



**Convention on the Elimination
of all Forms of Discrimination
Against Women**

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Ninth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 164th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 31 January 1990, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. EVATT

later: Ms. GUAN MINQIAN

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Convention (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Second periodic report of Mongolia (CEDAW/C/13/Add.7)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. IDER (Mongolia) took a place at the Committee table.

2. Ms. IDER (Mongolia) said she was pleased to present her country's second periodic report at a time when efforts were being made to improve and restructure international relations and to revitalize socialism. The report had been prepared in 1986 and had been distributed to the Committee the following year. In the intervening years, a programme of restructuring initiated in 1987 had given rise, and continued to give rise, to sweeping changes in her country. Economic reform, for instance, had resulted in a transition to economic methods of administration and increased autonomy for enterprises and farms.

3. The ultimate goal of the restructuring process was to bring socialism to a new stage of development, freeing it from misinterpretation and enabling it to address the basic rights and interests of the individual. Faced with traditional bureaucratic, dogmatic and conservative attitudes which were entrenched in the Mongolian way of life, that process was not going smoothly.

4. Perestroika and glasnost had brought many unresolved social problems to the fore, including the need to improve the working and living conditions of the rural population, particularly nomadic herdsmen. That population must be provided with adequate housing and improved medical and social services. Agriculture must also be mechanized and communications developed. Already, the number of privately owned cattle had increased and new forms of labour organization such as contracting and leasing were on the rise. In view of the vast resources and amounts of time needed, the Government planned to approach those problems in stages.

5. Although there was de jure equality of women and men, much remained to be done to achieve equality in practice. As the country developed socially and economically, the prospects for genuine equality would increase. Restructuring had brought to light many problems concerning women which, prior to that, had not been publicly acknowledged. Those problems included the need for radical improvements in women's working and living conditions; the need to make special provision for working mothers; high maternal and child mortality rates; the growing incidence of divorce and sing-parent families; a severe shortage of kindergarten and child-care facilities; and the huge difference between the living standards of urban and rural women.

6. While it would take considerable time and resources to solve such problems, some results had already been achieved. In December 1989, the Presidium of the Great People's Khural had enacted four decrees concerning women and children.

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(Ms. Ider, Mongolia)

Amendments had been made to public health legislation to give women the right to decide on the number and spacing of their children. Abortion was permitted, but only if performed by a physician in a hospital setting. Amendments to the Labour Code would ensure adequate paid maternity leave, as well as parental leave and job continuity for mothers and single fathers with young children. Amendments had also been made to pension legislation, enabling women and men who provided care for children or grandchildren to retire early. Students with children were entitled to the same leave benefits as working mothers. The network of pre-school facilities was being greatly expanded, with support from the Government and other public organizations, and various programmes were being implemented to provide more flexibility for working mothers.

7. State and public organizations dealing with women's issues were interested in learning about the experiences of other countries, particularly countries which had a level of development similar to that of Mongolia.

8. In recent years, political activism among women and women's organizations had been on the rise. Women were participating increasingly not only in the discussion of issues concerning women and children but also in the discussion of problems relating to restructuring. Preparations were under way for the Sixth Congress of Mongolian Women, to be held in June 1990. A proposal for granting the Committee of Mongolian Women the right to initiate legislation and monitor compliance with legal instruments for the protection of women and children was under consideration, as was the creation of a State mechanism to elaborate policies for addressing women's problems. In December 1989, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Unen, the newspaper of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party and the Mongolian Government, had published the full text of the Convention.

9. The equality of men and women was enshrined in the Mongolian Constitution and in the country's labour, civil, penal and family codes and other legislation. A great deal of work was being done to improve existing legislation. The new Penal Code in effect since July 1987 contained provisions prohibiting any impediment to women's exercise of their rights. Any one who violated those provisions was subject to prosecution and could be imprisoned, fined or otherwise punished. In 1989, the Government had enacted legislation which included provisions proposed by women's organizations. Under one such provision, the workers' council of every enterprise must henceforth involve representatives of women's organizations in decision-making on labour and social issues. Another provision enabled rural women with four or more children to include private farming as part of their pension calculation base.

10. There was no special organization in her country for monitoring compliance with legislation concerning women. The country's judicial organizations ensured respect for the rights of all citizens. The Committee of Mongolian Women and other Party organs also monitored compliance with the relevant legislation.

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11. Mongolia did not have one institute dedicated solely to research on women's issues. Several scientific and other institutes conducted research on some issues concerning women and children.

12. Women and men were equally responsible for the upbringing and education of their children.

13. There was no problem of prostitution in her country. Pornography was banned under the new Penal Code and was punishable by imprisonment or a fine.

14. Thus far, there had been no cases of AIDS or HIV infection in Mongolia. In 1987, a national AIDS referral centre had been set up and the Government had funded a number of prevention and control measures, including screening and public education. A programme of co-operation with WHO on AIDS prevention and control had been drawn up. In 1989, teaching on AIDS prevention had been introduced into school curricula.

15. Women currently accounted for 24.9 per cent of deputies to the Great People's Khural and 28.7 per cent of deputies to local khurals. There was a woman member of the Presidium and seven women were deputy ministers. In 1985, the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party had adopted a decree on the promotion of women to leadership posts. Implementation had been slow and inconsistent, however. The promotion of women to decision-making posts was influenced by objective factors, such as women's lack of preparation for socio-political activities and an inadequate social infrastructure, by subjective factors such as traditional prejudices against women. Under *perestroika*, however, women were becoming more active socially and politically and that trend was likely to be reflected in the forthcoming elections.

16. Mongolia participated actively in bilateral and multilateral activities concerning women's issues. It had sent representatives to all three world conferences convened during the United Nations Decade for Women. The requirements for women wishing to participate in international life were the same as for men. Her country was underrepresented in the United Nations Secretariat, where the sole Mongolian national was in fact a woman.

17. Under Mongolian law, divorce between a citizen and an alien did not automatically alter the citizenship status of either partner. Furthermore, there was no legal distinction between the rights of men and women with regard to the nationality of their children.

18. Between 1975 and 1989, the proportion of working women with higher education qualifications had increased from 27 to 40 per cent. During the same period, the percentage of female students in higher education had increased by approximately 7 per cent. Girls accounted for 50.6 per cent of the secondary school population and 60.3 per cent of enrolments in special and vocational/technical schools. The school drop-out rate for both sexes was insignificant and did not pose a serious problem.

(Ms. Ider, Mongolia)

19. There was no difference in the wages or salaries of men and women engaged in the same profession. Wage differentials were based solely on the level of education and the type of profession.

20. The economic equality enjoyed by men and women was evident from a 1989 decree of the Council of Ministers expanding banks' lending activities to all individuals without discrimination. Other recent measures to improve women's working and living conditions included: wage increase for workers in fields dominated by women; a decree increasing the number of cattle that could be privately owned; and a law on private business activities, which allowed men and women to choose the type of activity in which they wished to engage. Furthermore, special measures relating to maternal and child health would henceforth be included in annual and five-year socio-economic development plans, with special attention paid to the needs of single mothers and mothers of large families. School construction in Mongolia was scheduled to double during the period 1990-1995, and the country was in the process of formulating a population policy.

21. In conclusion, she expressed the hope that perestroika would help solve the problems facing Mongolia, particularly those pertaining to mothers and children.

22. Ms. Guan Mingqian, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

23. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed the candid answers provided by the representative of Mongolia. It was clear that, while many problems persisted in Mongolia in the age of perestroika, considerable progress had been made. She noted, however, that some questions raised in connection with Mongolia's initial report had not been addressed in the second report.

24. Ms. IDER (Mongolia) said that the omissions in her country's second periodic report were due not to the Government's lack of interest in certain issues but to a lack of statistical data, particularly data that could be used to compare living standards in rural and urban areas. Her Government was trying to fill that gap.

25. Ms. OESER welcomed the many legal measures that had been taken to eliminate discrimination against women in Mongolia. Nevertheless, she would like some answers to a number of questions which had gone unanswered in Mongolia's second periodic report. For example, she wished to know whether there were any areas of social life where men continued to dominate, thereby preventing women's equality. She also wished to know what effect religion had on the daily lives of women in Mongolia.

26. While it was obvious that the Mongolian Government had made a major commitment to providing child-care facilities, she wondered to what extent existing needs could be met. With regard to abortion, she wished to know who determined when that procedure was necessary. What was the average number of children in a Mongolian family and what percentage of families had more than 10 children?

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27. Ms. SCHOPP-SCHILLING praised the Mongolian report and welcomed the fact that, under perestroika, the Mongolian Government was paying particular attention to the status of women. She wished to know specifically what kind of work rural women engaged in: were they primarily involved in livestock raising, or did they perform other tasks as well? Information about women's remuneration in livestock raising and in the agricultural sector in general would be welcome.

28. Following the line of questioning opened by Ms. Oeser, she wished to know whether any customary practices stemming from the Buddhist religion affected women where social practices such as betrothal were concerned.

29. Ms. ESCOBAR noted that the representative of Mongolia had said that there was no prostitution in her country. She wondered how that could be, and asked whether provision was made for sex education in schools.

30. Ms. IDER (Mongolia) said that the comments by Committee members would serve as an incentive for Mongolia's women's organizations, which were eager to learn from the experience of other countries.

31. With regard to the questions just raised, there were in fact some areas of the national economy in which women played a predominant role, such as health and education. In particular, women were to be found in large numbers in schools providing general education and in vocational and technical institutions. As one went higher in the educational hierarchy, however, the percentage of women decreased. Mongolian women were being encouraged to take jobs traditionally held by men, with large numbers of women finding employment in the fields of finance, science and technology. At present, 33 per cent of all lawyers in Mongolia were women, a genuine achievement in view of the country's history.

32. The provision of adequate child-care facilities posed a major problem for the Mongolian Government, given that over 60 per cent of the population was under the age of 30. On average, urban families had three to four children while rural families had five to six. The fact that 90 per cent of Mongolian women either worked or studied made the need for child care particularly acute. The country was endeavouring to increase the number of pre-school facilities significantly by 1995, albeit with limited resources. Women's organizations and the Government were taking measures to promote the creation of private child-care facilities and family day-care arrangements.

33. The abortion laws had recently undergone a drastic change. Previously, abortion had been allowed only when stringent conditions were met. On 23 December 1989, however, the Presidium of the Great People's Khural had issued a decree permitting unrestricted abortion during the first trimester of pregnancy. Under that decree, any woman was entitled to an abortion performed by a doctor in a hospital free of charge. Medical consultation was required in the case of abortions performed beyond the first trimester, however. One major goal of the country's family planning policy was to enable women to decide on the number and spacing of their children. Mongolia had thus complied fully with the provisions of the Convention regarding family planning.

(Ms. Ider, Mongolia)

34. Religion in Mongolia was currently viewed as being closely associated with the culture, history and art of the Mongolian people. While there was a general resurgence of interest in religion, however, that had no influence on the status of women. In fact, as many as five centuries earlier, when religion had been much more influential, Mongolian women had enjoyed broad rights and had often had a decisive say in matters pertaining to the family and society.

35. Although no statistics were available, she could confirm that organized prostitution did not exist in Mongolia. Individual cases might occur, but prostitution did not pose a social problem. Sex education was being actively introduced in Mongolian schools, and programmes and messages about sex and reproductive health were being disseminated by the Ministry of Public Health and the mass media, with the country's large population of young people the primary target audience.

36. The situation of rural women in Mongolia posed a serious problem. A recent study by an expert from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific had found a big difference in the standards of living enjoyed by rural and urban women. Most rural women were involved in livestock raising. As members of co-operative farms, they were paid for their work; wages were low, however, a fact that had been widely and openly criticized. Rural women also engaged in unpaid work at home, much of which revolved around privately owned cattle, but they could then sell their cattle products privately for a profit.

37. There were no customary practices in Mongolia which jeopardized women's equality, perhaps because Mongolia had originally been and to some extent still was a nomadic society. In conclusion, she hoped that any question she had not answered would be taken up more fully in her country's next periodic report.

38. Ms. Ider withdrew.

39. Ms. Evatt, Chairperson, resumed the Chair.

Second periodic report of Egypt (CEDAW/C/13/Add.2 and Amend.1)

40. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Galal (Egypt) took a place at the Committee table.

41. Mr. GALAL (Egypt) said that Egypt believed in the equality of all citizens before the law and that they should have equal rights and duties without discrimination on the basis of sex, origin, language or religion. That principle was enshrined in article 40 of its Constitution, and Egypt's laws made it perfectly clear that there should be equality between men and women in the economic and political fields. There was, however, an obvious difference between theoretical, de jure equality and the de facto situation. The law was subject to the control of the organs of the State, while the de facto situation was linked with the culture, customs, heritage and stage of development of each society.

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(Mr. Galal, Egypt)

42. Although the contemporary world was marked by the shrinking of distances and the elimination of boundaries, group identity was nevertheless being reinforced, as was the right to preserve that identity. Egypt was a country with an ancient civilization going back more than 7,000 years, and women had played a prominent role in that civilization and had reached the highest positions in the State. Egypt was also an Islamic country, and article 2 of its Constitution stated that Islam was its official State religion. In practice, that meant that religious truth was valued, whether Islamic, Christian or Jewish, in the culture of the society. Islam respected all religions, and education therefore included classes on religion for students of different faiths and promoted general religious principles such as tolerance, equality, justice and compassion. Personal status law, which governed such matters as marriage and divorce, affected the personal affairs and religious beliefs of the individual. Islam therefore governed the personal status of Muslims, and the laws of other religions governed that of non-Muslims. Marriage was, in Islam, a sacred union, but it was also a civil contract, and Egyptian law therefore required that marriages should be registered. For Coptic Egyptians, marriage was a sacrament and was therefore solemnized by the Church, recorded in its registers and governed by its laws. The Church itself was governed by a Supreme Council of Church leaders. Egyptian law thus respected personal freedom and freedom of belief, and Islamic principles were not imposed on those professing other faiths.

43. The situation of women in Egypt was similar in many respects to that of women in other developing countries where women had not achieved full rights as a result of social backwardness. The low percentage of educated women in the population was a result of the same phenomenon, as were their low rate of participation in public life and their failure to take full advantage of all the rights and privileges accorded to them by law.

44. There was a world-wide trend towards conservatism, and one of its features was the emergence of fundamentalist concepts, whether in politics or religion. Many countries were governed by parties of a conservative orientation and, in religious life, various groups were turning towards religion and religious values. While there had been many studies of so-called Islamic fundamentalism, the same phenomenon was to be found in Christianity and Judaism.

45. To mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, a second United Nations Decade for Women should be proclaimed in order to consolidate the achievements of the first and promote the full integration of women in development and their full participation in society on an equal footing with men.

46. The questions asked in the Committee following the presentation of his country's second periodic report would be addressed in the order in which they appeared in annex II to document CEDAW/C/CRP.12.

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(Mr. Galal, Egypt)

General questions

47. The report had been prepared in 1987 and, since statistical work took some considerable time, the statistics it contained related to 1984 and 1985. More recent statistics had been distributed to members of the Committee, but they remained inadequate owing to the customary time-lag in the preparation of statistics in developing countries.

48. States had a sovereign legal right to enter reservations to the provisions of any international convention and, from the practical point of view, the exercise of that right promoted the accession of States to such conventions in that it reflected their honesty in declaring openly that they were unable to apply particular provisions. It was better for a State to accede to a convention with reservations than not to do so at all. In Egypt's case, its reservations to the Convention were due to a combination of factors relating to its heritage and religion and to its laws and system of government. Law was, after all, a reflection of economic, social and cultural development. The reservation made with respect to article 9 concerned the nationality of a child of an Egyptian woman married to an alien, and that matter was still under discussion in legal and political circles.

Article 2

49. The law of the State was a unitary law. Islamic law, as such, was not followed in Egypt, although there were legal principles derived from Islam which governed personal status law for Muslims. Article 2 of the Convention was, on the whole, in conformity with Egyptian law, and the right to litigate was guaranteed to men and women on an equal footing. Discrimination was punishable by law; the Penal Code stipulated that any person who felt that he or she had suffered discrimination could take legal action, and the Civil Code made allowance for compensation. The law regulating the multi-party system stipulated that no party could be formed on the basis of discrimination on grounds of sex, origin or religion. Sanctions in the case of discrimination were determined by a judge, in accordance with the nature and gravity of the violation or of the damage suffered. There had been many cases of women taking legal action to enforce their rights under the Constitution.

50. Rights and responsibilities were of two kinds. In the case of general rights and responsibilities relating to political and economic life and the role of the citizen in society, no distinction was made on grounds of sex or religion under the Constitution and legislation. However, the rights and responsibilities of Muslims with regard to family law were governed by the rules of Islamic law and those of Copts by the Coptic Supreme Council.

Article 4

51. The success of temporary special measures to improve equality between men and women depended on the development of individual awareness in men and women with regard to asserting their rights. In recent years, women had entered new fields of

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work, such as the police and civil aviation, and had reached leading positions in the diplomatic corps. There were two women ambassadors in important European capitals, and women of ambassadorial rank in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and serving at the under-secretary level in a number of other ministries.

Article 5

52. Programmes to educate the public about the equal status and rights of women included those conducted in the women's pages of the national newspapers and in women's magazines. Meetings were held to discuss women's issues, such as the recent Conference on Women and Development, and women's non-governmental organizations participated in international meetings and seminars. The National Commission for Women monitored the situation of women and made proposals for their advancement. The Commission had conducted a field survey of the needs of Egyptian women, in which various State agencies and the Centre for Social Research had participated. A National Council for Children and Mothers had been established in 1988, and it concerned itself with all matters relating to children and to women in their capacity as mothers.

Article 6

53. Traffic in women and the exploitation of prostitution were forbidden by law. The Penal Code imposed a penalty of hard labour for life for abduction and the death penalty for abduction and subsequent rape, and it ensured protection for minors.

Article 7

54. Law No. 114, the Election Law, had been amended to remove the reservation of one seat for women. The repeal of the special quota for women in parliament was not incompatible with article 4 of the Convention. That article stated that adoption of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality should not be considered discrimination, and it made no adverse reference to the discontinuation of such measures. The law in question had been repealed for procedural reasons relating to its promulgation and not because of its tenor.

55. With regard to the proportion of women to men on ballot lists, the law relating to political rights stated that all persons, both men and women, who were entitled to exercise political rights must be entered on such lists. Registration was thus automatic for all persons over the age of 18. The proportion of women who actually exercised their political rights was limited in comparison to that of men, owing to a lack of political awareness among women or to their personal preoccupations. The participation of women in the electoral process varied from one election to another and from one level to another. At the local level, it was higher because of vigorous competition among candidates, while it was lower in general elections owing to lack of interest. Following the 1987 elections, there were 10 women among the 248 members of the Advisory Council and 16 among the

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453 members of the People's Assembly. That number was lower than it should be, although it represented an advance over the situation in 1976, when there had been only 7 women in the People's Assembly.

56. There were numerous women's organizations: the organizations affiliated with each of the six political parties; sectoral women's organizations; and national women's organizations such as the National Commission for Women sponsored by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The objectives of those organizations differed, but all of them sought to promote the advancement of women, the role of women in society and equality between men and women, and they undertook to publicize the Convention on such occasions as Women's Day, Mothers' Day and Children's Day.

57. Egypt did not have two women ministers, as stated in the English version of its second report, but one woman minister with two portfolios, namely social affairs and social insurance. That represented a measure of progress, although more was required.

Article 9

58. The matter of the reservations made to article 9 of the Convention was, as previously stated, being considered by lawyers, the Ministry of the Interior and politicians.

Article 10

59. Women were moving into new fields of work, including the police, the judiciary, law, engineering, medicine, science, civil aviation and the armed forces, all of which were non-traditional areas. Their numbers, however, remained small in comparison with those of men. The drop-out rate for girls was higher than that for boys, and that was due to economic and social reasons, including early marriage among girls. No relevant statistics were yet available, and an endeavour would be made to provide them at a later stage. There was still a certain amount of illiteracy among young persons of both sexes. Although elementary education was free and compulsory and there was an enrolment rate of 80 per cent, economic circumstances prompted pupils to drop out and seek work at an early age.

Article 11

60. The unemployment rate for males in the total work-force was about 8.5 per cent, that for females about 6.2 per cent and that for both sexes about 14.7 per cent. Work in the private sector was governed by supply and demand, and the Government could not impose on that sector employees of a particular kind, whether men or women. The private sector was, however, obligated to observe certain rules to ensure the granting of the same entitlements available to women in government jobs, such as three months' maternity leave and leave to accompany a husband, and enterprises employing more than 100 women were required to provide day-care facilities.

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61. The recommendation on half-time work with half pay had been implemented on a limited scale in certain State agencies, although it was still a subject of general discussion. In view of the fact that the recommendation had been made on an optional basis, no statistics on its implementation were available.

62. The limitation placed on maternity leave to only three times during a woman's working life was required by economic considerations and also by law so as to encourage family planning in a country suffering from overpopulation. Women could obtain contraceptives free of charge at family planning centres, but abortion was punished by law since it was incompatible with Islam.

Article 12

63. The infant mortality rate was falling because of improved health care, and the same was true in relation to mothers. The annual birth rate remained high because of a lack of awareness in the country of the gravity of the population problem. The 651 family planning centres remained insufficient. Egyptian legislation prohibited abortion induced by any means and with or without the consent of the woman, and the practice was punished by hard labour, imprisonment or hard labour for life according to the circumstances.

64. Juvenile delinquency among girls did exist in Egypt, although it was not a serious problem. The cohesion of the family ensured that girls were conservative with respect to traditions and customs, and that had the effect of reducing delinquency.

65. The law punished acts of violence against women whether in the home or outside. Domestic violence was also considered grounds for a divorce initiated by the wife, since proper treatment was one of the conditions for sustaining a marriage in accordance with Koranic precepts. The difficulty encountered by women in obtaining a divorce was due not to Islam but to prevailing traditions and customs. In that connection, Al-Haqq, the journal of the Union of Arab Lawyers, should be commended for having published in two special issues a number of the papers presented at the First International Conference of Arab and African Women, held at Cairo in February 1985, in order to assist women in asserting their legal rights.

66. Under the Penal Code, rape was punished by hard labour or hard labour for life. If the perpetrator was a person in a position of trust in relation to the victim, an employee of such a person or an employee of the victim herself, then the penalty was hard labour for life.

67. Female circumcision continued to be practised in certain Egyptian villages. The custom was an ancient one, although it had no basis in religion; it was falling out of use and had disappeared in the cities and among the educated classes.

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Article 13

68. Women had full economic rights and could dispose of property independently, buy and sell and give and receive loans without any discriminatory restrictions.

Article 14

69. Working conditions in the countryside were generally not subject to regulation, whether for men or women. Attempts were being made to improve the situation of women through projects for their advancement and the establishment of some 259 clubs, but much remained to be done. The great changes taking place in rural society as they related to women were: the increasing number of health centres and family planning centres; the greater number of television sets and increased viewership; and the introduction of modern domestic appliances such as washing machines and stoves. As a result of those changes, rural women had a heightened awareness and the burden of household chores had been reduced.

70. The chief consequences of the migration of men had been greater family dependence on women and their enhanced leadership and decision-making role and increased self-confidence. The negative consequences had been a growing incidence of divorce, sexual deviation and family break-up.

71. Women could indeed own land, and their inheritance rights extended to all forms of movable and real property. The Government recognized the right of women working in agriculture to organize co-operatives. Such co-operatives were for men and women equally, without discrimination. It had to be admitted that health services and family planning schemes in rural areas were less effective than they were in cities.

Article 15

72. The treatment accorded by the courts was equal for men and women. Women could be witnesses, but the testimony of a woman was considered to have one half the weight of that of a man. That was a matter governed by certain religious prescriptions, and it was currently under discussion in Islamic and secular jurisprudence. Men and women had equal access to legal services. Women could conclude contracts in their own name and had full and independent financial competence. They could both sue and be sued.

Article 16

73. Consent on the part of the woman was a pre-condition for marriage and, in its absence, the marriage was invalid. Social influences did, however, play a part in the decision to marry, and that was a matter governed by individual and family relations and by tradition. The age of majority was the same for all, but the minimum age for marriage was 18 for men and 16 for women. The law required that marriages and divorces should be registered if they were to have legal effect, and that was a secular procedure. Women had the same rights as men with regard to

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trusteeship and guardianship of children. Adoption, however, was prohibited since it conflicted with Islamic law and Egyptian positive law. There was nevertheless the practice of hadanah, under which the child received full care without bearing the name of the guardian and without having any of the legal effects of filiation.

74. After a divorce, the woman could have custody of a male child up to the age of 10, extendable up to the age of 15 with the agreement of the court, and of a girl child up to the age of 12, extendable up to the age of marriage on the same condition. The percentage of women who had a clause inserted into the marriage contract stipulating the possibility of divorcing their husbands was low, and the practice was limited to the educated sector of society. There was, however, nothing in Egyptian law or in the principles of Islamic law to prevent a woman from requesting the inclusion of such a stipulation in her marriage contract.

75. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed the fact that withdrawal of the reservation to article 9 was under consideration. She would appreciate more information on de facto as opposed to de jure equality of rights, opportunities and choices in Egypt. In connection with the role of Islamic law, she wondered what the position of secular, non-religious women was in Egypt. She also wondered what effect the very high drop-out rates from primary and secondary education had on literacy rates. She deplored the fact that as witnesses women did not have the same status as men, and said that the participation of women in politics in Egypt needed improvement. She also felt that a greater sharing of family responsibilities was important, particularly given the high fertility rate.

76. Ms. CORTI said that much remained to be done to ensure equality of men and women in Egypt and that she could not agree that progress in that area must await improvements in the economic situation. Islamic law was very liberal but she wondered whether it was subject to misinterpretation. She asked whether conservative trends, particularly fundamentalism, were affecting Egypt and whether their impact was felt mainly among old people or young people. She wished to know whether divorce was covered by a single body of laws or by separate Coptic and Islamic laws. In connection with article 7, she wondered whether the fact that there was one woman minister with two portfolios really constituted progress by comparison with the situation described in the initial report.

77. Since the reason for the high drop-out rate was early marriage rather than economic factors, a major public education effort was needed to reduce it. In connection with articles 15 and 16, she noted that tradition and custom sometimes made it difficult to implement laws. Lastly, she wondered what measures were planned to combat illegal abortions, which posed a great danger to women.

78. Ms. GONZALEZ MARTINEZ said that a clearer picture was needed of progress in the areas of labour and employment. The high drop-out rate at the primary and secondary levels could, of course, be explained by financial need, but it could also be a result of discrimination, in that there might be a tendency to sacrifice a girl's education rather than a boy's. She wondered therefore what proportion of drop-outs were girls and what proportion were boys.

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79. Ms. OESER noted that the second periodic report (CEDAW/C/13/Add.2, p. 3) stated that the question of the validity of the provisions of the Convention or of referral to them before courts of law did not arise. Was that because there were no cases, or because there was no conflict between the Convention and domestic law? The table on page 23 of the report showed increased employment of women in mining, petroleum and construction; she wondered what kind of work women did in those sectors. She welcomed the fact that Egypt was reconsidering its reservations to certain provisions of the Convention.

80. Ms. TALLAWY said that the second periodic report, while making an improvement over the inadequate initial report, should have been still better. She hoped that the third report would reflect the relevant guidelines and comments. She welcomed the new job opportunities for women in the army, police and judiciary, but was concerned at the lack of progress in respect of the National Commission for Women, whose programme was never described in the report. She regretted the lack of interest shown by Egyptian women in pursuing their rights and playing a more dynamic role in society.

81. She welcomed Egypt's decision to reconsider its reservation to article 9, but felt that the reservations to articles 2 and 16 did a disservice to the country. The reservation to article 2 should not exist at all, because Egyptian law excluded discrimination. The reservations to many subparagraphs of article 16 could also be withdrawn, because no conflict with Islamic law was involved.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.