



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

Distr.: General
22 May 2023

Original: English

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Eighty-fifth session

Summary record of the 1972nd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 9 May 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Paláez Narváez

Contents

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

Fourth periodic report of Timor-Leste (continued)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.



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

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

Fourth periodic report of Timor-Leste (continued) (CEDAW/C/TLS/4, CEDAW/C/TLS/Q/4, CEDAW/C/TLS/RQ/4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Timor-Leste joined the meeting.*

Articles 7 to 9

2. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that women's representation at the executive level had stood at 15 per cent in 2022, and their representation in public services at the national level had stood at 25 per cent. In addition, the country's ambassadors to a large number of States were women.

3. As preparations were currently under way for the parliamentary elections, the Female Parliamentarians of Timor-Leste Group were conducting the "Women Are Ready to Lead" campaign with a view to encouraging potential women candidates to participate in seminars and radio and television talk shows. Political parties were required to comply with the 30 per cent quota for women candidates. During the current legislature, about 40 per cent of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of parliamentary committees had been women. Women candidates were also preparing to run in the village (*suco*) elections. In addition, women with disabilities were actively involved in public life at all levels of government.

4. Efforts to increase birth registration had continued in the country's hospitals and through mobile units in remote areas. The Government had also extended its public Christmas bonus programmes to citizens other than civil servants, which had been made possible by the mobile civil registration drive that had been organized throughout the country.

5. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that the Ministry of State Administration was committed to the empowerment of women in rural areas. Support for administrative training in 12 municipalities had been provided in 2022, including for 94 women. The Ministry had provided the village chiefs with training in the use of the relevant database in 2023 to help them better understand their roles and responsibilities under the law. In addition, the Ministry, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, had organized training programmes to empower women and persons with disabilities in the area of local development. The Ministry had recently trained focal points to raise awareness among women, girls, persons with disabilities and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex community about issues of gender equality and social inclusion and to highlight the important role played by women in politics and leadership. The aim was to facilitate their access to administrative posts in rural areas and to promote their participation in the forthcoming village elections. The Ministry was also running a social housing programme under which some 4,000 houses had been built, which had benefited women and persons with disabilities.

6. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that there were no refugees in Timor-Leste. Children born in Timor-Leste were entitled to Timorese nationality.

7. **Ms. Mikko**, referring to the 30 per cent quota for women in political parties' lists of candidates for election, said that she would welcome a more detailed account of the positions that they held in such lists.

Articles 10 to 14

8. **Ms. Akizuki** said that the Committee welcomed the progress achieved by the State party in the area of education. However, it noted with concern that the school dropout rate among girls and young women remained high. As the lack of sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities contributed to their high dropout rate, she would like to hear about the impact of the Sanitation and Hygiene Strategy 2020–2025. She also wished to know when the State party planned to adopt legal regulations conducive to the return of pregnant girls and young mothers to formal education.

9. The Committee noted with concern that the literacy rate for women had been only 67 per cent in 2020 and that the rate was lower and the gender gap wider in rural areas. Moreover, the literacy rate among women and girls with disabilities was only 10.5 per cent. She asked what measures were being taken to increase women's literacy rate in rural areas, to monitor and assess learning outcomes and the quality of teaching and to ensure quality access to education for all girls and young women with disabilities.

10. The Committee was perturbed by the fact that 71 per cent of children had reported having experienced physical violence by teachers during the past 12 months, and that such violence was a generally accepted practice, primarily for the purpose of punishment. Furthermore, formal reporting of sexual violence was virtually non-existent due to the normalization of sexual harassment of girls. She was concerned that restorative justice and informal resolutions generally took priority over criminal justice in cases of sexual violence. She wished to know how the State party monitored the implementation of Government Decree No. 29/2017 on the regulation of discipline for teaching and non-teaching staff of school establishments, and whether the Decree was widely disseminated among teachers and students. It would also be useful to know how the reporting of violence at schools to the police and other relevant institutions was encouraged, and how the rights and dignity of students who reported sexual violence were protected in a confidential and safe manner, for instance through counselling and psychological support.

11. The Committee noted with concern that difficulties were encountered in implementing reproductive health education owing to cultural taboos and the inadequate capacity of teachers, who failed to provide comprehensive sexuality education. She would appreciate additional information on the training courses on sexual and reproductive rights that were being conducted by the Secretariat of State for Equality and Inclusion, and on measures to prioritize sexual and reproductive health education.

12. **Ms. Haidar** said that women had accounted for 45.2 per cent of the labour force in 2021. However, the number of women in vulnerable and informal employment had increased to 73.6 per cent. Most women were reportedly excluded from the formal labour force and were thus denied access to appropriate social security. A large number of women worked in the informal sector as market sellers, subsistence farmers and household workers, and only 20 per cent of them were paid for their labour. Women's participation in the labour force was limited by their gender roles, family duties and educational attainment. She therefore wished to know what measures the State party intended to take to increase the number of women in formal employment, to ensure that they were not over-represented in unpaid and domestic labour, and to reduce their unemployment. She would also welcome information on measures to address customary laws and principles that reinforced discriminatory gender roles and negatively affected women's employment opportunities, especially in rural areas.

13. Noting that the National Employment Strategy 2017–2030 aimed at increasing the participation of women in the labour force, particularly women from rural areas and women with disabilities, she would welcome an update on the plan to establish career guidance and employment centres in each municipality. She wished to know whether steps had been taken to eliminate discrimination against women in recruitment and promotion, including effective mechanisms to ensure and monitor compliance with existing legislation. She asked whether the State party compiled data on unpaid care and domestic work. She was also interested in hearing about the current status of the draft law on domestic workers and whether it provided for mandatory contracts for domestic workers and a guaranteed minimum wage.

14. She noted that the General Inspectorate of Labour had received 427 labour-related complaints, 137 of which had been filed by women. Most cases related to contracts, salaries and overtime, but the Committee had received no disaggregated data about sexual harassment in the workplace and how it was addressed.

15. **Ms. Correia** said that article 59 of the Constitution guaranteed universal and compulsory basic education free of charge. The National Policy on Inclusive Education also guaranteed equal access to education. The Ministry of Education and educational establishments were entitled to enable young mothers to return to school after giving birth. However, it was necessary, with the assistance of the Ministry of Education, to adopt a

resolution on a “return to school” policy. She hoped that the next Government would continue to prioritize the issue.

16. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that, in 2019, a total of 29 pregnant students had participated in national examinations. The corresponding figures for 2020 and 2022 were 19 and 15 respectively.

17. The Ministry of Education had issued an order to all schools to implement the inclusive education system and to eliminate negative social norms. The Ministry had allocated funds for awareness-raising campaigns among students in vocational and higher education on the prevention of gender-based violence and sexual harassment, on reproductive health and on the promotion of a healthy school environment. No progress had been made during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, but action had been taken thereafter to promote sexual and reproductive health and to provide schools with basic hygiene and sanitation tools. In 2023 the Ministry of Education had allocated budgetary funds for the promotion of gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence and for awareness-raising of municipalities. During the period from 2019 to 2022, 1,689 girls and women had benefited from such activities. Municipality training courses were also being conducted in 2023 on behalf of 1,350 male students and teachers and 1,350 female students and teachers. Literacy promotion programmes had been implemented in nine municipalities during the period from 2018 to 2022 on behalf of 4,201 persons, including 2,689 women and girls.

18. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that the issue of social taboos had been included in national action plans, including in the National Action Plan against Gender-based Violence. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health had integrated issues relating to sexual and reproductive health into training courses and information campaigns on behalf of young people and newly formed families or households.

19. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that a recommendation had been made to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the ratification of the International Labour Organization Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), but there had not been sufficient time to debate the matter in the Council of Ministers. Similarly, although the bill on domestic work had been drafted, it had not been possible to discuss it during the Government’s short mandate. The outgoing Government would recommend to the new Government that it should prioritize those matters.

20. In 2022, the minimum wage had been increased from US\$ 115 to US\$ 135 per month. Under the law on social security, both employees and employers contributed a percentage of the salary to the social security scheme. Efforts were being made in coordination with the relevant ministries to enhance access to the social security system for women, particularly in rural areas, through advocacy and awareness-raising. The Government also cooperated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on labour issues.

21. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that, as part of efforts to increase women’s participation in the formal labour market, the Civil Service Commission had introduced a quota whereby 30 per cent of posts were to be reserved for women. It also sought to eliminate criteria that disadvantaged women candidates when applying for jobs. Women and persons with disabilities were encouraged to apply for all public positions. The Secretariat of State for Equality and Inclusion had also discussed increasing the recruitment of women in the National Police and the National Defence Forces.

22. The many women working in the informal sector were vulnerable because of the absence of formal contracts and the lack of regulation of working hours. In an effort to improve the situation of informal workers, the Secretariat of State for Professional Training and Employment had established professional training centres with a view to building the skills of both men and women in various areas, such as plumbing, electricity, carpentry and hospitality.

23. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that efforts to address sexual harassment included the decision by the Civil Service Commission to focus on ending sexual harassment in the civil service and the recent launch, in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), of the Safe Campus initiative at the National University of Timor-Leste. There were plans to extend the initiative to other

universities across the country. Safe spaces for women had also been established at stations and public transportation hubs. Victims who had the courage to do so could report cases of sexual harassment, and an online complaint mechanism was being developed.

24. **Ms. Haidar** asked how women were encouraged and supported to report cases of sexual harassment and given a sense of protection when doing so.

Articles 10–14

25. **Ms. Bonifaz Alfonzo**, noting with satisfaction the reduction in maternal and infant mortality according to data from 2016, said that she would welcome updated statistics on those mortality rates. She would be interested to know what was being done to increase the number of health-care professionals in all municipalities, particularly in rural areas, especially with a view to guaranteeing sexual and reproductive rights, and to increase the proportion of women giving birth in public health facilities. The Committee was concerned that it was quite common for women to have to ask their spouse's permission to receive gynaecological care and would appreciate information on measures being taken to combat the patriarchal values that led to such forms of discrimination. She wished to know what the State party was doing to ensure that all women, not only married women with children, had access to family planning and contraception, including in rural areas. The delegation might comment on steps being taken to address the increasing adolescent pregnancy rate and to provide the necessary sex education in schools. It might also describe the measures being taken with respect to the high malnutrition rates in rural areas. With regard to persons with disabilities, it was clear that ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities would provide the State party with more tools to work with, particularly in the field of health. She would be interested to hear about continued efforts to prevent HIV. Lastly, she wished to know about the circumstances in which abortion was permitted, for example in cases of pregnancy as a result of rape or where the woman's life was at risk.

26. **Ms. Bethel** said that the COVID-19 pandemic had increased the marginalization of vulnerable groups, such as women-headed households in rural areas and women and girls with disabilities. She would be interested to hear how those vulnerable groups were being provided for under the new social protection system and how effective the State party's communication strategy was in informing vulnerable women about the law and access to social services. The delegation might also provide an assessment of the Unique Identity System, which was intended to facilitate citizens' access to government services and support, and comment on the State party's position with regard to expanding social protection, particularly pension entitlements, to women working in the informal sector. Despite the expansion of the Bolsa da Mãe Programme to pregnant women and children and to selected municipalities with the highest rates of poverty and malnutrition, alternative sources indicated that overall coverage of poor and vulnerable households remained low. How did the State party intend to address that low coverage?

27. It would be interesting to hear how the State party was monitoring the implementation and outcomes of the Maubisse Declaration on Rural Women 2018–2023, which committed the Government to improving rural women's lives through measures such as access to credit and training. Given the potential of artisanal products to contribute to the country's economic development, it would be helpful to know whether the State party was supporting women artisans to build the capacity to improve the quality of their products and to gain access to domestic and international markets. Information on steps being taken to provide skills training to local businesses and women's groups and to facilitate access to credit for women entrepreneurs would be welcome.

28. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that a decision had been taken to deploy health professionals, especially doctors and midwives, to health posts at the *suco* level with a view to contributing to the prevention of maternal mortality.

29. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that, according to the results of the demographic and health surveys, the maternal mortality rate had decreased considerably between 2015 and 2022. The Ministry of Health had introduced a dashboard system to facilitate communication between health professionals and women in rural areas; for example, health workers could use the system to remind pregnant women about upcoming

appointments at their local health centre. A total of 24,221 women had been enrolled in the Liga Inan health programme in 2022; they were taught how to identify risks during pregnancy and when to seek assistance, thus helping reduce the maternal mortality rate. In addition, a pilot project had been established at the national hospital and five referral hospitals to conduct reviews and autopsies following maternal deaths to identify the cause of death and whether it was due to delays in reaching a health facility or not being attended to by a health professional, for example.

30. Under the family planning policy that had been launched in 2022, single women and adolescent girls were provided with information but were not given access to contraceptives. The Ministry of Health provided family planning services at all levels of the integrated health system, including in the most rural and remote areas. It was true that women were often concerned about their spouses' reaction when it came to using contraception; to address that problem, the Ministry was working in cooperation with church groups to raise awareness of the importance of birth spacing for women's health. Health workers provided services to pregnant adolescent girls. However, often girls' families wished to hide their daughters' pregnancies from the community and did not allow them to have access to such services, which contributed to the high maternal mortality rate.

31. With regard to nutrition, capacity was being developed to ensure essential care for newborns at the national hospital and five referral hospitals, and mothers were encouraged to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months.

32. HIV services continued to be run at the national hospital and referral hospitals and had also been expanded to health centres. Specially trained teams provided testing, including to pregnant mothers, and administered treatment if necessary.

33. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that the Bolsa da Mãe Programme had originally been expanded in response to the higher malnutrition rates in Ermera, Oecusse and Ainaro, but coverage had been expanded to several additional municipalities in 2023. Some 16,000 pregnant women already had access to health clinics under the programme and were entitled to a US\$ 15 monthly allowance to support their nutrition. After the birth, they would receive an additional \$5 per month, and a further US\$ 10 if the child had a disability. The monthly allowance for older persons and persons with disabilities had been increased from US\$ 30 to US\$ 50 in 2022 and to US\$ 57 in 2023; in addition, they would receive an end-of-year allowance of US\$ 200. Measures were also in place to facilitate access to credit for members of women's cooperatives.

34. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that, in 2021, a decree-law had been adopted to expand the Bolsa da Mãe Programme for poor and vulnerable households with a view to increasing access to health care and nutritional support women, children and persons with disabilities. In November 2022, the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion had allocated US\$ 7 million to the programme. Currently, some 9,500 mothers and more than 51,000 children received an allowance through the programme.

35. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that a credit support scheme had been introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic to support the economic recovery of the business sector. More than 4,000 persons had benefited from the scheme each year, of which some 60 per cent were women. The Government had also launched a scheme to provide baskets of basic food and hygiene products during the lockdown. Some US\$ 80 million had been allocated to the scheme from the State budget, and more than 1.6 million baskets had been distributed, at a value of US\$ 50 per basket. The scheme had created some 29,000 temporary jobs, nearly half of which had been held by women, in particular those related to weaving the baskets and packaging food products.

36. Timor-Leste had an autonomous agency that worked in coordination with the Ministry of Economic Affairs to provide employability and entrepreneurship training, consultancy services, business incubation sessions and support for setting up a business. Currently, 996 persons – of whom 60 per cent were women – were registered with the agency to receive support and training.

37. In 2022, the Government had introduced a programme of low-interest credit to support economic recovery. Some 25 per cent of beneficiaries were women. In addition, the

Government was pursuing a policy to build an inclusive, non-discriminatory economy. More than 4,000 women had received leadership and management training, and 49 women were qualified as national trainers.

38. **Ms. Stott Despoja** asked whether the State party had any plans to amend article 141 of the Penal Code with respect to abortion.

39. **Ms. Akia** said that, while she welcomed the adoption of a transitional land law that granted women the same land ownership rights as men, she wished to know what was being done to provide rural women with the skills, market access and knowledge of sustainable agricultural practices necessary for them to live independently and participate in the economy. It would also be useful to learn what steps had been taken to increase access to productive land for rural women, inform them about their land rights, put a curb on forced evictions and guarantee adequate compensation for women who were forcibly evicted. She also wished to know what the impact of such measures had been and whether they were implemented across all areas of the country.

40. She wondered whether the State party had implemented the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially regarding the need to conduct an urgent review of the land registration process, draw up a law to protect customary land, end the forced displacement of indigenous peoples from their lands and ensure that all such removals were conducted with free, prior and informed consent. It would be interesting to learn what mechanisms were in place to ensure that the voices of women – especially rural and indigenous women – were taken into account during legislative drafting processes.

41. As women remained highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, she wished to know what practical legislative, policy and administrative measures had been introduced to provide long-term solutions for communities affected by climate change, including by enhancing their resilience and supporting adaptation efforts. She would welcome information on the number of women who had been affected by Cyclone Seroja in 2021 and on the support that they had received from the Government. She wished to know how the Government had incorporated gender sensitivity requirements into climate change financing, legislation, policies and disaster risk management efforts in order to address the specific needs of women and girls. It would also be useful to learn what was being done to increase climate change literacy and disaster risk knowledge among communities, especially women, with a view to empowering them to participate in decision-making and exercise their rights.

Articles 15 and 16

42. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that she would like to learn what the State party was doing to prevent adolescent pregnancy, what progress had been made in the discussions on the minimum age of marriage and what was being done to change the culture of payment of bride prices. She would welcome information on measures to eradicate polygamy and on the status of the draft autonomous law on the rules of marriage and family; in that connection, she wished to know what provisions the bill contained to help end polygamy. She also wondered whether any discussions had been held on the introduction of legal provisions to criminalize incest, especially in cases involving underage victims, and whether the State party had taken inspiration from the approach used by other countries to overcome religious or cultural obstacles to legal changes regarding marriage customs.

43. With regard to land ownership, she wished to know what mechanisms were in place to allow complaints to be made regarding the implementation of land registration and what training was given to judges, lawyers and other legal actors regarding the application of new land laws, specifically Law No. 13/2017 on the ownership of property and Law No. 8/2017 on the expropriation of land in the public interest. It would also be useful to learn how many women have been evicted or relocated by the State since the approval of those two laws. Lastly, she wondered what measures had been taken to ensure the protection of women's land rights during such evictions and what impact those measures had had.

44. **Ms. Correia** (Timor-Leste) said that the Government had begun to review the Criminal Code. It hoped that the incoming administration would continue to prioritize the legislative review.

45. The national action plan on environmental protection included programmes to encourage women across all municipalities to plant trees, using seeds provided by the Government.

46. Abortion was permitted only in exceptional circumstances, such as where there was a risk to the mother.

47. In March 2023, Timor-Leste had worked with international partners to provide training to judges, public defenders and public prosecutors on how to handle cases of gender-based violence, in line with the applicable international instruments.

48. **A representative of Timor-Leste** said that working groups had been established within all line ministries to monitor the implementation of the 2015 Maubisse Declaration aimed at improving rural women's lives and produce an annual progress report. Gender equality requirements had been integrated into the projects carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

49. **Ms. Bessa** (Timor-Leste) said that the State understood that national development was dependent on the full participation of women on an equal footing with men in all sectors. To that end, women and men must work together to overcome the barriers to women's participation. The Government remained committed to amplifying women's voices, promoting their rights and implementing the Convention. It welcomed the Committee's recommendations and would continue to work constructively with all stakeholders to enhance the enjoyment of human rights by all persons, including women and girls.

50. **The Chair** said that the constructive dialogue with the State party had enabled the Committee to better understand the situation of women in the country. The Committee encouraged Timor-Leste to take all necessary measures to implement the Committee's recommendations and to accept, without delay, the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.