

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

CEDAW A/52/38 (1997)

123. The Committee considered the combined initial, second and third periodic reports of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (CEDAW/C/STV/1-3 and Add.1) at its 316th, 317th and 322nd meetings, on 16 and 21 January 1997 (see CEDAW/C/SR.316, 317 and 322).

124. In introducing the reports, the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines apologized that the report submitted to the Committee in 1992 (CEDAW/C/STV/1-3) had been sent owing to an administrative error. The representative requested that the report submitted to the Committee in 1994 (CEDAW/C/STV/1-3/Add.1) be considered as the principal report. She further indicated her willingness to clarify statements in the document dated 4 November 1991 of the International Women's Rights Action Watch.

125. The representative indicated that a number of legislative reforms, including the Domestic Violence Act and the Equal Pay Act, had been implemented since the submission of the report in 1994. A Family Court and legal aid had been introduced within that period as well. The representative indicated that treaties were not self-executing in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and, although there was no specific law against discrimination, a woman who was discriminated against might seek legal redress in the High Court under section 16 of the Constitution. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had been seen as a major step in developing legally binding and internationally accepted principles aimed at achieving equal rights for women. Consequently the Government had introduced national legislation that conformed to the articles of the Convention.

126. The representative briefed the Committee on the administrative measures that had been taken to advance the status of women, including the establishment of a women's desk in 1984, which had subsequently been upgraded to the Department of Women's Affairs. The Department, along with the National Council of Women, was focused on establishing equality between women and men, proposing socially responsive legislation and implementing policies that favourably affected women.

127. The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines expressed concern with regard to several important socio-economic issues, including youth unemployment, the high rate of female migration, decreased export earnings in the agricultural sector, the high rate of pregnancy among pre-teenagers and adolescents, traditional socio-cultural attitudes reflecting stereotyped gender roles and the prevalence of domestic violence.

128. The representative stated that, while all citizens had an equal right to education, employment, political participation and representation, obstacles remained for women in tertiary education and there was occupational segregation in the labour market. A gender gap also persisted in public sector employment, particularly at decision-making levels and in political life. Women experienced limited access to credit and land ownership, particularly in the rural areas, despite the fact that they represented a high percentage of the agricultural labour force.

129. In concluding her presentation, the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines indicated that she eagerly anticipated questions that might be raised by the experts on the development of the status of women and pledged to take appropriate actions on behalf of the women of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and in keeping with their needs.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

130. The Committee expressed appreciation for the frank presentation of the combined initial, second and third reports. The oral presentation complemented the comprehensive written reports. The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was commended for being one of the first countries that had ratified the Convention, and had done so without reservation. The Committee expressed its satisfaction with the well-structured reports that followed the reporting guidelines. The report format, with full text of the articles, followed by relevant comments, was a good practice and made the report a very useful educational document. The report provided excellent data. However, the Committee regretted the lack of focus on how the status of women had progressed since the ratification in 1981 to date. It also regretted the delay in the presentation of the initial report. The report failed to make any reference to a follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women or commitments made. There was also no information on implementation of the Committee's general recommendations.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

131. Under the legal system of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Convention is not self-executing and it was necessary to enact legislation to give it full effect. Pervasive traditional, social, and cultural values, as well as generally accepted behaviour patterns, impede the advancement of women.

Positive aspects

132. The Committee appreciated the Government's efforts to conform to the provisions of the Convention by introducing several legal reforms. It was also appreciated that the Government and non-governmental organizations were collaborating in the implementation of the Convention.

Principal areas of concern

133. Legal measures that had been taken did not address all aspects of the Convention. Some existing domestic laws contravened the Convention. The Committee regretted that the Constitution did not specifically refer to the equality of women. It also regretted that the Convention had never been cited in any legal proceedings.

134. The Committee noted with concern that the Government had not made use of affirmative action measures to accelerate the unequal status of women, particularly in the areas of employment and public service.

135. The non-availability of shelter homes, which also provided victims with counselling services, was of concern to the Committee. Again, the Committee was very concerned about the persistent traditional, stereotypical roles and attitudes towards women and girls. Moreover, domestic violence was rampant, a fact that was also of great concern to the Committee.

136. The Committee noted with concern that no research had been undertaken on the real situation concerning prostitution and trafficking in women.

137. The low participation of women in the political parties and as candidates for election was of great concern to the Committee.

138. Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child and human rights in general were part of the school curriculum, the Committee was concerned that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was not taught in schools. The Committee was very concerned about the high rate of teenage and pre-teen pregnancy, which sometimes forced children to be mothers with very serious, negative consequences for their future, in particular, the interruption of their education.

139. The Committee was concerned about the very high rate of unemployment among women, which increased their vulnerability to domestic violence. It noted with concern that the Government had not made use of affirmative action to redress that problem. The Committee also expressed its concern about the feminization of migration.

140. The Committee was concerned that women had to seek spousal consent for tubal ligation. That contravened not only article 12, but also article 15 of the Convention. The Committee was also concerned that the law precluded safe abortion and prevented women from taking control of their reproductive health.

141. The Committee was concerned about the high rate of female migration outside Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the consequences it created in society.

Suggestions and recommendations

142. There was a need to review all domestic laws with the aim of identifying which should be amended and what new laws should be enacted in order for women to enjoy fully all the rights provided for under the Convention.

143. Subsequent reports must give information on the implementation of the Committee's general recommendations and concluding observations and also on follow-up programmes for the implementation of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

144. The Committee also wanted to be apprised of the follow-up programmes to the Conference and the commitments made there by the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in relation to the implementation of the Convention.

145. The next report must indicate special measures that had been taken by the Government and the

political parties to close the gap between de jure and de facto equality, particularly in the area of political decision-making and employment.

146. The next report should also provide more detailed information on prostitution and trafficking.

147. The Government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, churches and all individuals and competent authorities, should introduce gender-sensitive reproductive and sexual health education, information and counselling in order to curb the very high rate of pre-teen and teenage pregnancy and should integrate reproductive and sexual health services, including family planning, into primary health care.

148. The law on abortion should be reviewed with a view to removing the penal provisions and in order to guarantee safe abortion and motherhood.

149. Government and the private sector must work towards creating job opportunities to help keep women in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines so that they could better contribute to the development of society in general.

150. The Committee urged the wide dissemination of the present concluding comments in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to make both women and men aware of the steps that had been taken to ensure de facto equality for women and the further steps required in that regard. In addition, the Committee requested that the next report describe steps taken by the Government to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.