

COLOMBIA

CEDAW A/42/38 (1987)

452. The Committee considered the initial report of Colombia (CEDAW/C/5/Add.32) at its 94th and 98th meetings, held on 6 and 8 April 1987 (CEDAW/C/SR.94 and 98).

453. In her introduction, the representative of Colombia said that, although women had made good progress in her country, major obstacles remained in achieving the objectives of the United Nations Decade for Women in areas such as communications, co-ordination with voluntary organizations and problems connected with housing and food. Consequently, concrete special measures were called for to strengthen the integration of women in the development process. She also said that the obstacles should serve as a stimulus to make even greater efforts to achieve the goals set for the year 2000.

454. The representative drew attention to the supplementary report, which had been submitted during the session, and made specific reference to the updated statistical data given therein. The report could not be considered as exhaustive, she said, because it was particularly difficult to obtain information and statistics about marginal sectors of society. The supplementary report also contained documents emanating from the Ministries of Justice, Agriculture and Education and the Institute of Family Welfare.

455. While introducing both reports, the representative went through the Convention article by article and highlighted the most important achievements made by her country. She said that politics were of great importance to Colombia, but that women had not yet been able to overcome the obstacles that prevented them from benefiting from political rights they possessed. Their power was particularly severely limited in the trade unions. She underscored the legislative reforms with regard to equality before the law and explained that three types of matrimonial unions existed: the free union, the Catholic marriage and the civil marriage. She was prepared to provide more information if the Committee so decided.

456. Members of the Committee commended the representative of Colombia on her excellent presentation and expressed satisfaction at the frankness of the report. The report was praised for being very detailed, and it was stated that, for a developing country, the relatively advanced legislation showed the political will of the Government to eliminate discrimination. It was found, however, that some of the information provided was not entirely relevant and that the original report did not comply with the requirements set out in the general guidelines. It was felt, however, that the legislative information provided was not sufficient, that the implementation of the laws seemed rather slow and that traditional stereotypes seemed to persist in the country. The report did not make it clear which measures had actually been implemented. Experts found the late submission of a supplementary report a bit confusing and suggested that the setting of a deadline for the submission of addenda by a State party should be discussed in Working Group I.

457. In the course of the general comments, it was asked what was meant by the “geographical position” of women. There was a contradiction in assertions that women were “an important half of the national work-force” and yet that an increase in maternity leave might force women out of the work-force. No reference could be found in the two reports to the demographic problem of the country and to the situation of abandoned children. Whereas one expert regretted the lack of detailed information on women in rural areas, another one found the account given in the report on the problems faced by rural women truly moving. The presence of women in decision-making positions was welcome, but it was felt that those few were not representative of the status of women in the country in general.

458. Members of the Committee recalled the stipulation made in the Constitution that women should have the same political rights as men and asked how their civil, social and other rights were protected and whether the Government was contemplating any concrete measures to ensure the practical realization of the principle of equality between women and men. It was asked whether rights traditionally accorded to men had been extended to women through constitutional amendments, whether discrimination was prohibited by legislative measures or sanctions and which organ supervised the execution of laws against discrimination. Clarification was requested of the apparent contradiction between the assertion that Colombian legislation did not permit any discrimination and the reference in the Civil Code “with no distinctions as to sex, except as expressly stated...”. It was asked whether there was a clear distinction in the country between the legislative, judicial and administrative authorities.

459. It was asked whether there was a problem of drug abuse among women and particularly among school girls.

460. A certain discrepancy was noted between the importance given in the report to women in development and the recent curtailment of the activities of the Colombian Council for the Integration of Women into Development. It was asked which other body had taken over its functions and whether the regional councils had ever been operative, and information on any other similar bodies was requested. The importance of consciousness-raising efforts for women as well as for men was noted, and experts asked for more information on concrete steps taken in that direction.

461. Clarification was sought on the existence and use of temporary special measures to permit equality. The introductory statement and the report seemed to contradict each other in that respect. It was asked whether the fact that in Colombia the mother was responsible for the care of her children was not in contradiction with the shared responsibility for child rearing, as stipulated in the Convention. An inquiry was made about concrete actions regarding family planning and sex education, about the practice of co-education and about measures to protect women from being utilized as sex objects in the mass media.

462. Information was requested on the functions and working methods of the Institute for Family Welfare, and experts asked whether it had taken over the tasks of the Institute of Women’s Affairs. They asked whether it was concerned only with women who had children or whether it dealt with non-mothers too. They also inquired about programmes to change the patriarchal structure of society and about the role played in that context by the Council for the Integration of Women. Other questions referred to the distribution of household tasks in the family and to the percentage of

families that could afford domestic servants. It was noted that the heading of the Institute of Women's Affairs by the President's wife merely reinforced the stereotyped image of first ladies' involvement in social activities.

463. It was asked whether any policies existed and programmes were set up to deal with the problem of domestic violence and sexual harassment.

464. Addressing the issue of prostitution, it was asked which body was responsible for combating prostitution, for dealing with associated problems and for integrating prostitutes in social life. It was asked what the related penalties were, whether they applied to the prostitutes themselves, and whether there was a law that excused rape in cases of prostitution.

465. It was noted that the participation of women in political life seemed to be confined to their right to vote, but no reference was made to their participation in everyday political life. It was also noted that the performance of Colombian women in the political arena had not been outstanding. They needed to present a common front in order to acquire their own place in political life.

466. Data on the number of women ambassadors and the number of women in the foreign service were requested.

467. Experts asked whether the Government undertook any measures to combat the high rate of illiteracy and whether they included also women in rural areas; what the "variety of reasons" for the high drop-out rate of girls was and what they did after leaving school; and whether that part of the rural population that wished to receive secondary education had to move to the cities. As the statistics on education did not give any data on law and political sciences, it was asked whether any women studied those subjects. Other questions referred to the reasons for the lack of women in adult education and to the number and fields of women teachers.

468. Clarification was sought concerning discrimination in admission to medical and engineering schools and the school fees for private and public universities and as to whether there were adequate provisions for women in State universities.

469. Many questions addressed employment issues. It was asked whether any measures had been adopted to eliminate wage discrimination, whether a married woman needed her husband's consent to enter an employment contract, what the retirement age for women and men was, whether working women received maternity benefits, what the rates of unemployment in urban and in rural areas were, whether unemployment insurance existed, why the female work-force had decreased between 1973 and 1983 and whether the same had applied to men and whether housework had been given monetary value.

470. Experts inquired about paid domestic work. They asked what the percentage of women in domestic service was, whether they were entitled to social security benefits and employment protection and whether they were protected against exploitation. Experts also asked when the law referring to the improvement of the conditions of work of domestic servants would be enacted and whether women's organizations were trying to speed up its enactment, whether the new law would give domestic servants a recourse possibility against employers that did not comply with it and

whether it would limit the hours of work per day.

471. A question referred to the system of “learning contracts”; it was asked whether the practice was restrictive and whether it was accepted by women.

472. It was asked whether the proposals and strategies prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security had shown any results. Experts inquired about the special provisions governing the employment of women and the reasons for the job segregation in the technical and managerial fields. It was asked whether any job evaluation systems were in use and what the role of trade unions was in that area.

473. Comments were made on the legislation in force that banned women from certain types of work. As it had adverse effects on women, experts inquired about plans to amend that legislation. It was also asked whether the performance of night work, which was actually forbidden for women but in practice was being done, was placed under legal sanctions.

474. It was asked whether the proposed Office of Labour Affairs and Social Security for Women and the advisory committees had actually been established.

475. Experts asked whether abortion was permitted, what the frequency rate was, how many women died in the process, whether the Colombian Family Welfare Association had achieved any positive results, whether it was subsidized by the State, what the percentage of women was who took advantage of family planning services and what the extent of those services were, as many of them were provided by hospitals run by the Catholic Church.

476. Several questions were raised about women working in rural areas, who constituted a very high percentage of the labour-force. Hope was expressed that women rural workers could benefit from social security and training programmes and had access to land ownership and credit. It was asked whether the reference to skilled work performed by men and unskilled labour mostly performed by women implied discrimination and whether women were mainly employed in seasonal work. More information was sought on the National Federation of Coffee Growers and its legal standing as well as its programmes and their accessibility to women. It was asked whether the lower salaries received by women were justified, whether new technologies were also available to women and whether women had access to multilateral or bilateral international assistance. Experts asked whether any projects similar to the floriculture project in Bogotá existed; they expressed concern over the inherent health hazards to women and asked whether the women working under the project received minimum wages.

477. It was asked whether women and men had equal rights to conclude contracts and administer property and who chose the family domicile. Experts wanted to know whether there was a reduced penalty for a man who had murdered his wife for having committed adultery. Members of the Committee welcomed the fact that it was no longer permitted to kill a woman taken in adultery and asked about the current penal provisions applicable to cases of adultery.

478. The three different types of matrimonial unions were discussed. It was hoped that free cohabitation that had lasted for many years could be legalized to the benefit of both the partners and

the offspring, and information was sought on the provisions of property adjustments within such de facto unions. Considering that the canonic law had precedence over civil law and that the Civil Code applied only to registered marriages, it was asked what the legal status of a marriage between non-Catholics was. It was asked whether the separation of a Catholic marriage could be transferred into divorce and whether anything was being done to harmonize procedures of separation of marriage under canonic and civil law.

479. It was asked whether the impact of the Catholic Church in society had reinforced traditional gender stereotypes, and more information was requested on the 1.5 per cent birth rate.

480. Information was requested on the number of Colombian babies that left the country per year to be adopted abroad and on whether any support mechanisms were being considered for destitute mothers who saw no other solution but to give up their babies.

481. The representative of Colombia introduced her replies by saying that one should bear in mind that Colombia was a developing country in Latin America. Big strides forward had been made, but social and regional differences still persisted. As to the apparent confusion over the two reports presented by her Government, she stated that both reports were official documents and both should be considered.

482. The representative explained that the 75 per cent of the female work-force referred to in the report concerned only workers in the floriculture industry. The term "geographical position" meant that the status of women was different, depending on the geographical part of the country where they lived. The principles of "public morality" meant that improper behaviour was not tolerated and the showing of obscene films and the sale of pornographic material were not allowed. Vulgar forms of publicity, which denigrated women, were illegal. Abandoned children constituted only a small portion of the society. They could mainly be found in the over-populated capital and were covered by governmental measures and institutions to eradicate poverty and to protect the family.

483. She also said that in Colombia, as in any other country, there were social differences owing to economic factors and that any situation of marginalization was a handicap to equality.

484. The Colombian Council for the Integration of Women into Development had been in function since 1978. With the change of Government in 1982, that office had not disappeared, but the new Government was currently investigating how the Council's work could best be co-ordinated with that of the Institute for Family Welfare. Governmental and non-governmental organizations were encouraged to develop programmes beneficial to women.

485. Among the laws concerning a betterment of the rights of women enacted in the past were: a law liberalizing the patrimonial property system, a law on the recognition of illegitimate children, a law that gave women the right to vote, a law on equal parental rights and women's entitlement to maintenance, a law under which women were no longer obliged to bear their husband's name, a law giving women equal civil rights and obligations, a law legalizing divorce in civil marriages and a law giving children born within and outside wedlock equal inheritance rights.

486. The representative explained that the indigenous tribes had formed a matriarchal society and

that in Colombia women were very much aware of their own value. In rural areas, most of the important family decisions were made by women. Only in the cities, the Spanish tradition of male superiority prevailed. The idea of discrimination tended to disappear among young people, although deep-rooted prejudices remained.

487. She said that the Constitution guaranteed the equality of political rights. The equality of civil, economic and social rights were dealt with in other legal instruments. The Constitution was monitored by the Supreme Court of Justice and the Office of the Procurator-General, which included a Bureau of Human Rights and a section to monitor the implementation of the Convention. Women had a right to take their cases to court.

488. The representative explained that adultery was no longer a crime or a reason to deprive offenders of social and economic rights and of custody over their children.

489. She said that the country did have a drug problem, but national campaigns had been waged and a crop-substitution programme had been developed to fight the problem. Several official bodies were involved in setting up appropriate programmes for children and adults to prevent drug abuse and rehabilitate drug addicts.

490. She stated that parents had equal duties in caring for their children. As to the Institute of Family Welfare, she explained that its functions were to prevent families from disintegrating, to provide marriage guidance counselling, to help protect minors, to supervise school curricula and to combat malnutrition. Her country considered it to be a very positive sign that the President's wife headed the Institute; her position did not have only ceremonial value.

491. Inducement to prostitution was a criminal offence, and the Government had organized rehabilitation programmes for prostitutes.

492. The representative said that the high rate of illiteracy in no way contradicted the large number of women in decision-making positions, because they were held by those who had the necessary professional qualifications. The Government had established programmes to reduce illiteracy in rural areas. They included also training programmes in agricultural techniques and special training programmes for women. As the national economy was mainly based on coffee and flower cultivation, both of which occupied many women, women contributed largely to the economy of the country.

493. Both public and private schools were co-educational and they had the same school programmes. Primary education lasted five years and it was planned to extend it to nine years. Both public primary and secondary education were free, and establishments existed in urban and rural areas. State universities were open to both sexes and entrance examinations were required at private and State universities. About 70 per cent of the students in political sciences and in law were females. Concerning supposed discrimination in the admission of women to medical and engineering schools, she stated that only two universities discouraged women from enrolling because their enrolment had exceeded normal levels. Forty-eight per cent of all university students were women. The drop-out rate was high for both sexes. Girls who left school got married or were engaged in professions that required less training. The country had over 30 universities, but only

very few in rural areas.

494. Women in Colombia did not need their husbands' permission to do paid work, and they had a right to inherit and to take on any type of obligations. There was no discrimination between women and men with respect to skilled or unskilled labour. The retirement age was 55 years for women. The regulations that applied to women only were aimed at protecting pregnant women and women as mothers. No special legislation covered domestic work. Non-resident servants worked seven hours per day; resident servants participated in family life and worked more irregular hours. Their conditions of employment were closely watched by non-governmental organizations. She said that no statistics on the number of women employed in domestic work were available.

495. The representative explained that abortion was not permitted; however, women who aborted were not legally prosecuted. Abortions were carried out only in a few private institutions. Family planning advice was received by 60 per cent of all couples, and thus, the annual growth rate of the population could be reduced to 1.5 per cent.

496. Women in rural areas had access to credit, land ownership and also to new technology, although women used agricultural machinery very rarely. Women could also sign contracts, administer property and have recourse to the courts, freely and under the same conditions as men.

497. The National Federation of Coffee Growers was an association of growers and manufacturers and governed production, internal consumption and export and was, therefore, a very important organization that promoted programmes for rural areas. Of its programmes, 144 had already been implemented for women. The draft law concerning the setting up of the Federation foresaw equal opportunities for women and men and was being debated in Parliament.

498. As concerned occupational hazards in the flower growing industry of Colombia, she explained that only the universally accepted chemicals were used.

499. The representative said that 32.2 per cent of women worked in rural areas; no corresponding statistics were available for urban areas. In 1986, over 30 per cent of bank credits had gone to women.

500. As regards marital unions, she explained that the Catholic and the civil marriage were equally valid, as both had to be registered. In addition, there were many common-law unions. Since 1981, couples could choose between civil and religious marriage. Both types gave rise to civil rights and obligations. While in a civil marriage the partners could seek divorce, a religious marriage could only be separated. The division of property was decided by a civil court. There was complete religious freedom in the country. In some cases of common-law unions, the woman could benefit from maintenance, transfer of her companion's pensions and assistance from social security funds.

501. In 1986, some 3,700 children had been adopted, 50 per cent of whom by parents abroad.

502. The representative concluded by hoping that when the country's subsequent report was submitted some of the problems mentioned would have been solved.

CEDAW A/49/38 (1994)

450. The Committee considered the revised combined second and third periodic reports of Colombia (CEDAW/C/COL/2-3/Rev.1) at its 250th meeting, on 31 January (CEDAW/C/SR.250).

451. In presenting the report, the representative read out a letter from the President of Colombia to the Chairperson of the Committee, in which the President reaffirmed the commitment of the Government to guaranteeing equal rights for women as spelled out in the Constitution of the country. That commitment had been demonstrated by the establishment of the Presidential Council for Youth, Women and the Family and by the adoption of an integrated policy for women and a development policy for rural women.

452. The representative focused on the achievements made by her country since 1987, the year of the presentation of the initial report. She said that the ratification of the Convention had been the result of pressure exercised by women's organizations, international groups and the nascent awareness of national institutions, in addition to events promoted by the United Nations within the framework of the United Nations Decade for Women. The creation of the Colombian Women's Integration Council in 1980 had marked a milestone in that it recognized the necessity of creating a national mechanism for coordinating the various sectoral efforts to integrate women into their activities. Certain sectoral developments had been successfully initiated and had led to the creation, in 1990, of the Coordination and Control Committee on the Convention and to the establishment of the Presidential Council for Youth, Women and the Family.

453. In connection with the celebration of the International Year of the Family in 1994, the Government had taken care to ensure that the achievements and the progress made with regard to the status of women would not be jeopardized by the general concept of the family. The rights of all family members had to be respected and it should be possible to reconcile individual projects with family responsibilities. The subject of family violence would be a priority issue.

454. Regarding the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women, the representative said that the Presidential Council had been designated as a focal point for the coordination and mobilization of governmental and non-governmental organizations and also for the preparation of the national report.

455. She assured the Committee members that their observations would be taken into account in the elaboration of future government policies and also for the subsequent report.

General observations

456. Members commended the Government of Colombia and the Colombian non-governmental organizations for the progress made in spite of the difficulties created by violence and the economic recession. Special mention was made of the 1991 Constitution, which recognized very extensive rights for women, and of the good representation of women in economic life, although their proportion in public representative institutions was still low. In spite of the fact that some women had assumed high political positions, their representation in political decision-making was still very

limited. They welcomed the appointment of three female ministers. The members hoped for the enactment of a draft law that provided a guarantee for the appropriate and effective participation of women at decision-making levels of public administration and encouraged political parties to present more female candidates for elections. Furthermore, they urged the Government, in implementing the Convention, to adopt programmes for rural women.

457. Members expressed appreciation for the message sent by the President and for the dense, self-critical and frank report, as well as for the extensive replies given. They commended the establishment of the Presidential Council for Youth, Women and the Family and hoped that the new administration would maintain its efforts for the advancement of women.

458. In reply to the question why the Coordination and Control Committee had not functioned since its establishment, although it could have complemented the efforts of the President Council, the representative said that, although the Committee's establishment had demonstrated the Government's intention to create a national coordination mechanism for women's questions, it could not fulfil its mandate because of its weak institutional structure. That was why the present administration had created the Presidential Council for Youth, Women and the Family.

459. Asked about the Council's budget and organizational structure and the coordination between it and other government departments dealing with women's programmes, the representative said that the Council was part of the administrative structure of the State. The Council depended upon the President and had to coordinate resources for projects and programmes that guaranteed the promotion of women and the rights of the elderly. It was also the focal point at the national and international levels for women and gender-related issues. For the first time, gender-related issues had been integrated into development. The Council's functions consisted in defining policies, providing technical guidelines for integrating them within the governmental bodies, developing methods for promoting social and economic programmes and coordinating activities with ministries, institutes, regional bodies and non-governmental organizations. In order to strengthen the Council, strategies were being developed to make it into a permanent institution that should survive a change in government. The Council also gave support to departmental and municipal women's offices in order to strengthen them to such an extent that they would survive a change in administration, not only because of their legal structure but also because of their visibility.

460. The Council had been established by the President and currently had a staff of 50 persons. Its programme also included issues related to youth, the elderly, the disabled and the family, as well as income-generating activities, and its goal was to make women benefit from the development process. In addition, there was coordination with other sectors on subjects such as developing coeducational programmes and non-sexist curricula, health care for women, credit and training for women in micro-industries, and support for female heads of households. The Council had already been institutionalized to the extent that the current candidates for the presidential election were already considering different administrative structure for a national women's office

461. The Council had its own budget, received in part from national allocation, in part from international cooperation agencies. Additional funds for special programmes came from ministries, decentralized institutes and regional and municipal institutions.

462. Members requested information concerning programmes and measures directed towards disabled women.

463. In additional comments, members noted that the Presidential Council should be strengthened and hoped that the institution would be maintained even if the government changed. They asked what the greatest achievements of the Council had been. They also inquired about the impact of guerilla warfare and drug trafficking on the lives of urban and rural women.

Questions related to specific articles

Article 2

464. The representative highlighted the most important provisions of the Constitution, which had entered into force in 1991 and in which the principle of gender equality was enshrined. The provisions of the Convention had been incorporated in national legislation.

465. Other new laws that contributed to the equality of women and men were the Social Security Law, the General Education Law and the law that allowed divorce and gave support to single female heads of household. Currently, a draft law concerning sexual violence, sexual harassment and the participation of women in public administration were being discussed.

Article 3

466. Among institutions dealing with the advancement of women, the representative mentioned the Presidential Council for Youth, Women and the Family, the Office for Rural Women and 11 departmental and municipal women's offices and sectorial programmes.

Article 5

467. The representative said that, in the mass media, as well as in formal education, traditional stereotypical gender roles still tended to be reproduced and maternity and reproductive activities remained the primary responsibility of women.

468. Asked for additional information regarding violence against women, the representative said that, in comparison with the importance of that problem, the services available to female victims were still scarce. Statistics and studies were insufficient and based on partial data, yet the available information was alarming. According to a recent study, 65 per cent of women who were either married or lived in consensual unions stated that they had had a violent fight with their partner. One in 5 women said that they had been beaten and 1 in 10 declared that they had been forced into sexual relations. The current legislation did not cover that offence, nor were there sanctions for violence against women. As the Constitution made specific reference to marital violence, efforts were under way to adopt appropriate legal norms to penalize violence against women.

469. Regarding the question whether female victims of violence were given legal advice free of charge, the representative mentioned the family commissions that had been created in 1989 to prevent such violence and to give assistance free of charge to women who had become victims.

Currently, there were about 100 commissions, which received special support from the Government. They were municipal police-type bodies that undertook emergency measures until the cases were dealt with by the appropriate judicial or administrative authorities. However, because of budgetary limitations and lack of awareness about the issue not all municipalities had set up such commissions.

470. Regarding the availability of those commissions in rural areas the representative said that they did not yet exist in all rural areas. Efforts were under way to establish more family commissions so as to establish a nationwide network and to provide the necessary training to the officers and to extend the free legal advice services throughout the country.

471. Replying to a question about special training for the officers working in family commissions, the representative said that, although there was not yet any systematic training programme, some progress had been made and training workshops and programmes were being organized for judicial personnel who had to deal with female victims of violence as well as for the officers of the family commissions.

472. Regarding a question about shelters for female victims of violence, the representative said that there were only a few, which were run by non-governmental organizations.

473. In additional comments, members commended the efforts made to obtain more accurate data on violence against women. They noted that no mention had been made of measures to eliminate the root causes of violence. They said that one of the most important measures was the education of the entire society. They expressed the hope that the question of violence would also be dealt with in subsequent reports.

Article 6

474. Regarding prostitution, the representative said that the invisibility of the problem and insensitivity to it hampered implementation of the relevant provisions of the Convention. It was still felt that was a problem of private morals and not an ethical problem in a society that pretended to be a developed democracy.

475. In reply to the question whether HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programmes were targeted at women engaged in prostitution, the representative said that, since 1992, the Ministry of Health had been training prostitutes in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and in the use of condoms. Those training programmes were confined to the main cities. The prevention of HIV/AIDS through screening programmes was also difficult because of the high cost involved. Apart from some big cities, there were generally as yet no services specifically for the care of women prostitutes affected by HIV/AIDS. In December, the Institute of Family Welfare had started an ambitious programme for preventive and health care for girls who were at risk of becoming prostitutes.

476. Members requested that subsequent reports contain further information concerning prostitution. They also said that particular attention should be paid to the phenomenon of increased street prostitution. Some expressed concern that only rape of minors below the age of 14 was penalized very strictly, considering that aged and disabled women were equally vulnerable.

Article 7

477. The representative said that no legal measures discriminated against women with regard to political participation. However, although they had increased their participation, statistics showed that in practice women had not reached the highest levels equitably and continuously. Whereas more women could be found in leading positions in trade unions in the public sector, in the private sector their number was much smaller. The representative also highlighted the information given in the report regarding the role of women in community organizations, political parties and the cooperative movement. She said that 180 non-governmental organizations dedicated their activities in 1993 to the promotion of women.

478. Members noted that the statement in the report that women were “not yet organized in sufficient strength to constitute a pressure group” was not valid. Women could not wait to be organized, they ought to take action in all fields in order to achieve greater participation in decision-making. They also asked whether any initiative was taken to promote the participation of women in political life through increasing their numbers in political parties or on candidates’ lists.

Article 8

479. The representative stated that currently the Minister for Foreign Affairs was a woman and that 10 per cent of all ambassadors were women.

Article 10

480. The representative said that measures had been taken to improve and promote the concept of equality through the production of non-sexist school texts. Women represented between 49 and 52 per cent of school enrolment from primary to university education and there was a marked trend in favour of coeducation. While considerably more women had taken up courses in administration, economics, engineering, law and agronomy, women were still concentrated in traditional areas.

481. Asked whether the draft General Education Law had been adopted, whether it contained specific measures to combat discrimination against female students and positive measures to counter traditional stereotypes, the representative said that the law had been adopted in December 1993. It did not contain affirmative measures or provisions specifically addressed to women. Legislation did not contain any special measures directed to education.

482. Members requested further information on the participation of women in the various fields in which educational was provided.

483. In additional comments, members requested further information about provisions dealing with non-sexist education and were concerned that the law did not devote more attention to the issue of non-sexist education.

Article 11

484. The representative mentioned a law for the support of women heads of household that had been

adopted in December 1993, which gave female heads of households a right to social security, preferential access to education, employment, credit, micro-enterprises and low-cost housing. That law was the first example of affirmative action in Colombia.

485. As to whether measures had been taken to ensure the welfare and labour rights of women working in the informal sector and whether the draft law on social security mentioned in the report had been adopted, the representative said that Law 100, which had created the basis for the integrated social security system, had been adopted in December 1993. According to that law, social security was no longer the sole responsibility of the State. For old age and invalidity pensions, persons could choose between the social security scheme maintained by the State and another scheme financed from pension funds in the private sector. Over a span of seven years, the entire population, including people who could not pay the premiums, should be covered by a health insurance scheme. The contributions of the poorest and most vulnerable persons in rural and urban areas would be subsidized and special attention would be given to, among others, women during and after pregnancy, lactating mothers, women heads of household and workers in the informal sector.

486. Regarding questions whether the current laws were being enforced, and by what means, and whether labour inspectors dealt with failures to comply with the law, the representative said that the Ministry of Labour and Social Security had the authority to supervise the application of the laws through its Division for Special Relations. It was currently doing research on discrimination against women in the field of employment. The results of the study would be used to initiate training and consciousness of labour inspectors in that field.

487. Asked whether legal counsel and legal defence services were available to women free of charge, the representative responded that free legal counsel on labour matters was available to the vulnerable sections of the population, such as working children, women, indigenous women and disabled persons. In general, however, women were inadequately informed about their labour rights and the services that were available free of charge.

488. Regarding further details about women's participation in the labour market, the increase in the economically active female population, the occupational categories, wage differences, women's employment in the informal sector and the increase in the number of women heads of household, the representative referred members to a 1993 document entitled "Latin American women in figures" that had been distributed during the meeting. Women's integration into the labour market had been much faster than men's, but at the same time women had to face many adverse factors, such as their concentration in the informal sector with its precarious social security and legal protection, the higher rate of unemployment and the poverty that affected women heads of households to a greater extent.

489. In additional comments, members congratulated the Government for all the efforts undertaken and asked for the percentage of women heads of households.

Article 12

490. In reply to a question about plans to amend the existing laws governing the voluntary termination of pregnancies, the representative said that abortion was still illegal. The last attempt

to legalize abortion had been made in 1993, but the draft law had to be set aside because of strong opposition from members of Congress.

491. Regarding a question about campaigns to promote the use of condoms in order to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, the representative said that, in spite of massive resistance from religious groups, the Ministry of Health had managed to set aside important resources for an intensive media campaign to promote their use. None the less, widespread distribution of condoms had not been achieved.

492. In additional comments, members said that women in Colombia should fight for the legalization of abortion not in order to reduce births, but in order to protect women from illegal abortions, which resulted in maternal mortality. They said that the problems associated with abortion had not been helped by the Government's family planning media campaigns and programmes.

Article 13

493. The representative made special reference to the newly adopted Law on Social Security and Pensions, which contained, *inter alia*, the obligation to organize special information and education programmes for women in the fields of integrated health and sex education in less developed parts of the country, especially for the rural population and the young.

Article 14

494. The representative supplemented the information contained in the report by mentioning a policy document for rural women, which contained general objectives and basic strategies for rural women and which had been approved in the latter part of 1993. Its purpose was to better the quality of life of rural women by giving them equal opportunities for taking part in the sectoral strategies and in political life and better access to productive resources, and by increasing their revenues. The national machinery for rural women should also be strengthened.

495. In additional comments, members observed that regulations and laws were needed to govern the labour practices of flower producers.

Article 15

496. Although women had full equality before the law as spelled out in the Constitution, that principle had not been translated into full de facto equality. The major obstacles were insufficient information of many women about their rights and about the legislative machinery that was available to them for making them effective. In order to overcome that obstacle, the Presidential Council would, in the course of the International Year of the Family, disseminate widely information about fundamental family rights, in particular the rights of women.

Article 16

497. The representative pointed out three major innovations: a decision of the Constitutional Court

in 1992, according to which domestic labour was recognized as a contribution to the assets of the couple in a de facto union; a law adopted in 1992 according to which divorce was permitted for all marriages, including marriages in the Roman Catholic Church; and a provision allowing for divorce by mutual consent.

498. The Committee deferred its concluding comments on the reports of Colombia until its fourteenth session.

CEDAW A/50/38 (1995)

602. The Committee considered the revised combined second and third reports of Colombia (CEDAW/C/COL/2-3/Rev.1) of 21 September 1993 at the meeting held on 31 January 1994.

603. The representative of the Government of Colombia introduced the document in question and replied to the questions which the Committee had submitted to him in advance and which had been prepared by the Pre-session Working Group.

604. The Committee considered that the reports of Colombia, which had been drawn up with the participation of not only governmental agencies but also non-governmental organizations, were in keeping with the Committee's guidelines for the submission of reports and provided detailed information on the implementation of most of the articles of the Convention. Furthermore, they analysed in a self-critical manner the obstacles that still existed. The Committee drew attention to the extensive information provided on violence against women, which was felt to be of great interest; it regretted that no reference had been made to General Recommendation 18 of the Committee on handicapped women; and it asked how the increase in guerrilla activities and drug trafficking had affected the lives of urban and rural women and families.

605. In spite of the contents of the document, it should be pointed out that there were some shortcomings in it, such as the lack of analysis concerning articles 1 and 2 of the Convention, despite their particular importance. The Committee recommends therefore that in its future reports, Colombia should provide an adequate analysis of each of the articles of the Convention, in accordance with article 18.

Progress achieved

606. The following points should be underscored as the most significant ones in efforts to ensure the complete equality for Colombia women:

- Since 1992, divorce has been permitted for all marriages, including Catholic marriages, and the grounds of mutual consent have been added;
- In 1992, the Constitutional Court recognized that domestic work had monetary value, which constitutes a precedent and establishes jurisprudence;
- The patrimonial regime for de facto unions was regulated in 1990;
- The preposition de was removed from the names of married women through a legal order;
- The Law on Support for Female Heads of Families (1993) provides such women with access to social security both for themselves and their dependants;
- Law 50 of 1990 extended paid maternity leave from 8 to 12 weeks.

607. Furthermore, the Committee drew attention to the increased participation by females at all levels of the educational system, which has been put on an equal footing with the system for males, including university education, the reduction of illiteracy and fertility - although there are still differences in the number of children per woman according to her level of education - as well as the increase in the number of women who wish to work outside the home and who obtain a job.

608. The Committee attached particular importance to the 1991 Constitution, which contains several articles concerning the Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Discrimination against Women and the General Recommendations of the Committee, as well as a number of decisions by the Constitutional Court with regard to: (1) the ruling against an educational institution for expelling a girl because she was pregnant; the institution was required to readmit her; (2) the requirement to include sex education in primary education.

Obstacles and suggestions

609. The Committee regretted that the General Education Law of December 1993 had not included affirmative-action measures concerning non-sexist education or any provisions specifically relating to women. This required the Presidential Council for Youth, Women and the Family to continue to provide strong support for programmes aimed at overcoming stereotypes concerning men and women in textbooks and other school materials, the training of teachers and school curricula.

610. The Committee also pointed out that the Presidential Council and Ministry of Labour should publicize to a greater extent than up to now the rights of women in the workplace and seek ways of supporting them and protecting them more effectively against abuses in enterprises in sectors such as flower-growing, the clothes and food industries and particularly the informal sector. It would be advisable to train, in particular, officials responsible for monitoring the correct application of labour legislation, for example labour inspectors, with regard to the rights of working women.

611. On the basis of the information provided on violence against women and on women prostitutes, the Committee requested that the next report should supplement that information with new data and analyses and, above all, information on new measures to eliminate violence against women in all its forms. It was suggested that all necessary steps should be taken to ensure that in cases of domestic violence, the aggressor was the one who left the residence instead of the woman attacked, as occurred in many places in the world.

612. The Committee criticized the high number of miscarriages and the maternal mortality rate resulting from them, which made it consider the possible need to amend the legislation in force and the necessity to continue to promote the spread of family planning, particularly in rural areas.

613. The Committee pointed out that policies to promote equality should be stepped up with regard to the most impoverished women and the low level of training and should eliminate the differences which still existed between urban women and rural women.

614. While the Committee viewed positively the fact that some Colombian women had reached very high-level posts (three ministers, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs), it considered that speedier progress should be made in the participation by women in decision-making, for example,

through government support for specific programmes for women candidates in elections.

615. In order to promote and coordinate these measures and continue making progress in implementing the Convention, the Committee recommended strengthening the government mechanism responsible for policies on equality - currently the Presidential Council for Youth, Women and the Family - by providing it, under the law, with sufficient authority to propose, promote, coordinate and carry out measures on behalf of women at a higher hierarchical level within the Administration, greater autonomy and more human and economic resources. If all that was established by law, the changes of government would not have a negative impact on its functioning.

CEDAW A/54/38Rev.1 (1999)

337. The Committee considered the fourth periodic report of Colombia (CEDAW/C/COL/4) at its 422nd and 423rd meetings, on 3 February 1999 (see CEDAW/C/SR.422 and 423).

(a) Introduction by the State party

338. In introducing the report, the representative underlined the commitment of the Government of Colombia to the goal of gender equality. She noted that that commitment was manifested in the Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men, which was in the process of being adopted and which was part of the National Plan for Development. The coordinating institution for the plan would be the National Office for Equality for Women, the government agency responsible for coordinating activities to promote the equality and participation of women. The Plan would be a significant part of the implementation of the international commitments for the advancement of women, including the Beijing Platform for Action.

339. The representative indicated that article 13 of the 1991 Constitution incorporated the concept of equality between women and men as a fundamental right. She also noted that article 93 of the Constitution provided that treaties took precedence over domestic legislation and were drawn on the interpretation of the Bill of Rights.

340. Among the constitutional mechanisms to ensure the effective exercise of human rights in Colombia was acción de tutela, which allowed individuals to seek protection of fundamental human rights in the courts. Laws could also be brought before the courts and declared unconstitutional. The representative noted that a large body of jurisprudence with regard to human rights had developed over the eight years since the adoption of the 1991 Constitution.

341. The representative informed the Committee that recent activities of the National Office for Equality for Women had included support to women's organizations in activities to promote political participation and citizenship, the strengthening of women's networks, as well as the discussion with women's organizations on the National Development Plan, 1998-2002.

342. The representative indicated that Law 294 on violence in the family had been adopted in 1996 and that the Inter-American Convention for the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women had also been ratified. She also described Law 360, adopted in 1997, which increased penalties for violence. In addition, the title of the chapter of the Penal Code relating to sexual crimes had been amended to emphasize such crimes as the violation of personal freedom and dignity, rather than morals.

343. The representative noted that displaced women faced significant problems, including violence, and that the Government had introduced the National Plan for Attention to the Displaced Population to give priority attention to their needs. She also described the effects of armed conflict on women.

344. The representative informed the Committee that women's representation in public life in Colombia was still low, but that the President had recently appointed two women ministers. While

there had been some increase in the enrolment of girls at the primary level, their educational level was still lower than boys. Initiatives to improve girls' access to education included a project to address stereotyped textbooks and promote coeducation.

345. The representative noted that an increasing number of women were entering the labour market, in particular in urban areas. However, despite their level of education, they received lower wages than men and occupied fewer decision-making positions. In addition, women were affected by unemployment.

346. The representative indicated that life expectancy was 64.3 years for men and 73.24 years for women. The Government had adopted a series of measures with regard to sexual and reproductive health in the General System of Social Security in Health and had launched several information campaigns, including on HIV/AIDS prevention.

347. The representative emphasized that important advances had been made to integrate the gender perspective in the rural sector.

(b) Concluding comments of the Committee

348. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Government of Colombia for its fourth report, which contains a comprehensive, candid and critical account of the progress that has been achieved since the submission of the previous report. The report describes the difficulties and obstacles that still impede the implementation of the Convention and the programmes that have been implemented to promote the advancement of women and the exercise of their rights.

349. The presence of the delegation headed by the Director of the National Office for Equality for Women, at a time when the country is suffering the consequences of a disaster caused by an earthquake that has plunged the nation into a terrible tragedy, is testimony to the importance that the Government of Colombia attaches to the Convention. The Committee deeply appreciates this gesture, which underscores the political will of the Government to improve the status of women in Colombia.

350. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the comprehensive replies to the questions that have been asked and for the fruitful dialogue, which has contributed to a better understanding of the situation of women in Colombia and to an in-depth review of the implementation of each article of the Convention.

351. The Committee appreciates the fact that the Government of Colombia supports the adoption of an optional protocol to the Convention.

Positive aspects

352. The Committee notes that the Convention can be invoked in national courts, since it enjoys precedence within the domestic legal order and thus prevails in situations of conflict of laws.

353. The Committee takes note of the significant progress that has been achieved with the adoption

of legislative measures for the protection of women. The 1991 Constitution provides for the equality of men and women before the law and defines discrimination. In accordance with the Constitution, important social legislation has been enacted, including legislation on education, social security, dissolution of religious marriages, protection of women heads of household and punishment of sexual abuse and domestic violence.

354. The Committee notes that the acción de tutela or amparo have been increasingly used by women as a constitutional means of protecting their rights. The Ombudsman's Office has also been created along with a special unit for the protection of the rights of children, women and the elderly, which assists the Ombudsman's Office by playing a positive role in requesting reviews of acción de tutela.

355. The Committee welcomes the creation by the Government of national machinery, namely, the National Office for Equality for Women, which is attached to the Office of the President of the Republic and advises the Government in that field. The National Office can also propose policies and programmes and works in coordination with various women's non-governmental organizations.

356. The Committee notes that primary school enrolment rates have increased, that the rate of female illiteracy has declined and that the Ten-Year Education Plan, 1996-2005, has placed special emphasis on the objective of eliminating all situations of gender discrimination or exclusion, including the introduction of the gender dimension in the education system. Research and consultation have also been carried out to document the issue of equality of men and women, and a strategy of awareness-raising is being developed for publishers of school textbooks, with a view to eradicating gender stereotypes.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

357. The social and economic reality of Colombia remains a serious obstacle to the full participation and advancement of women in society, as well as to the implementation of the Convention. As a result of economic restructuring and adjustment policies, which take little account of social development, over half of the population of Colombia lives below the poverty line. In addition, inequitable patterns of income distribution as well as substantial differences between the urban and rural areas, impede the implementation of the Convention.

358. The Committee notes with concern the persistence of widespread violence as a result of the armed conflict in the country. Women are the principal victims and there are tens of thousands of displaced women and female heads of household who lack the resources needed for their survival in a situation in which they are called upon to assume greater responsibilities, both reproductive and productive, towards their families and communities.

Principal areas of concern and recommendations

359. The Committee notes with concern that little has been done to disseminate the text of the Convention, as required under the constitutional provisions governing the rights of women, and of the supplementary legislation that has been enacted.

360. The Committee recommends that steps be taken to disseminate those norms and to educate the general population, particularly women, about the law as an essential step towards enabling them to learn about and defend their rights.

361. The Committee calls attention to the gaps that exist in follow-up and control mechanisms in the current legislation. There is no effective machinery to enforce compliance with court rulings, nor are there any studies or assessments relating to compliance with legislation on women.

362. The Committee recommends that practical measures on the follow-up and monitoring of legislation be taken, that assessments of their effectiveness be carried out and that mechanisms guaranteeing compliance with court rulings be created.

363. The Committee points out that there has been no systematic development of training programmes for government, State or court officials or for police forces responsible for the implementation of the rules and procedures relating to compliance with the law and the implementation of the Convention.

364. The Committee recommends the introduction of training programmes for all those officially responsible for ensuring compliance with current legislation.

365. The Committee is concerned at the level of authority and rank accorded to the Government's national advisory machinery, which limits its functions to proposing policies and programmes.

366. The Committee recommends that the Government consider strengthening the role of the National Office for Equality for Women, by means of a national law raising its status to that of an autonomous body with all the requisite powers and resources to be able to exercise more effective influence in Colombian society.

367. The Committee notes with concern that, although various programmes for the benefit of women are in place, the economic adjustment programmes restrict public expenditure, thus limiting the availability of resources, which in turn hinders the incorporation of women's interests in State policies and programmes.

368. The Committee recommends that in the allocation of budgetary resources priority be given to the needs of women, especially women of limited means, including access to employment, education and public services, since social investment in women constitutes one of the most effective means of combating poverty and promoting sustainable development.

369. The Committee notes that despite the efforts made it has not proved possible to incorporate in legislation temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between women and men within article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention so as to ensure women's political participation, under the Constitution, because it is seen as discriminatory and there is clearly resistance on the part of legislative, executive and judicial bodies to their being put into effect.

370. The Committee recommends that consideration be given to the possibility of adopting temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, to promote

the increased integration of women in decision-making in the country's administrative and political life.

371. The Committee recognizes the difficulties faced by the Government in putting law and order into effect in a situation of internal conflict and paramilitary violence. It takes note of the incidence of violence directed against women in custody, including cases of kidnapping and disappearances. Moreover, it notes with concern the increasing danger in which the individuals forming organizations promoting human rights in Colombia find themselves.

372. The Committee urges the Government of Colombia to establish an effective national mechanism, including complaints procedures, that will ensure that those guilty of criminal conduct, both State officials and private individuals, stand trial. The Committee recommends that the Government step up security measures for all those who promote and defend human rights, especially in view of kidnappings and other acts that constitute an assault on physical integrity, with particular attention to the situation of women.

373. The Committee is concerned that, despite the efforts that have been made, the Government's ability to ensure compliance with the rules providing for punishment for domestic violence is restricted. Moreover, the family commissions do not have the necessary human or financial resources to carry out their mandate and there is no systematic supervision of their work by the relevant government body. As a result, efforts to help victims are inadequate. The Committee stresses that, since a human rights issue is involved, it is the Government's responsibility to act to reduce violence against women, investigate cases and give treatment and support to the victims of violence.

374. The Committee recommends that effective measures be taken to ensure compliance with the law and that due attention be paid to the family commissions to enable them to carry out their functions.

375. The Committee is concerned that there is currently before Congress a bill to decriminalize domestic violence at both the civil and criminal level, passing responsibility for dealing with these human rights violations to an administrative court.

376. The Committee recommends that the bill be reassessed, since it represents a step backwards from the progress achieved by the country in legislative terms in tackling and confronting the problem of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

377. The Committee is concerned that, although national legislation condemns inhuman and degrading treatment, many women are forced to become prostitutes in order to survive and there is traffic in women. Preventive mechanisms are lacking and the State has little capacity to confront the national and international criminal organizations engaged in procurement, which operate with a high degree of impunity.

378. The Committee recommends that the Inter-institutional Committee that has taken various measures to prevent and punish traffic in women should organize a more energetic and effective work strategy in order to deal with this serious phenomenon.

379. The Committee is extremely concerned at the situation of street children, in particular girls, with respect to their human rights and physical integrity.

380. The Committee recommends that the needs of street children, especially girls, be integrated systematically into all poverty-eradication, social-development and anti-violence plans and programmes.

381. The Committee notes that no systematic effort is being made to counter discriminatory cultural traditions and change sexist stereotypes and that the media continue to project stereotyped images of women.

382. The Committee recommends that a systematic effort be made to educate the population on gender issues by all possible methods and in all sectors and that programmes be developed with the aim of raising the awareness of media personnel with respect to equality of men and women, with a view to eradicating sexist stereotypes in all media.

383. The Committee notes that there is little participation by women in management and decision-making bodies and that there is a lack of specific measures to promote their participation.

384. The Committee recommends that statistics be disaggregated by sex, in a systematic manner, and included in the next periodic report and that steps be taken to guarantee greater involvement of women in decision-making.

385. The Committee is concerned that the school drop-out rate of girls and young women remains high and that the causes of this high rate are linked to sexist stereotypes and that, in addition, the vocational choices made by women when they enter higher education are still gender-differentiated.

386. The Committee recommends that regulations, programmes and other measures, including career counselling, be put in place to prevent girls and young women from dropping out of school and to reverse the trend of high female drop-out rates. It recommends the introduction of vocational programmes to promote the access of women and men to all careers.

387. The Committee notes with concern that women constitute the majority of the unemployed and that the majority of women work in the informal and service sectors, frequently as domestic workers. It notes that within these groups, women receive the lowest wages, and that there are gaps in the level of pay received by women and men for equal work and work of equal value.

388. The Committee recommends that appropriate measures be taken to improve the status of working women, including through the establishment of child-care centres and the introduction of training programmes to promote the integration of women into the labour force and to diversify their participation, through the implementation of legislative measures and through greater efforts to achieve equal pay for work of equal value.

389. The Committee is concerned that, although maternity protection is ensured by law and provision is made for maternity leave in the relevant legislation, the law is sometimes broken and women must meet certain requirements in order to have access to jobs, such as undergoing

pregnancy tests.

390. The Committee recommends that steps be taken to ensure compliance with the law and that those who engage in such discriminatory practices are punished. It also reiterates that women must be made aware of their rights through wider dissemination of legislation providing protection for them as workers.

391. While welcoming the preventive measures taken by the Government, including the fact that it has set a minimum age for employment, the Committee notes with concern how widespread child labour is in Colombia, since it leads to the exploitation of girls and the violation of their rights to health, education and future opportunities.

392. The Committee urges the Government to adopt and implement a compulsory education policy, since such a policy is one of the most effective ways of ensuring that girls do not work during school hours.

393. The Committee notes with great concern that abortion, which is the second cause of maternal deaths in Colombia, is punishable as an illegal act. No exceptions are made to that prohibition, including where the mother's life is in danger or to safeguard her physical or mental health or in cases where the mother has been raped. The Committee is also concerned that women who seek treatment for induced abortions, women who seek an illegal abortion and the doctors who perform them are subject to prosecution. The Committee believes that legal provisions on abortion constitute a violation of the rights of women to health and life and of article 12 of the Convention.

394. The Committee calls upon the Government to consider taking immediate action to provide for derogations from this legislation. Furthermore, it asks the Government to provide regular statistics on maternal mortality by region.

395. The Committee is concerned that sterilization is the most widely used family planning method. It believes that it might be unnecessary to make such widespread use of sterilization if couples were better informed and instructed in the use of family planning methods and had ready access to contraceptives.

396. The Committee recommends that information on the use of contraceptives be more widely disseminated, that the necessary effort be made to ensure that women, including women in the most vulnerable population segments, have access to affordable contraceptives, and that action be taken to promote the use of contraception by men, particularly vasectomy.

397. The Committee is concerned at the situation of women in rural areas, where there is a considerable lag in basic services infrastructure, low health and education coverage, and lower quality of life for most of the population. These factors are an obstacle to integrating women in development and ending their difficult living conditions, which, together with violence, are responsible for rural women being one of the population groups that are most vulnerable and subject to discrimination.

398. The Committee recommends that existing programmes be expanded with a view to improving

the status of rural women, particularly among displaced populations, and that attention be focused as a matter of priority, on rural women with a view to improving their health, education and quality-of-life indicators.

399. The Committee recommends that those involved in planning and programme implementation receive gender-sensitive training. It recommends the introduction of micro-credit programmes to improve the economic situation of women, as well as programmes to improve the enjoyment by rural women and displaced women of their human rights to health and education.

400. The Committee requests the Government of Colombia to provide information addressing the concerns raised in the present concluding comments in the next periodic report required under article 18 of the Convention.

401. The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Colombia of the present concluding comments, in order to make the people of Colombia, and in particular government administrators and politicians, aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure de jure and de facto equality for women and the further steps that are required in that regard. It also requests the Government to disseminate widely, and in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention, the Committee's general recommendations and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.