



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Summary record of the 2003rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 11 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Peláez Narváez

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

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

Ninth periodic report of the Philippines (CEDAW/C/PHL/9; CEDAW/C/PHL/Q/9; CEDAW/C/PHL/RQ/9)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Philippines joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Yuzon-Chaves** (Philippines), introducing her country's ninth periodic report (CEDAW/C/PHL/9), said that the Government's unwavering commitment to the Convention was recognized at the international level, as illustrated, for example, by the 2023 Global Gender Gap Index, in which the Philippines ranked sixteenth. An inclusive, participatory approach had been taken to developing mechanisms to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on women and bolster their status during the post-pandemic recovery.
3. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the Government had adopted various legislative measures during the reporting period. They included laws that: increased the age under which a child could be considered a victim of statutory rape; prohibited and sanctioned child marriage; prohibited the online sexual abuse and exploitation of children and the dissemination of materials depicting such exploitation; expanded the definition of trafficking in persons to include trafficking using information and communication technology; and increased benefits and other support for single parents. The implementation of those legislative measures, which was monitored by government agencies and civil society organizations, took place at the national and local levels, for example through local ordinances to combat the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children, along with local committees that tackled trafficking in persons and violence against women and children. There had been 878 convictions for trafficking in persons over the previous decade, bringing justice for more than 1,000 women and 700 girls. A number of inter-agency councils worked with civil society to prevent different forms of gender-based violence. Efforts were under way to draft a fourth national action plan on women, peace and security with the involvement of women's rights groups, particularly those representing Indigenous women, women with disabilities and young persons.
4. In addition to legislation, the Government had implemented practical initiatives and programmes to empower women, such as the provision of credit to more than 47,000 women with small-scale farming and fishing operations. Women's entrepreneurship had been further supported by a programme that had granted loans to almost 50,000 micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, around 62 per cent of which had been owned by women. Women workers in the informal sector had benefited from an initiative that afforded them a temporary wage, and women's welfare and equal opportunities at work were guaranteed through rigorous labour inspection procedures.
5. Efforts in the education sector included a gender-responsive policy that protected all children from gender-related violence, abuse, exploitation, discrimination and bullying. In response to a surge in gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government had established a strategic health promotion framework that focused on violence prevention, as well as sexual and reproductive health. The needs of survivors of violence were met through comprehensive services provided under the Women and Children Protection Programme. Courts had been rendered more gender-responsive to protect victims from trauma when giving their testimonies, while judges, court officials, prosecutors, public defenders, social workers and law enforcement officials underwent continuous gender-sensitivity training.
6. The Government's budgets were gender-responsive, and it had developed a tool to assess its gender and development focal point system, which operated in all government agencies. A resolution enjoining those agencies to adopt a gender perspective in the generation of statistics and to develop an online statistical gender and development database had been adopted in June 2023. Gender-based violence in all its forms was combated through education programmes and the media, and women's active participation in economic, social and political life was celebrated during an annual women's month and a campaign addressing

violence against women. The Government ensured full implementation of the Magna Carta of Women through action under the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Plan 2019–2025, and its work at international level included leading gender mainstreaming efforts within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

7. **Ms. Dumarpa** (Commission on Human Rights) said that, while the Government's adoption of legislation to protect women and girls' rights was welcome, the Commission remained concerned at the persistent challenges to the enjoyment of those rights in practice. In particular, women human rights defenders often faced baseless criminal charges; the fact that they were usually acquitted did not erase the threats to their security and liberty, the trauma they suffered or the consequences of their criminalization. The Committee should therefore seek the Government's commitment to strengthening accountability for malicious prosecution and other human rights violations and to amending legislation intended to combat terrorism and local armed conflict linked to communism. The Committee should urge the Government to review provisions concerning third-party consent for sexual and reproductive health services and the criminalization of abortion, and to expedite the adoption of legislation on divorce, workers in the informal economy, human rights defenders, early pregnancy, and sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, as well as the Commission's charter. The Committee should also encourage the Government to ensure the full implementation of legislation on child marriage and safe spaces.

8. Updated information had yet to be provided on compliance with the Committee's View on the complaint submitted by members of the Malaya Lolas organization. The Committee should urge the Government to provide compensation in that case and grant swift remedies to the authors. The Government's action on gender-based violence was insufficient, and the Committee should encourage it to institutionalize survivor-centred, intersectional responses, ensure accountability among duty bearers and enhance support for women with disabilities and other groups. Marginalized women had expressed a need for the Government to ensure their meaningful participation and, in the light of the exacerbation of inequalities during the COVID-19 pandemic, it should also institutionalize and localize gender-responsive and intersectional responses to health crises and other emergencies.

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9. **Ms. Akizuki** said that, while the State party had made commendable progress in establishing a legal, administrative and institutional framework to fulfil its obligations under the Convention, gaps and challenges persisted.

10. **Ms. Ameline**, noting the high levels of instability, insecurity and violence in the State party, said that she would welcome confirmation of the Government's commitment to consolidating the rule of law based on human rights and international law and in close cooperation with human rights mechanisms. She would also like to know how the State party planned to strengthen the Convention's legal weight and application across the country for the benefit of all women, particularly women who were vulnerable or subjected to repressive or discriminatory measures, such as human rights defenders and journalists. It would be good to hear of any plans to adopt a general equality law that consolidated the legislative framework and covered all forms of discrimination.

11. Clarification was also required as to whether priority was given to the legislative agenda on women's rights and to draft legislation that would ensure coherence between national law and the Convention. She also wished to know whether a mechanism would be set up to address persistent discriminatory provisions that affected, for example, Indigenous women and women with disabilities and to conduct an in-depth evaluation of the impact of repressive laws and measures on women's rights.

12. She would welcome confirmation of whether the State party would commit itself to strengthening its cooperation with United Nations agencies in order to implement the Committee's recommendations. She would also like to know whether the planned reforms to the justice sector would incorporate a gender perspective into all proceedings and judges' training and ensure harmonization between judicial systems and structures, including religious courts. She wondered whether steps would be taken, perhaps with the assistance of technology, to improve access to legal knowledge and to conduct impartial investigations

and appeals. Lastly, she asked what role was played by the Philippine Judicial Academy in strengthening women's rights in proceedings, particularly mediation.

13. **Ms. Yuzon-Chaves** (Philippines) said that 11 legislative measures had been proposed in the Women's Priority Legislative Agenda for the 19th Congress of the Philippines. They included amending the Family Code to recognize all forms of violence as grounds for legal separation, reinstating divorce, amending the Anti-Rape Act and the discriminatory provisions in the Revised Penal Code relating to adultery and concubinage, and enacting laws on the rights of women deprived of their liberty and women's representation in politics. A Senate bill to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics was under consideration, while the House of Representatives Committee on Women and Gender Equality had forwarded a consolidated bill for the consideration of the House Committee on Appropriations in May 2023. In the absence of national legislative measures, several local government units had adopted anti-discrimination ordinances on sexual orientation and gender identity.

14. **A representative of the Philippines** said that an extensive social amelioration programme, introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, had provided social assistance to more than 15 million households – the majority of which were headed by women. Assistance for single parents, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable and marginalized groups had been prioritized. The *Bayanihan* (Cooperation) to Heal as One Act had led to the distribution of cash and non-cash assistance to poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups. In addition, livelihood assistance grants had been distributed to persons worst affected by the pandemic, particularly women, as part of efforts for post-pandemic recovery.

15. **A representative of the Philippines** said that human rights defenders were treated fairly by the Government. The tax case involving Rappler – the news site owned by Maria Ressa – had been dismissed by the Court of Tax Appeals. The case against Ressa concerning cyberlibel was pending before the Supreme Court; probable cause had been found by the court of first instance and had been affirmed by the Court of Appeals. The judiciary, which was independent, made decisions based on the evidence presented and the law. All citizens were considered to be human rights defenders, owing to their duty to promote, protect and defend human rights.

16. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Philippine Judicial Academy had provided training on women's rights in relation to topics such as violence, trafficking in persons and cybercrimes. Mandatory continuing development courses were attended by judges, officers of the court, public attorneys, lawyers, social workers and law enforcement officers. Skills development on mediation and judicial dispute resolution had been provided to mediators and judges. By 2022, almost 26,000 persons from across the criminal justice system had attended training in areas relevant to the protection and advancement of women's rights.

17. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, despite the adoption of Republic Act No. 11596, which prohibited child marriage, no specific programme had been implemented to disseminate it within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and it remained a subject of discussion for the government of the Autonomous Region, because no child would want his or her parents to be imprisoned, as explicitly provided for in the Act. The Bangsamoro Women Commission had conducted an awareness-raising campaign on the model family in Islam in three provinces, and its radio programmes had reached more than 23,000 listeners since their launch in 2022. The Bangsamoro Women Commission had integrated an Islamic perspective on gender and the rights of husbands and wives in its work. The government of the Autonomous Region operated under the provision set out in the Constitution on the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference.

18. **A representative of the Philippines** said that civil society organizations provided input into national development plans for women, including the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Plan 2019–2025. The Women's Priority Legislative Agenda was established through consultations with women and civil society organizations about their priority issues. Civil society organizations served as partners on inter-agency committees,

voicing their concerns and monitoring the implementation of the law in specific areas, such as the Safe Spaces Act.

19. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Government was working with its partners to build the capacities of women and their communities on climate change and disaster risk reduction.

20. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Presidential Human Rights Committee Secretariat acted as a reporting and follow-up mechanism to ensure the fulfilment of obligations under the eight core human rights treaties. The Committee Secretariat had conducted training with a view to establishing a national recommendation tracking database.

21. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Government had never had a policy of red-tagging persons or organizations, accusing them of links to communist organizations. The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions had conducted a capacity-building seminar on forensic science, to ensure that criminal investigations and prosecutions were evidence- and science-based. Once the law enforcement agencies had gathered evidence, it was presented to the judiciary, which was independent and acted on the basis of the evidence and the law.

22. **Ms. Yuzon-Chaves** (Philippines) said that the National Policy on the Prevention of Illegal and Unsafe Abortion and Management of Post-Abortion Complications upheld the rights of women who were seeking abortion and prevented their stigmatization. Although abortion remained illegal, the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act ensured access to humane care and counselling for post-abortion complications or complications arising from pregnancy and childbirth, in accordance with the law and medical ethics. The National Policy also provided that post-abortion care should be available at all public and private health facilities, and reiterated the importance of family planning to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

23. **Mr. Catura** (Philippines), speaking as co-head of the delegation, said that Republic Act No. 11479, the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, had been adopted following comprehensive consultation of stakeholders, including women, civil society organizations, human rights defenders and the Commission on Human Rights. Complaints of any violation of the rights of women human rights defenders could be addressed through the judiciary, the executive branch of government or the Commission on Human Rights, and claims of threats or coercion could be filed with the courts under the revised Penal Code. The Presidential Task Force on Media Security and the Inter-Agency Committee on Extra-Legal Killings, Enforced Disappearances, Torture and other Grave Violations of the Right to Life, Liberty and Security of Persons provided further mechanisms that could receive complaints. The State was committed to holding killers of human rights defenders accountable for their actions and to ensuring the enjoyment of human rights by all rights holders.

24. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that she wished to know whether the State party had begun to implement the recommendations made in the Committee's decision concerning communication No. 155/2020: *Natalia M. Alonzo et al. v. the Philippines*. The matter was particularly urgent given the advanced age of the survivors of sexual slavery perpetrated by the Imperial Japanese Army in the Philippines during the Second World War, who had brought the complaint through the non-profit Malaya Lolas ("Free Grandmothers").

25. **Ms. Akizuki** said that, since international law had equal standing with domestic law in the State party, she wished to know how it was ensured that international laws were not effectively repealed by the adoption of subsequent domestic laws, in particular given that the Philippines was party to the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which provided in its article 27 that internal law could not be used as justification for the failure to perform a treaty.

26. **Ms. Ameline** said that women's rights were not only a fundamental universal principle but also the solution to many challenges. She wished to know whether the State party agreed that the Convention could serve as a means for the sustainable transformation of society.

27. **Mr. Catura** (Philippines) said that his Government had recently sent its response to the Committee's decision on communication No. 155/2020 and that it did not agree with the

views of the Committee on the matter. Older persons were revered in Philippine culture and they were well looked after.

28. **Ms. Rana** said that she wished to commend the progress made by the State party in the institutional field, such as the strengthening of the Philippine Commission on Women and the work of the Commission on Human Rights. Information would be appreciated on the increased human and technical resources and capacity-building for the Philippine Commission on Women and their impact; on when the five proposed regional offices would be established; on plans to appoint the Commission's chairperson as soon as possible; and on the impact of mandatory gender budgeting across all government agencies. Since the Commission on Human Rights was also the Gender and Development Ombud, she wished to know how it coordinated with the Philippine Commission on Women; whether the Commission on Human Rights also coordinated with the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples; how the State party intended to implement the recommendations contained in position papers of the Commission on Human Rights from 2020 and 2021 on strengthening the legislative framework to protect women from sexual violence; how gender equality and women's empowerment were integrated in the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028; and how civil society would be involved in the implementation of the Plan.

29. Clarification would be welcome of how the fourth generation National Action Plan on Women and Peace and Security would relate to the previous national action plans, and what assessment had been made of the implementation of those previous plans. She wished to receive details of the impact of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Regional Action Plan on Women and Peace and Security on the lives of women, particularly those who lived in conflict-afflicted areas.

30. **Ms. Hacker** said that she would like to hear whether the State party had or envisaged any temporary special measures to achieve women's substantive equality in fields such as political participation, health, education and employment, including with specific reference to women who suffered from intersectional discrimination. She wished to know whether any such temporary special measures had been or would be evaluated in terms of concrete outcomes and their de facto impact on girls and women from all groups, and if such evaluations could be shared with the Committee. She also wished to understand the prospects for the enactment of the Women's Political Participation and Representation Act.

31. **Ms. Yuzon-Chaves** (Philippines) said that the Philippine Commission on Women had been granted additional funding to establish one regional office. Since 2021, the Commission had operated field offices catering to three regions in Mindanao, Caraga and Zamboanga and provided technical assistance and training on gender and development to various stakeholders, reaching over 15,000 public servants as well as members of the general public, roughly 12,000 of whom were women. There was a 41 per cent increase in the budget for 2024, compared to 2023.

32. **A representative of the Philippines** said that a study of the gender and development policy of the Philippines covering the period 2010–2017 had found that it addressed the provisions of the Magna Carta of Women and demonstrated good practice in combating trafficking in persons and violence. However, more work was needed on addressing the representation of women, including Indigenous women, in decision-making, sports, the media, and culture and the arts. The study's findings had informed the development of further action plans for women.

33. **Ms. Yuzon-Chaves** (Philippines) said that the Sustainable Development Goals, including goal 5 on gender equality, had been mainstreamed in the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028. A dedicated planning committee on gender and development had been tasked with incorporating gender into all chapters of the Plan.

34. Consultations with non-governmental and civil society organizations were part of the Philippine Commission on Women's process for the development of policy and reports. Civil society was also represented in inter-agency mechanisms on women and peace and security and was involved in the development of laws, such as the Safe Space Act.

35. In terms of temporary special measures, the country had quotas in place setting a 30 per cent target for the employment of women in the Armed Forces, which were provided for in the Magna Carta of Women.

36. The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023–2033 was based on multi-stakeholder evaluation of the implementation of the previous (2017–2022) national action plan. It aimed to broaden the country’s approach to addressing the challenges faced by women of diverse and intersecting identities in armed conflict and acknowledged their valuable contributions to peacebuilding. It also upheld the Magna Carta of Women principles of the promotion and protection of women’s rights. Those principles were further reinforced in a five-point peace, reconciliation and unity agenda, which was underpinned by the principles of conflict sensitivity, peace promotion and a whole-of-society approach.

37. **Ms. González Ferrer** said that she wished to understand why the Philippine Commission on Women was not at ministerial level and how it was structured.

38. **Ms. Hacker** said that she would like to hear about the impact of the 30 per cent quota for women in the military and police force.

39. **Ms. Rana** said that there seemed to be significant potential for overlap in the mandates of the Philippine Commission on Women and the Commission on Human Rights. She wished to know whether a mechanism existed to avoid overlaps, harmonize work and create synergy between the two entities.

40. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, since the enactment of Republic Act No. 7192 in 1992, the proportion of women in the military and police force had gradually increased from 10 per cent to 30 per cent.

41. **Ms. Yuzon-Chaves** (Philippines) said that the Philippine Commission on Women was part of the executive branch and was attached to the Department of Interior and Local Government. The question of why it was not at the ministerial level could not be answered at that time. It acted as the policymaking body on gender equality and women’s empowerment, ensured gender mainstreaming and trained officials in local and national government on gender mainstreaming. There was therefore no overlap with the functions of the Commission on Human Rights, which was mandated to call out any agency or government officials violating human rights.

42. **Mr. Sorreta** (Philippines) said that the Commission on Human Rights was the country’s independent human rights institution. There was also the Presidential Human Rights Committee in the executive branch of government and similar entities in Congress and the Supreme Court.

43. **Ms. Akizuki** said that she would like to hear about the impact of the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Plan 2019–2025. She wondered if there had been any behavioural changes in men and women and what criteria were used for measuring changes in gender norms and culture. She was curious to learn how media and civil society organizations were engaging in targeted awareness-raising and educational campaigns to eliminate discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in society. She wished to hear of specific measures to monitor the negative portrayals of women in the media and on social media, as well as in statements by public officials. She wondered whether data were systematically collected on all occurrences of harmful practices in the State party, including on child and forced marriage.

44. She asked what measures were being taken by the State party to encourage reporting of domestic violence against women and girls and to eliminate gender-based violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres. She wished to know whether there were any plans to institutionalize survivor-centred and intersectional responses to gender-based violence. What measures were envisaged to ensure full implementation of the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act and adequate resourcing of local governments for that purpose? How did the State party protect Filipino women migrant workers from gender-based violence? What plans were there to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including online gender-based violence against women journalists, activists and politicians?

45. Finally, how did the State party intend to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse by members of its contributed military contingent and to resolve the outstanding paternity claim against one member?

46. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that she wished to know whether funding had been secured for the fourth National Strategic Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons 2023–2027 and what lessons had been learned from the previous plan. She wondered whether there was enough funding for shelters for victims and whether women overseas could benefit from the latest Plan.

47. She asked how the State party could guarantee that its bilateral labour agreements would lead to acceptable work conditions for women working abroad; what the State party was doing to detect, investigate and prosecute illegal recruiters; whether the Department of Migrant Workers was fully funded and operational; and how it contributed to protecting migrant women. How could the State party guarantee that the minimum age for overseas domestic work, set at 24 years, would not contradict the initial purpose of the law, discriminate against women or encourage the use of informal channels?

48. She wished to learn what specific plans existed to prevent an increasing number of families from forcing their children into online sexual exploitation. She would be grateful if the delegation could provide information on the status and implementation of the reported amendment to the Criminal Code to decriminalize women in prostitution. Were there also plans to amend the law on prostitution to criminalize the buyers of sexual services?

49. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the State provided 80 million to 100 million Philippine pesos in funding to the Inter-Agency Council against Trafficking each year for its activities. The Council had a unit of prosecutors specifically trained in handling cases of trafficking in persons. Specialized police were also trained to handle such cases. The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act had been updated to protect women and children from online sexual abuse or exploitation and to prevent online and technology-facilitated crimes, and a law specifically addressing the sexual exploitation and abuse of children had been enacted in 2022. Anti-trafficking hotlines accessible from all over the Philippines facilitated the reporting of trafficking in persons and referrals to law enforcement and social workers. Capacity-building activities were being implemented for front-line personnel such as prosecutors, police, social workers and labour inspectors. They were stationed at international airports and seaports and participated in the 25 anti-trafficking task forces operational throughout the country, including one located in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Migrant workers also benefited from that protection. Victim witness programmes assisted in the prosecution of cases. A recovery and reintegration programme, being implemented through the Department of Social Welfare and Development, provided victims of trafficking with immediate assistance.

50. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Inter-Agency Council against Trafficking was at the forefront of a strong approach to improve prosecution and enforcement of trafficking laws. The Department of Justice had issued a circular requiring coordination and collaboration between law enforcement and prosecution services to ensure that only cases with *prima facie* evidence and reasonable certainty of conviction could be filed.

51. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the recovery and reintegration programme for victims of trafficking in persons involved a comprehensive package of services, including case management, support and training to facilitate employment. Temporary shelter for victims and those with ongoing court cases was provided through residential care centres.

52. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Government conducted awareness-raising campaigns in schools, communities and workplaces to encourage victims and witnesses to report acts of violence. It had developed a booklet on violence against women that focused on identifying acts of violence, encouraging reporting and inviting citizens to become allies in preventing violence and changing social norms. The State partnered with civil society to provide survivors with critical information on how to access the comprehensive package of services to combat violence against women and children. It established and enhanced local referral systems and worked with local governments to improve their reporting processes and their support services for victims. Under the Anti-

Violence Against Women and Their Children Act, the State was mandated to establish units for the protection of women and children in all government hospitals, in every province and in cities. There were currently 120 such units in 57 provinces, 10 cities and 22 municipalities. The staff of the units were all trained to deal with cases of violence against women and children.

53. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Supreme Court, in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Social Services and Counselling Division and the Office of the Court Administrator, had approved the establishment of the “House of Hope” children’s home and outreach centre, and residential care facilities with a view to supporting women and child victims of physical, mental and economic abuse. The Court’s social welfare officers were tasked with ensuring the participation of women victims in court proceedings and facilitating the referral of women and their families to relevant institutions. The fees for registering cases filed by indigent women were waived.

54. **A representative of the Philippines** said that a distinguishing characteristic of the Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao was its adaptability. Efforts had been made to raise awareness of the Plan among important sectors of the community in the various provinces of the Autonomous Region, including in conflict-affected areas. In a rapidly globalizing world, the Plan addressed traditional issues in the women and peace and security agenda alongside contemporary concerns such as climate security, cybersecurity and the advent of artificial intelligence. Its comprehensive nature was demonstrated by the emphasis that it placed on mental health, psychosocial support and the involvement of men and boys in the issues covered by the Plan.

55. **Ms. Yuzon-Chaves** (Philippines) said that a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Magna Carta of Women, conducted in 2022, showed that capacity-building activities had helped to close the gender gap in education and raise public awareness of women’s rights. A study of unpaid care and domestic work had found that men’s participation in such work had increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

56. An information-sharing and awareness-raising campaign on women’s rights, known as National Women’s Month, was conducted in March every year. An 18-day campaign to end violence against women was also held from 25 November to 12 December every year. In 2021, the main focus of National Women’s Month had been on women’s role in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and other issues related to the health crisis. The conversations held as part of the event had touched on the heavier burden of unpaid care work that had fallen on women during the pandemic. As part of National Women’s Month in 2022, a survey of the priority issues that citizens wished to address had been conducted.

57. The Department of Education strictly implemented the Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy in order to address persistent and emerging gender-related issues in basic education. The Department’s Bureau of Learning Resources had established guidelines to ensure the quality of its learning resources. The guidelines included provisions to ensure that learning materials were free from gender stereotypes. Non-affiliated publishers that developed their own materials were also encouraged to adhere to the guidelines. In tertiary education, the State implemented a policy to ensure that educational materials used gender-neutral language and that the content of such materials and the curricula were free from gender stereotypes.

58. With regard to the portrayal of women in the media, the Philippine Commission on Women worked to promote a positive image of women and continuously called on government officials, social media content creators and companies to contribute actively to the mainstreaming of women’s empowerment. The Philippine Commission on Women had condemned the broadcasting of a rape scene in an evening drama series in 2019. The Commission also flagged social media content featuring sexual harassment and took action against online entities that encouraged child grooming.

59. The Inter-Agency Council against Trafficking had begun developing policy guidelines that would provide for the systematic involvement of victims in the development and design of relevant policy and the implementation of programmes. The guidelines were intended to empower survivors of trafficking by giving them a channel through which to

express their views, influence policymakers, advocate for improvements in the accessibility and quality of support services, and set up communities in which other survivors could come together to support each other.

60. The Department of Migrant Workers had conducted a review of labour agreements with destination countries where migrant workers were frequently abused and exploited. Earlier in 2023, the Government had sent a fact-finding team to assess overseas employment positions and review pending welfare cases in one of the Arab countries. The team was due to conduct a study of welfare cases involving distressed overseas Philippine workers over a period of five years. In that connection, the team would analyse the rise in the number of such cases, the response times of the authorities and recruitment agencies in both countries, and how foreign recruitment agencies monitored workers.

61. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, in 2012, the State had decriminalized prostitution by adopting the Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act. Under the Act, victims of trafficking for the purposes of prostitution may not be prosecuted, fined or otherwise penalized.

62. **Ms. Yuzon-Chaves** (Philippines) said that, in 2021, the Inter-Agency Council against Trafficking, with the support of the National Crime Agency of the United Kingdom, had launched a cybertrafficking monitoring centre as part of its efforts to prevent online sexual exploitation. The centre followed up on leads related to Internet-based trafficking in persons and the online sexual exploitation of children. The Government was engaging in regional cooperation initiatives with countries of origin and destination, as well as other countries, with a view to preventing the trafficking of women and girls.

63. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, in 2022, a delegation of the Government had visited the headquarters of the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust) with a view to strengthening coordination with those agencies in the fight against transnational crime, including the trafficking of women. The Government intended to make use of the comprehensive data held by Eurojust and Europol to better protect its borders and to identify any sexual offenders who might be in the Philippines. In that connection, a representative of the Department of Justice had been appointed to act as the Government's focal point in its interactions with the two agencies.

64. **Ms. Yuzon-Chaves** (Philippines) said that, on 30 July 2022, the Government had adopted the Anti-Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials Act, which penalized the production, distribution and possession of and access to material depicting the sexual abuse or exploitation of children. The Act provided for the establishment of a national coordination centre against online child exploitation. The implementing rules and regulations of the Act had been adopted on 4 May 2023.

65. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that she wished to know what assistance was given to child victims of online sexual exploitation who had been trafficked by their parents.

66. **Ms. Akizuki** said that she had still not received any information on the case involving sexual abuse committed by a national of the State party who was a member of a military contingent.

67. **A representative of the Philippines** said that child victims of sexual abuse were placed in residential care or supported by non-residential care services. Children whose parents were the perpetrators of sexual abuse were supported by the State's alternative family care programme, under which they could be adopted or placed in foster care. Alternative family care was used as a last resort when it was not possible or desirable for a child to return to his or her biological family.

Articles 7–9

68. **Ms. Hacker** said that she wished to know what measures had been taken to promote women's representation in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Committee would welcome statistics on women's representation in other decision-making positions, including at senior levels in the Government, the judiciary, the civil service and local

government. The delegation might describe any measures being taken to address and correct gender inequality in those bodies. She wondered whether any plans were in place to introduce a statutory quota for women's representation in national and local elective bodies and political parties.

69. The Committee would be grateful for information on women's participation in bodies or institutions representing the State party at the international level and in international organizations, including the participation of women facing intersectional discrimination. The Committee would also welcome information on campaigns to raise awareness among politicians, media professionals, teachers, community leaders and the general public about the importance of women's participation in decision-making at all levels.

70. She would be interested to hear about any measures being taken to protect women politicians against sexism, fake news and gendered hate speech, particularly during election campaigns, and the outcome of any assessments of the effectiveness of those measures. The delegation might state the number of women who had participated in conflict resolution negotiations. It might also provide information on the prison conditions of incarcerated women politicians and human rights defenders, including Ms. Leila de Lima and Ms. Adora de Vera, who were suffering from health problems, and Ms. Amanda Echanis, who had given birth less than a month before her arrest.

71. **Mr. Safarov** said that he wished to know what was being done to bring Commonwealth Act No. 473 on citizenship and Republic Act No. 9139 on naturalization into compliance with the Convention and the State party's international obligations relating to non-discrimination. He would be interested to hear about the outcome of the National Action Plan to End Statelessness and whether it had brought about a reduction in the number of stateless persons. The delegation might also describe the obstacles that prevented Philippine mothers from obtaining citizenship for children and husbands who were nationals of other countries.

72. **A representative of the Philippines** said that a dramatic shift in women's representation in the judiciary had taken place in recent years: in 2017, 50 per cent of the 1,827 judges appointed had been men and 47 per cent had been women; in 2022, however, 43 per cent of the 2,115 judges appointed had been men and 57 per cent had been women. As part of the Supreme Court's Strategic Plan for Judicial Innovations, the Court had recognized the fact that patriarchal norms heavily influenced legal bodies in the Philippines and adversely affected the material conditions of women.

73. In order to understand how the justice system reinforced gender inequality, the Supreme Court had commissioned two studies, one on feminism in the judiciary and the other on gender representation and mobility within the judiciary. The latter study would examine gender-disaggregated data for the period from 2006 to 2020, explore patterns of women's appointments to the judiciary and identify any possible barriers to such appointments. The study would contribute to the literature on women's participation in the higher courts and the effect of such participation on judicial decision-making.

74. **A representative of the Philippines** said that Ms. Leila de Lima had been denied bail and must therefore remain in detention while her case was being heard. Her lawyers had made use of all the legal remedies available to her as a litigant. The presentation of the evidence in her case would soon be complete and the court would then issue its ruling. She was being held in a room on her own, in conditions that were much better than those endured by most prisoners.

75. Other women deprived of their liberty might be able to obtain early release under one of the programmes established by the Department of Justice. In line with the commitment made by the Philippines before the Human Rights Council in 2022, the Government had been releasing between 400 and 500 prisoners per month. The Parole and Probation Administration and the Board of Pardons and Parole had simplified the procedure for applying for parole and probation, including by reducing the number of documents that prisoners were required to submit. Some older prisoners had been released before they had served their full sentences on the grounds of their age.

76. The Refugees and Stateless Persons Protection Unit in the Department of Justice had been making efforts to process all applications for asylum and refugee status, irrespective of the sex, creed or ideology of the applicant. Executive Order No. 163 institutionalized access to protection services for refugees, stateless persons and asylum-seekers. Other legislative measures had granted such persons access to health-care services and assistance in crisis situations. Under the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028, access to protection mechanisms was made available to refugees, stateless persons, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, and women and children. The Supreme Court had taken steps to facilitate the naturalization procedure for refugees and stateless persons.

77. The Government continued to implement the Complementary Pathways Programme, under which partnerships had been established with the private sector to provide Rohingya refugees with access to education. Progress was being made towards the adoption of the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons Bill, which was intended to strengthen protection of the rights of all internally displaced persons. Efforts had been made to resolve the long-standing issues relating to the status of persons of Japanese or Indonesian descent who had been unable to obtain Philippine nationality.

78. **Ms. Yuzon-Chaves** (Philippines) said that the Government had conducted a series of gender-sensitivity and inclusivity seminars for women aspiring to stand for political office. The Government had also developed materials for dissemination on social media, to increase public awareness of the importance of diversity in politics and to encourage young voters to exercise their right to vote. Press releases on voter registration had also been published online. The Philippines would be chairing the sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2024. In accordance with its usual practice, its delegation would include women from the grass-roots communities, rural women and Indigenous women.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.