Ms. Ameline** said that she commended the progress made by the State party towards gender parity in the National Assembly and the implementation of parity plans in several ministries. If full parity was to be achieved, however, as called for in the Committee's draft general recommendation No 40, on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, a more global and systemic approach was needed. In the absence of political pluralism, she would like to know how the State party might set about expanding the electoral base in such a way as to facilitate women's access to the Party, Party governance and national, provincial and local elections. In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, how might such development be speeded up?

58. She would appreciate information on any initiatives to ensure women's genuine participation in the life of the Party, in the Party Congress and in the Party Central Committee, to reflect their legitimate role in furthering the country's development. How could the Lao Women's Union contribute, for example by training election candidates at the local and national levels? How could a new culture of governance be promoted through greater involvement of civil society?

59. She would like to know what initiatives might be taken in the short term, possibly including a special plan for parity, to engage women in all their diversity, particularly those from ethnic minorities and younger women, and what incentives the State party could provide to encourage women to increase their involvement, particularly at the local level. She wondered what steps the State party, as a member of ASEAN, could take to ensure a more visible representation of women in regional organizations, in ambassadorial positions and at international conferences.

60. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she would be interested to know whether the Ministry of the Interior's birth registration campaigns were conducted on an annual basis. She would also like to know whether the State party's commendable initiatives to encourage birth registration had effectively increased the registration rate, and if so by what percentage. In its replies to the list of issues ([CEDAW/C/LAO/RQ/10](#), para. 37), the Government stated that a target of 70 per cent registration had been set for 2024. She understood that a level of 38 per cent had been reached by 2019; she would be interested to hear about the challenges the Government faced in that connection and to learn whether further incentives were being considered in order to register the remaining 30 per cent.

61. She would welcome any statistics on birth registration disaggregated by gender, rural and urban residence and disability. Were the statistics linked to the figures in other sectors, such as education and health, in order to ensure that there was no attrition between the time of registration and the moment of access to education or health care?

62. She would like to hear about any measures or incentives in place, as well as resources allocated, to improve birth registration rates and to encourage women from ethnic minority groups and rural women to register births, bearing in mind that a failure to register could facilitate the concealment of a child's age and thus permit early marriage.

63. It would be interesting to know how the documentation system was used to track and protect migrant women in the State party, given that many of them worked without permits and were exposed to the risk of debt bondage and trafficking in persons. Lastly, she wished to know whether stateless children and children born to immigrant women were able to obtain Lao nationality and how many had been granted nationality to date.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.