



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
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Summary record of the 2196th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 13 February 2026, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Akia (Rapporteur)

Contents

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

Combined fifth to seventh periodic reports of Lesotho

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In the absence of Ms. Haidar, Ms. Akia (Rapporteur) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

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

Combined fifth to seventh periodic reports of Lesotho (CEDAW/C/LSO/5-7; CEDAW/C/LSO/Q/5-7; CEDAW/C/LSO/RQ/5-7)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Lesotho joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Lesotho**, introducing his country's combined fifth to seventh periodic reports (CEDAW/C/LSO/5-7), said that the obligations under the Convention undertaken by Lesotho formed an integral part of its national legal system and policy framework. In accordance with articles 2 and 15 of the Convention, the guarantees of equality before the law and non-discrimination enshrined in the Constitution were an increasingly important instrument for eliminating structural and systemic gender inequality in Lesotho. Gender equality had been made a core pillar of the National Strategic Development Plan for the period 2018–2023. The Plan aimed to achieve sustainable development through women's economic, political and social empowerment. The Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation was spearheading the implementation of the Convention primarily by championing gender mainstreaming initiatives across all line ministries. The Human Rights Unit of the Ministry of Justice, Law and Parliamentary Affairs enhanced the institutional capacities of the line ministries to employ a human rights-based approach to programming, budgeting and monitoring and evaluation. Efforts to implement the Convention were anchored in a robust human rights framework in which gender equality was recognized not only as a legal obligation but as a prerequisite for sustainable development, peace and inclusive governance. Such efforts were guided by the Committee's general recommendations, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – particularly Sustainable Development Goals 5, 10 and 16 – conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) concerning equality, decent work, social protection and maternity protection, the African Union's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development.
3. The Government had undertaken a number of legislative and policy reforms to address persistent structural challenges, which included women's unequal access to economic opportunities, productive resources and decent work, their underrepresentation in political and public decision-making and the disproportionate impact of poverty, unemployment, climate change and environmental degradation on women and girls, particularly those in rural, remote and marginalized communities. The Persons with Disabilities Equity Act of 2021 was aimed at advancing intersectional inclusion, in line with article 1 of the Convention and general recommendation No. 18 (1991). Reforms to the Children's Protection and Welfare Act of 2011 were in progress. The Counter Domestic Violence Act of 2022 strengthened prevention, survivor protection and accountability mechanisms, in accordance with general recommendation No. 35 (2017). The Harmonization of Customary Widows' Rights with the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act of 2022 had abolished discriminatory customary practices regarding the administration of joint estates. Lastly, the Administration of Estates and Inheritance Act of 2024 ensured that women and men had equal property and inheritance rights, in line with articles 2, 15 and 16 of the Convention.
4. Effective implementation of legislation remained a challenge, as illustrated by women's continuing underrepresentation in politics and decision-making positions, despite the establishment of a quota system, in accordance with article 7 of the Convention. However, there had been an increase in appointments of women to the judiciary, with women accounting for 11 out of 20 High Court judges. The Department of Gender of the Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation continued to lead a coordinated multisectoral response, guided by the Gender and Development Policy for the period 2018–2030, to address challenges such as limited funding, technical capacity and staffing in enforcing laws against harmful gender norms and patriarchal practices. Gender mainstreaming was being strengthened across national planning, budgeting, service delivery, monitoring and accountability systems, in line with general recommendation No. 28 (2010). Those efforts

were complemented by the National Financial Inclusion Strategy for the period 2024–2028, which was aimed at expanding women’s access to finance, productive assets, entrepreneurial opportunities and social protection, in line with articles 13 and 14 of the Convention.

5. Women’s labour force participation rate, which was currently 48.7%, remained significantly lower than men’s, which stood at 67.7%. In an effort to bridge that gap, the Government was implementing the “Her Empire” project, an initiative designed to promote the economic empowerment of women and advance gender equality, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and in partnership with local banks, universities and telecommunications companies. The project, which was strongly focused on capacity-building, mentoring and enhancing women entrepreneurs’ access to markets, particularly in the agricultural, tourism and manufacturing sectors, was aimed at supporting the transition of women-led businesses from informal operations to sustainable, resilient and competitive enterprises. For that purpose, the project included a six-month training programme with a focus on business management, digital technology and marketing and a \$200,000 start-up fund for women entrepreneurs.

6. To improve access to justice, legal aid offices had been established in Mokhotlong, Thaba-Tseka and Mohale’s Hoek Districts and the High Court had been decentralized to better serve the south of the country. The Government remained committed to ensuring inclusive, equitable and quality education for women and girls, including those with disabilities, those from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds and those who were pregnant. It was strengthening policies to address school-related gender-based violence, reduce dropout rates and promote girls’ involvement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, in line with article 10 of the Convention and the principle that no one should be left behind. There had been significant and consistent declines in child and maternal mortality, with the maternal mortality ratio falling from 566 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2024 to 478 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2025. That progress was the result of initiatives such as the “M-Mama” programme, a round-the-clock emergency referral system for pregnant women and newborns that ensured that mothers in rural and mountainous areas had access to care through a free helpline and a network of local drivers; the increase of the proportion of the country covered by midwifery services, to 92%; the establishment of mobile clinics in industrial zones; and the issuance of improved guidelines on monitoring and responding to maternal and prenatal deaths. However, the maternal mortality ratio remained higher than the average for sub-Saharan Africa. The Government had adopted a gender-responsive national digital health strategy for the period 2025–2030 with a view to using emerging remote monitoring and big data technologies to expand access to healthcare services, improve medical diagnosis and promote person-centred care.

7. The Government had reached an advanced stage in the development of a national action plan on women and peace and security that was aligned with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women and peace and security, particularly resolution 2250 (2015). The plan envisaged the adoption of a gender-transformative approach across the pillars of prevention, participation, protection, relief and recovery, with a strong emphasis on women’s leadership in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, climate security and disaster risk reduction. Broad-based consultations on the plan had been undertaken with government institutions, civil society, traditional leaders and development partners. In response to the significant challenge to sustaining progress posed by the global and national decline in funding for gender equality programmes, the Government was strengthening national ownership of such programmes, improving gender-responsive budgeting and exploring innovative partnerships, including with the private sector and development partners, to mobilize sustainable and predictable resources for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Articles 1–6

8. **The Chair** said that the State Party’s dual legal system – combining statutory and customary law – had reportedly led to confusion in interpreting and implementing the legal and policy framework for the protection of women and girls, with customary law, which could be discriminatory, often taking precedence over statutory law. She wished to know what steps the State Party was taking to resolve such challenges. She wondered what efforts

the State Party was making to ensure that customary law practices, norms and procedures and statutory laws that remained discriminatory were brought into line with the Convention, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Given that international instruments to which Lesotho was a party expressly provided that non-discrimination was a non-derogable right, she wondered whether the State Party would consider introducing constitutional reform to ensure that no exception to the principle of non-discrimination undermined the protection of non-citizens, especially women and girls facing intersecting forms of discrimination. She wished to know what legal and policy reforms were being undertaken to regulate technology, including artificial intelligence, in the State Party, with a view to mitigating its potential to perpetuate and exacerbate gender inequality and discrimination against women and girls.

9. She would appreciate hearing about the progress made on the justice reform project that the State Party had begun in 2023 to enhance access to justice for women and girls. In the light of reports that the relevant stakeholders, including law enforcement and judicial personnel, traditional leaders and community councils, had limited capacity to implement laws on discrimination against women, she wished to know what steps had been taken to provide those stakeholders and women and girls themselves with capacity-building on the Convention and the Optional Protocol thereto, the Committee's recommendations, the Maputo Protocol and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. It would be useful to know what measures the State Party took to raise public awareness of the Committee's recommendations and inquiry and communications procedures under the Optional Protocol. She wondered whether women and girls in communities had been consulted during the development of the national action plan on women and peace and security, if so, how their views had been incorporated into the plan and how the State Party had addressed the emerging issue of digital technologies in its women and peace and security agenda.

10. Given that the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties provided that reservations to treaties were not to be encouraged if they were incompatible with treaties' object and purpose, she recommended that the State Party consider withdrawing its reservation to article 2 of the Convention, taking into consideration the experience of States Parties with similar cultural backgrounds and legal systems that had successfully withdrawn similar reservations.

11. **A representative of Lesotho** said that article 18 of the Constitution contained a definition of discrimination that was similar to that set out in the Convention. Lesotho had strengthened its legal framework to enable it to advance substantive equality through the adoption and implementation of key policies.

12. **A representative of Lesotho** said that a number of legislative reforms were being undertaken to address conflicts between statutory and customary law. The Tenth Amendment to the Constitution, which provided that chiefs could be succeeded by their daughters, would be implemented in customary law through the adoption of a bill to amend the Laws of Lerotoli, the main source of customary law. Judicial and law enforcement personnel underwent continuous capacity-building on the integration of a gender perspective into their work, while women and girls were being taught about and empowered to exercise their rights through ongoing community outreach efforts. The national mechanism on reporting, implementation and follow-up disseminated the Committee's concluding observations in various ways, such as sending them to relevant ministries, presenting them at workshops and publishing them in the media. Civil society organizations, including women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs), participated in the planning and implementation of reforms, and governmental bodies collaborated with such organizations in holding community consultations on reforms in which individual women's voices could be heard. The Government did not currently plan to withdraw the country's reservation to article 2 of the Convention, as it appeared to have public support as a means of safeguarding the monarchy in its current form.

13. **The Chair** said that she would welcome disaggregated data on cases in which the Convention had been referred to in court proceedings.

14. **Ms. Barriteau** said that she would like to know whether a timeline had been set for the Laws of Lerotholi to be amended.

15. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Convention had been cited to justify the Harmonization of Customary Widows' Rights with the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act and the Administration of Estates and Inheritance Act. Courts had made reference to the Convention in cases in which customary law had conflicted with provisions of statutory law regarding gender equality, for example in court cases in 2016 and 2019 in which the Convention had been used to challenge customary inheritance practices that conflicted with women's constitutional rights. Any conflicts with other laws resulting from the adoption of the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution would be resolved through amendment to those laws, including the Laws of Lerotholi.

16. **Ms. Barriteau** said that, given that a survey conducted in 2022 had shown that 63% of respondents believed that daughters should have the same rights as sons to succeed their fathers as chiefs, she wondered whether the State Party would consider conducting a referendum to determine whether withdrawal of the State Party's reservation to article 2 of the Convention would enjoy popular support.

17. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Government was maintaining the country's reservation to article 2 of the Convention in connection with succession to the monarchy, not succession to chieftainships, which had been addressed with the adoption of the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution and the development of the bill to amend the Laws of Lerotholi. The adoption of the Amendment had been facilitated by a judgment issued in a case that had also been heard before the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. Discussions were under way on the possibility of withdrawing the reservation, and a referendum on the matter would be held when the time was right.

18. **Ms. Barriteau** said that, given that domestic laws provided for a number of exceptions to the Constitution that did not comply with article 2 of the Convention, it would be useful to know whether the State Party intended to enact a law that would fully incorporate the Convention into domestic legislation. She wondered what budget was currently allocated to the judiciary and to its training programme.

19. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Law Reform Commission, which was currently undergoing institutional capacity-building, would make a study of all national laws related to international treaties to which Lesotho was a party and issue recommendations regarding the incorporation of international treaties, such as the Convention, into relevant pieces of legislation.

20. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** said that the Gender Department, which accounted for less than 1% of the total budget of the Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation, reportedly lacked the human, technical and financial resources that it needed to monitor and coordinate government policy on gender equality. She wondered what steps the State Party envisaged taking to assess the work of the Department and enhance its capacity to address the needs of rural areas, where coordination was limited. It would be useful to know what steps were taken to gather data disaggregated by sex and gender to inform the development of public policies.

21. She expressed concern that the State Party's heavy reliance on external funding and donor-driven policies on gender equality had come at the expense of developing its own programmes and strategic plans. She wondered what steps were being taken to ensure greater national ownership in formulating such programmes and plans. She wished to know what measures the State Party would take to ensure that the gender-responsive budget that it had initially planned to introduce for the 2023/24 fiscal year was introduced for the 2027/28 fiscal year, as currently planned, that gender-responsive budgeting was implemented in all ministries and that its implementation was monitored and complied with.

22. It would be useful to know what measures the State Party would take to improve collaboration and coordination with civil society organizations, particularly women's organizations. She would welcome details of the planned timetable for the adoption of the Human Rights Commission Bill, which was essential for the establishment of that institution, and the steps that would be taken to ensure that the Human Rights Commission complied

with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).

23. **A representative of Lesotho** said that, with the support of development partners, particularly United Nations entities, the Government had carried out a gender audit of ministries, including the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of the Public Service and the ministry with responsibility for ensuring gender equality at the time, and had identified significant gaps in their capacities. A number of different strategies had been developed in collaboration with development partners to improve the collection of sex-disaggregated data, including a strategy developed by the police force in collaboration with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

24. The Government had made efforts to develop plans to address reductions in foreign aid; for example, it was currently in talks with stakeholders to find a way of continuing successful programmes that had formerly been conducted with support from the Millennium Challenge Account. The Ministry of Finance was leading efforts to build the gender-responsive budgeting capacities of line ministries with support from the Commonwealth. In collaboration with development partners, the Government had created the position of gender mainstreaming manager at four ministries with responsibility for water, agriculture, gender and finance, respectively. The Government had consulted extensively and had a good relationship with civil society organizations that focused on gender equality. There were a number of mechanisms to ensure government collaboration with such organizations, including a forum to combat gender-based violence which brought together line ministries, civil society organizations and development partners.

25. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the establishment of the Human Rights Commission was provided for in the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution. Although it was not possible to provide a timeline for the adoption of the Human Rights Commission Bill implementing that provision of the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution, the Government regarded its enactment as a priority.

26. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** said that she wished to know what plans the State Party had to work with NGOs to ensure gender equality, particularly by improving the level of participation of women's organizations in such efforts.

27. **Ms. Reddock** said that she would welcome details of work done by the Government with women's NGOs in rural areas.

28. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she wished to know whether the State Party had calculated the economic costs of failing to make use of temporary special measures and harness women's human capital to achieve national development targets in core sectors like STEM education, energy, financial services, manufacturing, industry and technology. She wondered what measures had been taken to raise awareness of the value of temporary special measures at all levels in the public and private sectors and ensure that measures to protect women's rights were fully aligned with the Convention and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. It would be useful to know what steps were being taken to ensure that women in uniform were provided with innovative pathways, such as accelerated promotion and special appointments, to attain leadership and decision-making positions within the defence and security forces, with a view to redressing the current male-dominated composition of their leadership. She would welcome more details of steps taken to ensure that girls and women had equal access to quality education, training and career pathways in STEM subjects and the arts and to accelerate meaningful participation, especially in emerging and future jobs in the digital sector.

29. She wondered what innovative temporary special measures had been adopted or proposed under the Gender and Social Inclusion Policy for the period 2018–2023 to achieve fifty-fifty parity in women's political and public participation, in line with general recommendation No. 40 (2024). She would appreciate disaggregated data on women's representation in the Cabinet, councils, public corporations, the National Assembly and other relevant bodies to reflect progress towards parity.

30. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Government attached great importance to safeguarding temporary special measures for women, as demonstrated by the promulgation

of the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution in August 2025, which required the Government to adopt temporary special measures to address inequality gaps for the benefit of disadvantaged groups, including women and girls, and to enact implementing laws. In addition, the Government intended to undertake reforms of the electoral and legal frameworks, guided by the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 (2004), to introduce time-bound legislative quotas for consideration by Parliament; those efforts would be complemented by capacity-building for women candidates, campaign financing support and measures to prevent political violence against women. The idea was to ensure that the quota translated into substantive and safe participation, not merely symbolic inclusion, as had occurred with previous legal instruments.

31. In terms of women's and girls' access to opportunities in science and technology, the Government provided scholarships for women and girls in the mining sector. There were also scholarships for girls with disabilities and youth leadership programmes for young women, and some leadership spaces in local governance were reserved for rural women.

32. **A representative of Lesotho** said that, in the light of the limited success of quotas, the Department of Gender was in talks with the Independent Electoral Commission regarding ways to further increase women's representation in politics at all levels, including by providing incentives for political parties to use funds received from the Commission to that end. Efforts also included community-level dialogue and multisectoral activities with NGOs. The National Strategic Development Plan had contributed to increasing the recruitment and promotion of women; for example, a woman had been promoted to the rank of Major General in the Lesotho Defence Force.

33. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she would welcome the State Party's comments on the contradiction between the 30% quota of chieftains in the Senate and the law that precluded women from becoming chieftains and on the ways in which it was tracking the results of efforts to implement the Convention to ensure that they had an impact on the lives of women at the community level.

34. **A representative of Lesotho** said that, pursuant to the adoption of the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution, laws were being harmonized to ensure that girls could accede to the chieftaincy.

35. **A representative of Lesotho** said that, while the wheels of the legislative process sometimes turned slowly, whether for reasons of accuracy and comprehensiveness or due to broad consultations, there was political will to integrate the provisions of the Convention in national law.

36. **Ms. Barriteau** said that, despite commendable efforts to achieve gender equality, gender stereotypes and patriarchal practices remained highly institutionalized, hampering the effective implementation of laws and policies introduced to address issues such as child marriage, polygamy, bride price (*bohali*) and gender-based violence against women and girls, especially those in rural areas, those with disabilities and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women. Girls as young as 16 were permitted to marry under the Marriage Act, and the minimum age was even younger under customary law. More than 85% of women experienced gender-based violence, and Lesotho had the third highest rape rate per capita in the world. Accordingly, she was interested in hearing about: the strategies developed, including budgetary and human resources, for the full integration of child brides, especially into educational institutions; any measures to criminalize and eradicate the practice of marrying girls to their rapists or kidnappers; any planned legal amendments to ensure the prohibition and criminalization of all forms of child marriage; and any existing measures to maintain centralized disaggregated data on child marriage. She was also interested in receiving data on prosecutions and convictions in cases of domestic or gender-based violence in all administrative districts.

37. In addition, she would welcome information on the comprehensive measures taken to combat harmful gender stereotypes about women, including those conveyed in traditional media and online, specifying whether the measures included engaging with men and traditional or community leaders and undertaking capacity-building for service providers and what their outcome had been. Lastly, information would also be welcome on measures taken and resources allocated to implement the Counter Domestic Violence Act of 2022 and on the

decentralization of services for survivors of gender-based violence, including nationwide access to shelters, protection, legal aid, healthcare and reparation.

38. **Mr. Safarov** said that, despite the ratification of a number of national, regional and international instruments, the State Party saw high rates of trafficking in persons, particularly in women, children and persons living in poverty, as a country of origin and transit. Economic hardship, exacerbated by inflation and climate change, had driven vulnerable populations to seek opportunities in urban centres and abroad, in particular South Africa, where they often fell prey to traffickers, including through online means. Victims rarely reported their cases. Against that backdrop, he wished to know what the status was of the special law on the prevention of trafficking, whether the definitions it contained were in line with international standards and whether there were shelters outside the capital, especially in areas with the highest prevalence of trafficking cases. In addition, he would be interested in information on the investigation of cases, the results of those investigations and any support programmes for victims, especially of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Lastly, he was curious to learn about the State Party's efforts to combat cybertrafficking.

39. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Government had strengthened the legal framework to protect the rights and dignity of women and children and to dismantle discriminatory norms and harmful practices. For example, the Children's Protection and Welfare Act of 2011 safeguarded children from exploitation, abuse, trafficking, harmful cultural practices, child labour and degrading treatment, with particular attention paid to the heightened vulnerabilities of girls. The Act, as amended, prohibited child marriage and removed fines as a possible penalty for violations, thus reinforcing accountability and prioritizing the protection of children's rights over customary practices. The Counter Domestic Violence Act of 2022 criminalized marital rape, abolished levirate and sororate marriages, prohibited forced marriage following rape and established comprehensive measures for prevention, protection, prosecution and survivor support, in line with the Convention and general recommendation No. 35 (2017). Furthermore, under the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act of 2006, women enjoyed full legal capacity to own property, enter into contracts and make independent decisions. The reforms directly challenged patriarchal norms and affirmed women's bodily autonomy, dignity and right to justice.

40. **A representative of Lesotho** said that district-level child protection teams had been strengthened to deal with cases of gender-based violence and to advise communities on pathways for reporting such cases. The Ministry of Justice, Law and Parliamentary Affairs, in partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sports, Arts and Social Development, the police and civil society organizations, had revived the nationwide campaign to inform communities and their leaders about their rights and channels for reporting incidents of gender-based violence. Efforts to reduce the stigma attached to such violence included encouraging the reporting of cases. Moreover, some NGOs provided free psychosocial assistance and others also provided legal services when a case was referred to the courts. The next fiscal year's budget allocation for addressing gender-based violence was not yet known. In three recent cases of women murdered by their intimate partner or another male relative, the penalties imposed had ranged from 24 years' to life imprisonment. Further details of those and other cases would be provided in writing.

41. Although national laws were being aligned with international standards regarding the minimum marriage age, child marriage remained a persistent challenge owing to poverty, traditional customs and high rates of adolescent pregnancy. Measures, including legal measures, were nonetheless being taken to specifically address early marriage and sexual abuse of children.

42. The Government was taking a multifaceted approach to addressing gender stereotypes through legal reforms, policy change and public information under the Gender and Development Policy 2018–2030, which aimed at changing societal mindsets that favoured traditional and patriarchal roles. The initiatives also engaged men recognizing that, without their involvement, harmful gender norms would persist. Public awareness activities, including in rural or remote areas, consisted of workshops and radio and television programmes. In addition, dialogues were held with traditional leaders to prevent customs from resulting in harm to girls.

43. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Government was aware of rising gender-based violence and other violations against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and had taken deliberate measures to address the situation. For example, in collaboration with NGOs representing persons with different gender identities and sexual orientations, the Ministry of Justice, Law and Parliamentary Affairs and other line ministries had conducted countrywide campaigns among members of that community, their leaders and service providers to raise awareness about the rights of those women and how to include them in society. In addition, there were plans to amend criminal law concerning hate crimes perpetrated against protected groups, including members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community, so as to ensure that perpetrators were punished in accordance with the gravity of the offence. To that end, the Government had sought technical assistance from the Human Dignity Trust.

44. **A representative of Lesotho** said that, pursuant to an amendment introduced in 2021, the definition of trafficking and exploitation had been broadened to criminalize all forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour and child trafficking. Any recruitment or transport of a child for exploitation purposes henceforth constituted trafficking, irrespective of the means used. Negotiations were under way with South Africa to identify all nationals of Lesotho in that country, including those who might have been trafficked, and ensure that their situation was regularized. Efforts were being made more generally to account for all Lesotho nationals abroad and thereby identify those who might be missing.

45. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Ministry of Home Affairs conducted public awareness campaigns to combat trafficking in persons, including information on the dangers of modern technologies. In addition, some police stations, particularly in Mokhotlong, Leribe and Maseru Districts, had established anti-trafficking and migrant control units. Although the demand for online job searches was increasing, there were currently no confirmed cases of Lesotho nationals having been recruited through online scams.

46. **Ms. Barriteau** said that she would welcome further details about the budget allocated to the reintegration of child brides in school.

47. **Mr. Safarov** said that he would appreciate more information about anti-trafficking measures in the State Party, including specifics about the legal definition, identification and investigation procedures and the forthcoming national action plan.

48. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Government aimed to make education governance more gender responsive. It had not received any reports of girls being denied an education because they were mothers or were pregnant.

Articles 7–9

49. **Ms. Draz** said that she was interested in hearing about the specific measures being taken to increase women's representation in politics, in both the executive and legislative branches, and about any mechanisms or initiatives envisaged to ensure gender parity across all levels of governance. While the 30% quota of women had been successful in the latest local elections, it had yet to translate into broader leadership transformation. Therefore, she wished to know whether the State Party had considered introducing incentives for political parties that succeeded in placing women higher on their candidate lists and what specific mechanisms were in place to ensure that the success of the local quota was linked to mandatory representation of women, including those facing structural disadvantages, in higher-level executive positions. It would be helpful to know the timeline for the entry into force of the new provision allowing women to accede to the chieftaincy.

50. Despite strong public support for women's right to hold office, there remained significant concern among the public that holding such office would trigger family conflict and expose women to harassment. Accordingly, she wondered what targeted actions were being taken to dismantle the cultural barriers preventing women from seeking political office and to create safe and supportive environments for participation in public and political life. She also wondered what specific measures were being taken to institutionalize gender parity, in particular in the foreign service, the judiciary, the security services and academia, and what time-bound policies or legislative frameworks were being developed to ensure equal representation in senior decision-making in those sectors.

51. **Ms. Al-Shukairi**, commending the State Party for the amendments to article 41 of the Constitution enabling women to transmit their nationality to foreign spouses and children on an equal basis with men, said that she wished to know what specific steps were being taken to adopt the Immigration and Citizenship Bill containing those amendments, when it would enter into force, what monitoring and service delivery mechanisms would be put in place to ensure implementation, particularly with regard to the registration of foreign spouses or restoration of citizenship without a court decision, and how information on changes to citizenship law would be disseminated at the local, national and international levels to ensure that all citizens were aware of their rights. She also wished to know how compliance would be monitored, particularly in rural districts, whether the State Party would collect sex-disaggregated data on applications for acquisition or restoration of citizenship following the entry into force of the amendments, if so, how the data would be used to assess the impact of the reforms on women and what measures were envisioned to build the capacity of immigration officials, civil registry staff and local authorities to ensure the consistent and non-discriminatory application of the amended citizenship law.

52. **A representative of Lesotho** said that, although progress on the implementation of the 30% quota of women in political office was being hampered by beliefs, customs and religion, the promulgation of the Tenth Amendment, which reflected what the electorate desired in a government, would propel the process forward. Indeed, the Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sports, Arts and Social Development was enthusiastic about beginning work on instructions to operationalize the sections of the Amendment that dealt with the empowerment of women, gender equality and gender parity. To support compliance with the quota, the Government was running mentorship programmes for women counsellors to teach them about their rights and build their confidence to run and successfully compete for public office, and campaign funding was available for women candidates and for political parties with women on their candidate lists. In addition, reforms of the rules governing party nominations were being considered. The Government's efforts in relation to patriarchal norms and political violence revolved around dialogue and awareness-raising, particularly among traditional and religious leaders, and were slowly yielding the desired outcome.

53. **A representative of Lesotho** said that, pursuant to the National Strategic Development Plan, which required gender equality to be mainstreamed across all government sectors, steady progress had been made in advancing women's participation in international representation and diplomacy. The number of women serving as ambassadors and representatives abroad, supported by targeted recruitment, training, mentorship and leadership development programmes, had risen significantly. For instance, in 2025, 37% of ambassadors and 25% of Consuls-General had been women. Challenges remained, but the Government continued to strengthen accountability, gender-responsive budgeting and institutional mechanisms to ensure that women participated equally in international decision-making.

54. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Immigration and Citizenship Bill would permit all citizens, including women and children, to hold dual nationalities, thereby addressing historic gender inequalities in national rights. Access to identity documents, including passports, had been significantly improved for women, particularly those in rural areas or mountainous areas, enabling them to access social services, employment and financial opportunities. Lesotho nationals living abroad could apply to embassies and high commissions for registration and documentation. The Ministry of Home Affairs ran outreach programmes in remote areas to provide inhabitants with identity documents and explain changes in the law.

55. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Immigration and Citizenship Bill was at the consultative stage, where the Ministry of Home Affairs provided input for the Ministry of Justice, Law and Parliamentary Affairs to use in drafting; therefore, it was currently not possible to know when it would be enacted. Immigration personnel participated in training workshops on the principle of non-discrimination.

Articles 10–14

56. **Ms. Reddock** said that she wished to know whether there was a time frame for introducing universal, free and compulsory secondary education and whether there were

plans to introduce a gender perspective in the policy on technical and vocational education and training with a view to creating equal training opportunities for women and men, including in rural areas. She also wished to know what mechanisms were in place, including accessibility features, to facilitate access to all levels of education for women and girls with disabilities, in both rural and urban areas. While the life-skills-based sexuality education programme was well-structured and addressed the issues of gender, self-esteem and refusal skills, it was silent on sexuality itself. Accordingly, she wondered whether the State Party intended to revise and update the curriculum, especially regarding sexuality, sexually transmitted infections, contraception and consent, and to integrate a year-long specialist course on the matter into teacher training. The State Party was invited to describe the impact of the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy Policy, the number of rural schools at which it had been introduced and the extent to which it ensured that pregnant and parenting learners could remain in school or resume their education without having to withdraw and re-enrol, complete their education free from stigmatization and discrimination and receive appropriate social and financial support to promote retention.

57. Welcoming the progressive developments ushered in by the Labour Act of 2024, she was interested to know whether a comprehensive communications and implementation plan had been adopted to better inform women and girls in urban and rural areas about the provisions of the Act and other legislation. She also wished to know whether the broad protection against discrimination on the basis of sex contained in the Labour Code could be interpreted to apply to discrimination in promotion and demotion and, if not, whether the State Party intended to pass additional legislation to that end.

58. It would also be interesting to know whether there was scope for simplifying the maternity leave application process; whether the State Party planned to expand maternity and paternity leave in line with the relevant recommendations of the United Nations Children's Fund and to introduce paid maternity and paternity leave in the public and private sectors; how the State Party ensured that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex women who gave birth, and their partners, benefited from the same parental leave policies as other parents; and what child- and family-friendly workplace policies, such as daycare services, arrangements for workers with older dependents with care needs, and safe and efficient public transport, had been adopted to support all parents in balancing parenting and employment responsibilities.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.