

## IRAQ

### CEDAW A/48/38 (1993)

33. The Committee considered the initial report of Iraq (CEDAW/C/5/Add.66/Rev.1) at its 212<sup>th</sup>, 213<sup>th</sup> and 216<sup>th</sup> meetings, on 20 and 22 January (see CEDAW/C/SR.212, 213 and 216).

34. In introducing the report, the representative of Iraq pointed out that the political leadership in Iraq fully believed in the principle of equality between men and women even before acceding to the Convention, as reflected in the relevant legislation. She then gave a detailed explanation of the central role being played by the General Federation of Iraqi Women, the machinery for promoting women's rights and implementing the Convention. She said that the Federation had proposed draft laws ensuring equal rights for women, suggested amendments to existing laws, participated in deliberations on laws related to the status of women, and studied and given opinions on all draft laws proposed by the competent authorities. The Federation also operated family counselling centres on family and legal questions, thus becoming acquainted with women's problems on a continuous basis, and either gave advice directly or liaised with the competent authorities. Its services reached out also to rural women. Furthermore, the Federation had disseminated laws and regulations relating to women by the publication of a handbook.

35. The Federation had proposed the formation of a national committee for following up the implementation of the Convention, identifying legislation that ran counter to its provisions. It had also submitted a number of proposals for promulgating, abrogating or amending legal provisions to make them compatible with the Convention.

36. The representative stated that the main obstacles to the implementation of the Convention were the outcome of historical circumstances that could not be overcome in a short period. They were the result of the economic, social and cultural backwardness of developing countries, the unjust world economic order, prevailing traditions and customs and society's vision of women. The most serious circumstance that hampered the implementation of the Convention was the economic blockade that had been imposed on Iraq since 1990, with its economic and social consequences and implications for health. Severe shortages of food and medical supplies could lead to famine in the country; prices of basic food commodities had risen sharply. The child mortality and morbidity rate had increased between 1990 and 1992. All those factors would result in a regression in the country's economic and social life.

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\* Including subsequent reports, if submitted, in those cases where the State party's initial report had not yet been considered by the Committee.

### General observations

37. Members of the Committee commended the report for its adherence to the general guidelines regarding the form and content of reports and the way it had been presented to the Committee. They welcomed also the fact that the country had sent a representative to present it, despite the difficult situation in which Iraq found itself as a result of the long war and the recent conflict with all its negative consequences for the status of women. They noted that the Government was making efforts to address the issue of the status of women. While members welcomed the fact that the issue of reservations had been addressed in the report, they found the reservations a matter of considerable concern. In noting the reasons given for entering reservations, they observed that there was a contradiction between the reservations and the view that the Shariah also guaranteed women equality with men, and that gender equality was guaranteed by the Constitution. Concern was shown because those reservations were of a fundamental nature and touched on the heart of the Convention. If the Government adhered to the principle of gender equality, as enshrined in the Constitution, it would have to amend the laws that were still discriminatory against women. However, the Government indicated that it did not believe in legislative shocks, and yet any new law constituted a kind of legislative shock. Members stated that such shocks were necessary if laws were to be progressive.

38. When members asked how the issue of gender equality was dealt with in the case of laws that still encouraged gender inequality, the representative explained that all legislation was drafted on the basis of the Constitution. It had to be implemented accordingly, except when it was in contradiction with the Shariah.

39. Members of the Committee said that although the situation of women in Iraq was one of the most advanced in the region, and the Government had made great efforts to achieve gender equality, it would be desirable if it were to carry out that task with a stronger sense of commitment and to envisage reconsidering the issue of reservations with the goal of removing them, especially those concerning articles 2, 9 and 16 of the Convention. The representative stated that a high-level committee had been set up with the President's approval especially for reconsidering the issue of reservations. The entering of reservations had stemmed from the Government's interest in implementing the Convention faithfully, but the reservations were not meant to delay or hamper the advancement of women. Iraq had enacted many laws in favour of women and had dealt flexibly with the provisions of the Shariah in a way that was best suited to the goals of the Convention.

40. In noting that an impression had been given that the Government was more concerned with making women into good citizens than with trying to obtain for them equal rights and equal opportunities, members said that the conditions of women would not improve as long as old habits prevailed. Asked whether statutory provisions and customary laws were the same for all women, regardless of race and religious belief, the representative said that, except for the provisions of the Shariah, all others were generally applicable, irrespective of sex and belief.

41. Members asked whether Iraq had also entered a reservation to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol or to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights with regard to the rights of women.

Questions related to specific articles

## Article 2

42. Members of the Committee praised the active and varied role played by the General Federation of Iraqi Women. Asked whether the Federation reflected only the Government's views, whether women were obliged to join and whether there were any other women's organizations and, if so, what their methods were to advance the status of women, the representative explained that the Federation was a mass organization with political goals, the establishment of which had been approved by the Government, which supported it. It had legal competence and was morally, financially and administratively independent. Membership was not mandatory.

43. Talking about the way in which the Federation was involved in politics in Iraq, the representative stated that members of grass-roots organizations could participate in its discussions and that they had the right to vote in the national elections.

44. Questions were also asked about the election of the officers of the Federation and the kind of practices that it had changed or abolished.

45. In reply to a question, the representative stated that other political women's organizations also existed, but none of them enjoyed the popularity and expertise of the Federation.

46. Although the provisions of the Convention might be invoked in the courts, there had not been any cases of women having recourse to law courts in matters of discrimination.

## Article 3

47. Further explanations were sought regarding the data given in tables 1 and 2 of the report and their relationship to the Government measures; it was felt that they were contradictory to the data given in table 18 of the report.

## Article 4

48. As the report had not spelt out any actual temporary special measures, it was asked whether any such measures had been taken or whether the reference to them in the report constituted only a declaration of intent.

## Article 5

49. Asked how the obligation of obedience on the part of women to men was compatible with the principle of gender equality, the representative said that obedience was based on mutual respect and that Iraqi law had departed from the principle of arbitrary obedience. A woman was not obliged to live with her husband under certain circumstances, such as in cases of marital violence, lack of adequate financial support, contraventions of laws or the Shariah, or failure to pay the dowry.

50. Asked about the type of legal and practical measures taken in those cases, the representative said that, in the case of marital violence, a wife might request a separation before the competent courts, she might institute legal proceedings or ask for compensation for the moral or material harm

inflicted upon her. The condemnation of the husband, which could be followed by imprisonment or a money fine, might be used as a ground for divorce.

51. As to the means undertaken by the General Federation of Iraqi Women to protect female victims of violence, the representative said that their affiliated family counselling centres used a certain formula for the friendly settlement of family disputes or else they might refer the matter to the competent courts. No statistics were available on the incidence of violence against women. Members also asked what the concept of the “biological function” of women and men was in the policies of the Government.

52. In an additional comment, members observed that the one-sided duty of the wife to be obedient to her husband was contrary to the principle of equality.

#### Article 6

53. Asked about the effects that the law had on combating prostitution and whether, through its enforcement, prostitution and traffic in women could be eliminated, the representative said that the phenomenon could not be stamped out through a law. However, the establishment of rehabilitation centres was aimed at preventing the recurrence of prostitution. An active role in the rehabilitation process was also played by the General Federation of Iraqi Women in administering health services, organizing educational seminars and providing financial support. But the economic blockade of the country made the provision of all those measures rather difficult.

#### Article 7

54. Referring to questions about the conditions for voting and being eligible to be elected to the National Assembly the representative said that the general age at which one could vote was 18 years; in certain cases, it was not less than 25 years, and it was necessary that one had Iraqi nationality and that one’s parents had Iraqi nationality. The conditions were the same for women and for men.

55. The electoral system in Iraq involved voting for individual candidates rather than for lists of candidates. After the 1988 elections, the percentage of women in the National Assembly was 10.8 per cent. No quota regulations existed.

56. No statistical data were available for the percentage of women voters in the 1980, 1984 and 1988 elections, nor were explanations given on which method was applied for selecting candidates.

57. Regarding observations made by members on the low percentage of female members of political parties, the low representation of women in the judiciary, and women’s absence at high-level posts in executive bodies, and regarding questions whether the reasons were lack of interest on the part of women, lack of equal opportunities or lack of the necessary encouragement, the representative stated that there were some women, although the percentage was still low. The reasons were partly illiteracy, women’s unawareness of their political rights, and the preference that women gave to family obligations. Efforts were being made to increase the percentage of women in the judiciary because they had proved themselves to be capable in that field. As a result of their efficiency, women were gradually gaining self-confidence.

58. Regarding the request for statistical data on the participation of women in public administration, in general, and the percentage of women with university degrees in high-level public administration positions in particular, the representative referred to tables 1, 2-11, 13, 15 and 22 of the report.

59. No data were provided on the percentage of women in political decision-making positions nor was any answer given to the question whether political parties had their own women's organizations.

60. The representative mentioned awareness-raising programmes and seminars to encourage the political participation of women. There was also a women's magazine that dealt with economic, political and educational issues from the perspective of women. Unfortunately, its distribution had had to be suspended in the wake of the economic blockade.

61. Asked why the service of women in the army was limited to some well-defined ranks, the representative commented that military service was not compatible with the biology of women, and that data would be supplied in the subsequent report.

62. Referring to a request for more information on women in what had been referred to in the report as the autonomous region of Kurdistan, she explained that there was no inequality between women and men, they were governed by the general laws and there was a regional legislative assembly.

#### Article 9

63. Members urged the Government to review its Nationality Act of 1961 with a view to eliminating gender discrimination. The representative explained that, in the case of a marriage between an Iraqi woman and a foreigner, the man could not acquire Iraqi nationality nor were the children of such a union entitled to Iraqi nationality.

#### Article 10

64. Asked about the appropriate age for girls to leave school and get married or start working, the representative said that the parents would be sanctioned if they asked their daughters to leave school before they had completed secondary school. Girls were allowed to start working at the age of 16 years. Although it was up to the parents to decide whether their daughters continued higher education, the State was trying to encourage the higher education of girls.

65. Regarding a request for further details on the status of the Comprehensive National Campaign for the Compulsory Eradication of Illiteracy, the representative referred to the information contained in the report.

#### Article 11

66. Asked for a further explanation of what seemed to be a discrepancy between the status of working mothers in the private and the State sectors with regard to maternity leave, the representative said that women working in the State sector had guaranteed paid maternity leave. Private employers could not be forced to grant the same benefits because even if they were obliged

to grant them, they were still free to dismiss women wishing to take maternity leave. Although the General Federation of Iraqi Women had proposed certain measures to the authorities, it was difficult to implement them because of the economic blockade. Regarding the different retirement ages for women and men under the Workmen's Pension and Social Security Law of 1971, the representative said that that provision did not constitute discrimination because women were not forced to retire at the age of 55, but could choose to do so if they so wished.

67. Regarding a clarification of the reasons for the decrease in the number of nurseries and day-care centres, as set out in table 19 of the report, and the simultaneous increase in the number of working women in Iraq, the representative said that after the long war, the State was in favour of private day-care centres.

68. Concerning the protective legislation provided under article 81 of the Labour Law of 1987, and related questions about the type of hard work and work harmful to women's health that was prohibited, whether such prohibition was justified for objective reasons and whether it did not lead to discrimination, the representative said that there was no inventory of jobs in that category, but that the provision concerned jobs that were not compatible with the biology of women.

#### Article 12

69. Asked whether women's health, in general, was protected by legislation or whether the Law of Public Health of 1981 referred only to motherhood, the representative stated that adequate health services were provided free of charge to everyone.

70. Regarding questions relating to the practice and number of abortions, and to the availability, legal coverage and easy accessibility of family planning means and methods, the representative stated that abortions were generally considered to be against the provisions of the Shariah, but for medical reasons they could be carried out in public hospitals, but not in private clinics.

71. Asked about the percentage of maternal mortality, the representative said that the maternal mortality rate had been rising since the blockade, especially as a result of malnutrition, weakness and anaemia.

72. Considering comments on the high percentage of women undergoing surgery, the representative said that abortions could be included in the figures given in table 21 of the report if they had been carried out on a medical prescription. Asked whether women doctors were employed only in government hospitals or also in private clinics, the representative said that the statistical data covered only women doctors in public hospitals.

#### Article 13

73. Regarding a request for further clarification on women's access to credit, and questions whether the beneficiaries were only public administration officials or also rural or even illiterate women, the representative said that loans were given to rural women if they were landowners; however, the granting of loans had generally been reduced as a result of the blockade.

74. In an additional comment, further clarification was requested on the access of women to credit, bearing in mind that credit constituted the doorway to economic activity for women.

#### Article 14

75. Regarding a request for more information on the measures that existed to ease the situation of rural women, the representative referred to the information contained in the report under article 14. She also said that women were able to conclude contracts with cooperatives in their own name.

76. A clarification was requested of the statement in the report that the application of laws and regulations to rural women still left "something to be desired". It was asked whether it was because of lack of information, illiteracy, discrimination on the part of banking institutions, pecuniary problems or lack of self-confidence on the part of women. It was also asked what were the reasons for, and what was the percentage of , farmers' households that were headed by single women.

#### Article 15

77. The representative said that the judicial proceedings were in conformity with the Convention. No information was given on how the legal provisions that protected women's rights were disseminated.

#### Article 16

78. Members welcomed the extensive explanations in the report in connection with article 16, but they commented negatively on the persistence of polygamy in Iraq. Referring in particular to a decree of 1991, according to which a loan of 7,000 dinars was granted to any man who married a war widow, it was commented that such an encouragement of polygamy was unacceptable. Asked whether the decree had been promulgated and whether its provisions were subject to any limitations, the representative said that it was of a temporary nature and had been put into force for the protection of women before the outbreak of the war. Widows of men who were termed "martyrs" were granted lodging, a vehicle, financial facilities, credits and higher salaries.

79. No information was supplied on the incidence of polygamous marriages and on whether women wished to change the system of polygamy. However the representative explained that, in Iraq, polygamy was allowed only under certain very strict conditions, as set out in the report. In case of non-compliance, the consequences were three to five years' imprisonment for the husband and the possibility for the wife to request a divorce.

80. The minimum marriageable age was 15 years for both girls and boys with - and 18 years without - parental authorization. With regard to the reason why a mentally ill person could contract a marriage, but why such a person's divorce was not valid, the representative said that, under the Shariah, a mentally handicapped person could conclude a marriage if a certificate, signed before a competent legal authority, indicated that the spouse was aware of the handicap and was still prepared to enter into the marriage. In such a case, no divorce based on the existence of the handicap could be granted later.

81. In clarifying the term “legitimate woman” in the definition of a marriage contract in the report, the representative said that the term was really “legitimate wife”, thus excluding sisters and other close relatives.

82. Asked about the possibilities for a woman to obtain a divorce and whether they were identical for both spouses, the representative referred to the information contained in the report and said that both spouses could request a divorce for certain well-specified reasons. The marriage could also be annulled if it had not been consummated within two years, if the husband had a contagious disease or if he refused to contribute to the wife’s maintenance. A woman could also divorce her husband for lack of harmony, a very common ground for divorce, which could encompass many reasons. After divorce, the woman was entitled to reside for three more years in the marital domicile. If the husband divorced his wife without an acceptable reason, the wife could request financial compensation. If a marriage was contracted under duress or with the use of violence, the perpetrator was imprisoned for 3 to 10 years.

83. Information was requested on whether the provision under which “a mother is more entitled to the custody of her child during her marriage”, and after separation, conformed to the Shariah. Members also asked whether the General Federation of Iraqi Women had been opposing the current practices and laws in family relations and whether there were any other areas in which personal laws had such a strong impact on the status of women in Iraq as in the field covered by article 16 of the Convention.

84. In additional comments, the representative pointed out that the example of other Muslim countries showed that it was possible to base the provisions in force on secular laws rather than on the Shariah, and consequently to do away with polygamy. Even if all legislation remained within the purview of the Koran, new interpretations could be found in order to change the policies of the country.

#### Concluding observations

85. The representative of Iraq stressed the political will of her country to implement the articles of the Convention with the aim of promoting the social, economic and cultural status of women. In spite of the difficult situation brought about by the war, the country was pursuing the goal of progressive legislation. Women faced obstacles that had to be periodically reviewed in order to abolish discriminatory laws. Another obstacle was the psychological reluctance on the part of both women and men to accept the enacted new laws. But the backwardness of developing countries in general and the economic blockade had most severely harmed the situation of women.

86. Members commended the informative replies given by the representative of Iraq and expressed understanding for the difficult economic and political conditions in which the Government was trying to promote the advancement of women. It was hoped that the subsequent report would be submitted as early as possible and that it would contain details about the number of women and children that had been affected by military action and the blockade. Members commended the political determination of Iraq to improve the status of women in the process of modernization; however, they questioned how progress could be achieved if the reservations to the Conventions were maintained.



**CEDAW A/55/38 (2000)**

166. The Committee considered the combined second and third periodic reports of Iraq (CEDAW/C/IRQ/2-3) at its 468th and 469th meetings, on 14 June 2000 (see CEDAW/C/SR.468 and 469).

**Introduction by the State party**

167. In introducing the report, the representative of Iraq stressed her delegation's desire for a constructive dialogue with the Committee. She noted that according to the most recent census of 1997, women composed 50.3 per cent of the total population of approximately 22 million, which reflected a population growth since 1987 of approximately 3 per cent.

168. The representative informed the Committee of actions taken in her country pursuant to the Convention and the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. These included a seminar in 1994 on the topic "Women and human rights: ways of confronting challenges". The seminar, organized by the Government in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, resulted in the adoption of the Declaration of Baghdad. A national strategy to promote the situation of Iraqi women had also been developed after the Fourth World Conference on Women. Institutional mechanisms had been reinforced to facilitate the strategy's implementation. For instance, a high-level National Committee for the Advancement of Iraqi Women had been established, headed by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs and comprising high-level officials from ministries and bodies concerned with the implementation of the national strategy.

169. The representative emphasized that the implementation of the Convention in Iraq should be seen against the background of the circumstances of the country. She recalled paragraph 145 of the Beijing Platform for Action, on the negative impact of economic sanctions on the status of women, and noted that the comprehensive regime of sanctions on Iraq had negatively affected the lives of its people and resulted in a significant increase in child and maternal mortality and cancers, including leukaemia. In that regard, she drew attention to the findings and recommendations in a 1999 UNICEF survey on child and maternal mortality in Iraq.

170. The representative noted that Iraq had experienced over 197,000 air raids since 9 May 1991 which had caused the death of hundreds of civilians and the destruction of critical economic infrastructure. Extreme suffering had been experienced by the general population and among women and children, in particular. The absence of governmental control over the north of the country had also impeded the State party's ability to monitor the implementation of international human rights treaties, including the Convention.

171. The representative emphasized the Government's decisive political will to implement the Convention, which was clear from steps such as the accession to the Convention, regular reporting, the formulation of national strategies and the establishment of national mechanisms. The absence of adequate resources and international cooperation had hindered full implementation, and circumstances had forced the State party to change its priorities and shift its main focus to the right of survival, especially for women and children.

172. The representative highlighted several measures introduced to ensure the advancement of women. They included the introduction, by the country's largest political party, of quotas to increase the number of women at the decision-making level, which resulted in a marked increase in the number of women occupying leadership positions after the 1999 elections. Women currently comprised 8 per cent of members of Parliament, a figure exceeding the Arab country average of 3 per cent. The personal status code had been made more equitable through reform of regulations on alimony payments for women, which had been further reinforced by criminal law. The penal code had also been amended to exclude women from detention for certain crimes.

173. The representative concluded that political will existed at the highest levels in Iraq to ensure the implementation of the Convention, despite the adverse effects of sanctions and the resultant limited resources which prevailed. In that regard, she urged the Committee to take into consideration the grave circumstances and challenges facing her country, which were caused mainly by sanctions, and which affected implementation of the Convention.

## **Concluding comments of the Committee**

### **Introduction**

174. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Government of Iraq for submitting its combined second and third periodic report in accordance with the Committee's guidelines for the preparation of periodic reports and with statistical data disaggregated by sex. It welcomes the submission of written replies to the Committee's questions and the oral presentation that further clarified the current situation of women in Iraq. The Committee appreciates the fact that, despite the difficult situation faced by the country, the Government has shown the will to continue the constructive dialogue with the Committee.

### **Positive aspects**

175. The Committee welcomes the Government's stated political will to implement the Convention and notes with appreciation the legislative reforms implemented by the State party, in particular with regard to the Personal Status Code, which brought about a greater degree of women's equality with men, and the Penal Code, which now provides greater protection to women.

176. The Committee commends the Government for adopting, in June 1997, a National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and keeping in mind the provisions of the Convention, as a five-year plan to the year 2005.

177. The Committee welcomes the establishment, in June 1997, of the high-level National Committee for the Advancement of Iraqi Women, the agency concerned with the advancement of women and consisting of representatives of ministries involved in activities of relevance to women, and of the General Federation of Iraqi Women. The Committee welcomes the work of the General Federation of Iraqi Women aimed at implementation of the Convention.

### **Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention**

178. The Committee notes that the effects of sanctions and embargo are reflected in the difficult economic and social situation prevailing in the country, which has had repercussions on the advancement of women and on their socio-economic well-being. The situation impedes the full implementation of the Convention. However, the Committee is of the opinion that, notwithstanding difficulties, the State party remains responsible for implementing its obligations under the Convention in order to ensure elimination of discrimination against women with respect to the rights contained in the Convention.

### **Principal areas of concern and recommendations**

179. The Committee notes with concern that while the current situation in the State party is not favourable to the advancement of women in some respects, the State party has failed to adopt specific policies and take all possible measures to implement the Convention. The Committee notes in particular the failure of the State party to revoke legislative provisions that discriminate against women.

180. The Committee also notes with concern that discriminatory views and attitudes that impede women's enjoyment of their rights have not been addressed by the State party.

181. The Committee calls on the Government to review discriminatory legislative provisions and to take measures, including temporary special measures, aimed at creating a non-discriminatory legislative and de facto environment for women.

182. The Committee is concerned that while article 19, subparagraph (a), of the Constitution of 1970 provides for equality of all citizens before the law without discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of sex, it does not specifically prohibit discrimination that has the effect or purpose of adversely affecting women's human rights. The Committee is also concerned that article 19, subparagraph (b), grants equal opportunities to all citizens "within the limits of the law", thus restricting the guarantee of article 19, subparagraph (a), in particular for women.

183. The Committee calls on the Government to encourage a constitutional amendment which reflects fully article 1 of the Convention. It also encourages the Government to undertake a comprehensive legislative review with a view to bringing all legislation into full conformity with the Convention.

184. The Committee notes with concern that insufficient information is available about progress in the implementation of the national strategy and in particular about steps to measure and evaluate such progress and to identify successful programmes.

185. The Committee urges the Government to put in place a mechanism to provide for the regular evaluation and qualitative and quantitative assessment of progress in the implementation of the national strategy for the advancement of women. It also invites the Government to provide further information on the mandate, annual work plans and major areas of activity of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in its next report.

186. The Committee is concerned that the State party explicitly ruled out the possibility of withdrawal of its reservations to article 2, subparagraphs (f) and (g), and articles 9 and 16. The Committee expresses its concern at the State party's justification of those reservations as being based on its desire to apply the provisions of the Convention in a manner consistent with Islamic Sharia. In that regard, the Committee draws the attention of the State party to its statement on reservations (see A/53/38/Rev.1, part two, chap. I), and in particular its view that articles 2 and 16 are central to the object and purpose of the Convention, and that, in accordance with article 28, paragraph 2, reservations should be reviewed and modified or withdrawn.

187. The Committee is also concerned that Iraq's nationality law, which is based on the principle that the members of a family should all have the same nationality and that none should have dual

nationality or lose their nationality, does not grant women an independent right to acquire, change or retain their nationality or to pass it on to their children.

188. The Committee recommends that the Government of Iraq review its reservations to article 2, subparagraphs (f) and (g), and articles 9 and 16, in the light of the Committee's statement on reservations, assess the justifications for those reservations and modify or withdraw them as soon as possible to ensure full implementation of the Convention.

189. While noting the existence of certain legislative provisions on violence against women, the Committee expresses its concern at the lack of a comprehensive approach to that issue. The Committee is particularly concerned about the lack of data and information on the incidence and types of violence perpetrated against women in the home and in society; social, medical and psychological support available to women subjected to violence; and measures to prosecute and punish perpetrators and to provide legal redress.

190. The Committee requests the Government to provide in its next report a comprehensive picture with regard to violence against women in the State party, including information on legislation, statistical data on the types and incidence of violence against women and the responses to such violence by law enforcement officials, the judiciary, social workers and health-care providers. The Committee urges the Government to encourage and support the establishment of facilities for women victims of domestic violence, such as telephone hotlines and shelters for battered women, and to launch a zero-tolerance campaign on violence against women so as to raise awareness about the problem and the need to combat it effectively.

191. The Committee is concerned at the prevailing view that emphasizes women's stereotypical role in the family and in private life to the detriment of establishing equality of women in all spheres of life. The Committee notes with concern that insufficient attention is being given to modifying harmful traditional and cultural practices, such as polygamy, and stereotypical attitudes that perpetuate discrimination against women.

192. The Committee urges the Government to implement awareness-raising campaigns to change stereotypical and discriminatory attitudes concerning the roles of women and girls, in addition to providing a non-discriminatory legislative basis. It also urges the Government to work towards the elimination of the practice of polygamy, in light of the Committee's general recommendation 21 on marriage and family relations. It also urges the Government to ensure that gender-sensitive public education campaigns at all levels create a non-discriminatory environment.

193. The Committee is also deeply concerned by the violence against women perpetrated through honour killings.

194. The Committee urges the Government in particular to condemn and eradicate honour killings and ensure that these crimes are prosecuted and punished in the same way as other homicides.

195. While noting that, apparently, there is a quota provision in place in the country's main political party, the Ba'ath Party, to increase the number of women in leadership positions, the Committee expresses its concern about the continuing low representation of women in public life.

196. The Committee calls on the Government to introduce measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, and especially to increase the number of women in the political sphere.

197. The Committee notes with concern the level of illiteracy among women, the increasing rate at which girls drop out of secondary and higher education, and the low representation of women in technical schools.

198. The Committee calls on the Government to strengthen efforts to eradicate illiteracy and to ensure primary and secondary education for girls by preventing school dropouts. It further urges the Government to broaden the educational and training opportunities for girls and young women at the secondary and tertiary levels and in technical fields. It urges the Government to give particular attention to ensuring that girls and women have equal access to new specializations, including the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge to participate on a basis of equality with men in the labour market and in the future reconstruction of the country.

199. The Committee expresses its concern about women's low participation in the labour market. It is also concerned at the absence of a law establishing minimum wages, which makes it extremely difficult to determine whether women are being paid equal pay for work of equal value. The Committee is also concerned that the flexibility granted to employers in labour relations has a negative impact on women's employability and security of employment. Differences in maternity benefits granted to women in the public and the private sector are also a cause of concern to the Committee.

200. The Committee urges the Government to ensure that women do not bear a disproportionate portion of the economic difficulties facing the country. In particular, the Committee calls on the Government to ensure that non-discriminatory labour legislation is in place and effectively enforced. The Committee requests the Government to ensure that women's reproductive function does not lead to discrimination against them in employment, job security and social benefits.

201. The Committee recognizes that sanctions have had a negative impact on women and children in areas such as health care, nutrition, employment and other basic social services. The Committee nevertheless is concerned at the failure of the Government to put in place specific and targeted measures to address these problems.

202. The Committee urges the Government to assess the differential impact of sanctions on women and children, especially on particularly vulnerable groups of women, and to put in place measures aimed at countering such a negative impact. In that regard, the Committee urges the Government to use resources available from programmes such as the oil-for-food programme in a manner that directly benefits women, including through diverting resources currently allocated for other purposes.

203. The Committee expresses its concern at the overall health situation of women. It notes the high incidence of maternal mortality and the lack of basic health services, medicines and reproductive health services, including qualified birth attendants. The Committee is particularly concerned that, given the socio-economic difficulties, no measures have been put in place to address

the mental and psychological health of women. The Committee is also concerned that no steps have been taken to determine the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the country, and that no relevant preventive education and information campaigns aimed at women exist.

204. The Committee urges the Government to put in place mechanisms to provide the greatest possible protection of women's health rights. It urges the Government to ensure that women and children are effectively targeted so as to benefit from available resources and that such resources are not diverted to other purposes. It calls on the Government to take a holistic view of women's health, in line with the Committee's general recommendation 24 relating to article 12 of the Convention, and to put in place measures to ensure women's mental and psychological well-being.

205. The Committee expresses its concern about the lack of information provided about the situation of rural women and the implementation of article 14 of the Convention.

206. The Committee calls on the Government to provide in its next report a comprehensive picture of the situation of rural women, in particular their educational, health and employment situation, and the impact of traditions and stereotypes on their status.

207. The Committee notes with concern the lack of information on the situation of particularly disadvantaged groups of women, especially women belonging to ethnic minorities, including Kurds, Turkmens and Assyrians.

208. The Committee calls on the Government to address the situation of those groups of women.

209. The Committee requests that the Government respond in its next periodic report to the specific issues raised in the present concluding comments. It requests the Government to provide information about the mandate, functions and activities of the Human Rights Commission established within the National Assembly with regard to women's enjoyment of their human rights. It also requests that the Government engage in a broad consultative process with women's non-governmental organizations, including those that represent minority women, when preparing its next report.

210. The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Iraq of the present concluding comments, in order to make the people of Iraq, and particularly government administrators and politicians, aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure de jure and de facto equality for women and the future steps that are required in that regard. It also requests the Government to continue to disseminate widely, and in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention and its Optional Protocol, the Committee's general recommendations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the results of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

