

YEMEN

CEDAW A/48/38 (1993)

199. The Committee considered the initial, second and third periodic reports of Yemen (CEDAW/C/5/Add.61, CEDAW/C/13/Add.24 and Amend.1 and CEDAW/C/YEMEN/3) at its 225th and 228th meetings, on 29 January and 2 February (see CEDAW/C/SR.225 and 228).

200. In introducing the reports, the representative apologized for the fact that her colleagues from the Yemeni capital could not introduce the reports, because they were occupied with the preparations for the first elections in the country since the reunification on 22 May 1990. The elections, which would be free and in which all citizens had the equal right to participate, marked an end to the transition period the country was undergoing as a result of the incorporation of the former Democratic Yemen and Yemen Arab Republic.

201. The representative referred to the historical backwardness affecting women's status in Yemen. Women's struggle for human dignity and self-determination went back thousands of years; only after the revolutions in the two parts of the country had women's role in motivating Yemeni society and restoring its civilization been realized.

202. The Constitution of Yemen guaranteed equal rights and duties to all, without distinguishing between men and women. Since the ratification of the Convention, the Government had made available all the possible means to implement it and to achieve de facto equality. The constitutional rights had been embodied in other laws, especially those concerning political participation, employment and education, to establish firmly equality for women and to eliminate discrimination against them. Legislation provided special provisions to protect women in pregnancy and maternity.

203. The efforts of the Government had not been limited to legislation but had been expanded to translate various rights into reality through regulations in all areas of women's life: the judiciary, the civil service, general elections and social security. The Government had established meaningful programmes, funded by international organizations or foreign assistance, based on the creation of appropriate mechanisms and special projects to increase opportunities for the education and employment of women and to improve their health. A special concern had been training and education, including making women aware of their legal rights. Making the Convention known, especially among young generations, was a priority for the Government.

204. The representative said that participation in the civil service was free of gender discrimination. Political participation had also been made equal but social and regional differences, as well as the small number of educated and employed women, led to a lower participation of women in both political life and decision-making. The representative noted that Yemeni women had played a prominent role in international forums.

205. The representative gave a detailed explanation of parts of the labour legislation. She referred to the special provisions concerning the working hours of pregnant or nursing women, and to the

long maternity leave of 60 days, a special entitlement to leave in the event of the death of a husband and the retirement age. Nurseries and kindergartens had been established to increase women's access to the labour market and, thus, ensure their full participation in the development process. Nevertheless, the problem of early marriage, which resulted in uncompleted education and illiteracy, as well as social and religious limitations and controls, still hindered women's participation.

206. Reference was made to the special problems of rural women, whose participation in agricultural development was very high because of the migration of many men to urban areas.

207. A detailed description concerning family laws, codified in the new Personal Statute Law 20 of 1992, was given. The representative said that polygamy occurred under certain conditions. The minimum age for marriage was 15 years and a woman was free to dispose of her dowry as she wished. Details concerning the annulment of marriage, as well as the right to receive compensation, were given. With regard to the granting of custody, a mother's eligibility had to be proved. Poor morals did not prevent a woman from being granted custody until a child was 5 years old. Custody was granted for up to 9 years for boys and for up to 12 years for girls.

208. The representative said that the distribution of information, the mobilization of public opinion and the development of women's legal awareness were high priorities of the Government. She outlined the means at the Government's disposal for disseminating the Convention.

209. She concluded by saying that many social, economic and political difficulties had prevented the full implementation of the Convention, even though the Government had done its best to overcome them. She said that despite numerous laws, which guaranteed women social, political, economic and educational rights, certain traditions and values of a negative nature still affected attitudes towards women and impeded their real participation. Those problems could not be solved in a short period of time.

General observations

210. Members said that the reports of Yemen, especially the third periodic report, were comprehensive and frank, clearly defining the progress made as well as the obstacles, which provided a good agenda for the Government in future. The reports were regarded as giving hope and encouragement. In addition, the efforts of the Government in submitting and representing its reports deserved a special tribute, since the country was going through serious political changes on account of unification. Moreover, Yemeni women were to be congratulated on certain laws that had been enacted and applied in order to enable them to participate equally in the development of their country. Women seemed to be an integral part of society, and their achievements had to be especially praised when considering the social pressures under which they lived.

211. Structural difficulties, customary traditions and cultural patterns had impeded efforts to improve women's situation quickly. A clear commitment of the Government to promoting women's issues could, however, be recognized. The establishment of national machinery was acknowledged especially; however, considering its functions, its workload seemed to be too heavy,

especially as it sometimes acted as a family tribunal. Therefore, the effective coordination of the work of the national machinery as well as the creation of specific institutions for actions on family disputes was requested. Clarification was sought on the Shariah and how it was applied. The representative stated that it was a main source of legislation in Yemen.

212. Members urged the Government to pay special attention to education, also in rural areas. They cautioned against the Government's preference, mentioned in the second periodic report, to encourage marriage and the establishment of families as it prevented youngsters, especially girls, from completing even their basic education.

213. The Committee was reminded that Yemen was one of the least developed countries in the world and, therefore, faced serious economic difficulties in achieving its policy goals. The Committee appealed to Governments, non-governmental organizations and United Nations bodies to extend their assistance to women's organizations in Yemen in order to promote further the advancement of women and thereby the development of the country. It was essential to maintain the momentum as the foundation for real changes had already been laid.

214. Before answering the questions raised by the Committee, the representative made a clarification to the effect that the initial and second periodic reports had been prepared, prior to the unification, by Democratic Yemen, which had ratified the Convention. The third periodic report covered the unified Republic of Yemen, which explained why it might seem to be contradictory to previous reports, as it reflected the new legislation adopted for the unified Republic.

215. Members requested clarification on the country's new Constitution and asked specifically whether it had been worded to include the concept of discrimination based on sex. The representative said that the Constitution guaranteed equality of rights to all citizens and referred to article 27, which explicitly stipulated that discrimination based on sex was prohibited.

216. The Committee noted with appreciation that Yemen had not made any substantial reservations to the Convention. The only one that had been made concerned the system for the settlement of disputes, on which many other countries had made reservations. Nevertheless, members asked whether the Government could consider withdrawing its reservation.

Questions related to specific articles

Article 2

217. Members asked whether the stipulations in article 48 of the Civil Service Law, protecting pregnant and nursing women, might not actually be discriminatory in their nature, as they negatively affected women's employment opportunities. They also asked if the same regulation applied to both public and private posts. The representative replied that men and women were equal in the labour market and that protective measures for women, also in dangerous workplaces, showed that women enjoyed their full rights in that field.

218. Referring to the right of a woman to have a maximum of 40 days' special leave in the event

of her husband's death, it was asked whether men were entitled to the same right when they were bereaved. According to the representative, even new legislation did not mention men in that connection, because of old customs. A widow could not remarry until three months had elapsed after her husband's death. Members asked for an explanation why the period of such leave was so long. The representative replied that under the new law, the period was three months.

Article 4

219. The representative said that the Government had created mechanisms and special projects to encourage women's equality in all sectors of the economy, society and family, as well as to promote the awareness of women's rights. The Committee wished to know what proportion of young girls were included in those special projects, especially in those providing information on the Convention. In addition, information on the impact of those projects was requested and on whether the new awareness was reflected in the demands of women in the relevant areas of their work, as well as in private and public life.

Article 5

220. Asked about how the Yemeni Council for Mother and Child Welfare enforced policies for mothers and children, the representative said that maternity childcare centres had been established, as well as centres for monitoring health conditions and distributing contraceptives.

221. Concerning domestic and sexual violence against women, members asked what kind of information was available on the subject, what incidence of such violence was and what measures the Government was taking in the form of legislation, public information campaigns and education to eliminate violence. Members asked whether the Government worked in cooperation with women's organizations in providing shelter homes or other protection for victims. The representative regretted that no statistics were available on violence, but he agreed that Yemen, like other societies, faced such a phenomenon. The Government was aware that violence could take various forms, both physical and psychological. Referring to the latter, he mentioned forcing a girl to marry at young age or preventing her from obtaining an education. He referred to government campaigns to raise awareness among women. Moreover, if a woman wanted to file a lawsuit against violence, she had the right to claim damages.

Article 7

222. When asked about the low participation of women in public service, reflected in the fact that only 10 of the 301 members of the Council of Deputies were women, the representative stated that illiteracy, other occupations of women within the household and the fact that over 70 per cent of Yemeni women lived in rural areas were the causes. Concerning government measures to facilitate women's access to administration and to encourage their participation in public life, he said that the Government encouraged women in all areas of life, especially by improving education.

Article 8

223. In the third periodic report, as well as in the statement of the representative, it was mentioned that women had held important positions in international forums. The Committee asked whether it would be possible to have some statistical data. The representative observed that Yemen had many female diplomats, some in high positions.

Article 9

224. The Committee pointed out that the law concerning Yemeni nationality seemed to be in contradiction of the Convention. Since no reservation had been made under article 9, they asked the Government to examine its position and to alter it. The representative indicated that the question did not appear clear and that he saw no contradiction between the Convention and the Yemeni law concerned.

Article 10

225. Reference was made to the education of girls in rural areas. In the third periodic report it had been mentioned that problems included the unavailability of special schools for girls and a lack of qualified female teachers. Asked why girls had to be trained in special schools and by female teachers, the representative said that when girls reached the secondary-school stage, they were usually separated from boys.

226. Members asked how the Government proposed to remove obstacles, including the definition of sex roles, and to encourage the access of girls to education on the basis of their own motives. The representative answered that the Government was building schools in villages to enable girls to attend, but that it could not force parents to send their girls to school. Many traditions and customs affected women negatively in the development process and changes needed time. The Constitution guaranteed education to both sexes on the same basis.

227. In reply to a question on the proportion of girls leaving school without completing primary education, the representative said that no statistics were available as the country was in a transitional stage. Only the forthcoming elections would put an end to that period, when the elected Parliament would elect the President and the Prime Minister and Yemen would thus complete its unification process. He underlined the difficult economic situation in the country. He hoped that more statistics could be included in the next periodic report.

228. Asked about the number of women who were illiterate, the representative said that he had no statistics but that he presumed the percentage was very high, perhaps even 95 per cent. Concerning government literacy programmes, he said that they could not be carried out throughout the year because of the costs. Despite the limited duration on the programmes, some positive results could be seen. Referring to the low number of students in technical and vocational education and girls' participation in that field of education, he said that no percentages could be given, as he had no statistics. He observed that women could register in those schools, but that they were usually enrolled only in sewing and handicraft institutions and did not participate in other areas.

Article 11

229. Concerning the unemployment rate in Yemen, the representative said that he had no exact information, but that he presumed it to be high, especially after the Gulf War, when about 1 million workers had returned to Yemen, together with refugees from neighbouring countries. He could not give a percentage for the number of unemployed women, but thought it to be even higher than that of men. He observed that education programmes and the merging of the public sector because of the unification were expensive and that the war had badly affected the economic situation.

230. A question was asked about the low participation rate of women in the labour market and about government measures to encourage women's economic activities. The representative replied that the Government had tried, through better education, to increase women's role in development.

Article 12

231. Referring to the expansion of immunization services, members asked whether the rural areas also benefited from such services. The representative replied that the State made no distinction between different areas of the country; health services were for the entire country.

232. Asked about the actual maternal mortality rate, when the major causes for female mortality were and whether traditional birth attendance practices still existed, the representative declared that he had no statistics, but that there were several reasons for maternal mortality, such as the lack of awareness of health conditions, sickness in general and malnutrition.

233. The Committee asked whether family planning methods had proved effective and whether the Government devoted sufficient time, effort and resources to encouraging family planning and birth spacing, as the high birth rate constituted a serious health risk for women. Members asked whether the services were used and what means were available and used for family planning. The representative said that the issue was of serious concern to the Government, which had tried to affect public opinion through various campaigns and general education. He noted that some good results could be seen from the previous years in spite of the fact that the final decision had to be made by people themselves and that the Government could not compel them to adopt a certain behaviour. The reason for the high fertility rate was the custom of the country. Many felt that religion prohibited the use of contraceptives, and usually fathers wanted to have at least one son.

234. Concerning the incidence of AIDS and whether the Government took educational and preventive measures, the representative noted that some AIDS cases existed, but that government resources were limited. It tried to raise public awareness and conducted health campaigns to provide information about HIV.

235. Asked about the age of retirement for women (10 years lower than that for men), the representative considered that that kind of regulation was quite universal and was not discriminatory but actually favourable for women.

Article 13

236. As bank loans could be obtained on the condition that the borrower was a government employee or employed by a public institution, the Committee viewed that condition as a serious obstacle for women to borrow from banks. Asked whether the same conditions applied in rural areas and whether loans could be requested for the purpose of financing a business, the representative said that State loans could be granted for agriculture, housing or factory construction but were for a limited amount. The intention of the condition relating to public office was to guarantee that the loan would be paid back.

Article 14

237. Asked whether women in rural areas had the same access to health-care services, including information, counselling, ante- and post-natal services, and about the living conditions in rural areas, especially with regard to transportation, communication and sanitation facilities, the representative replied that women had the same access - sometimes even better - to health-care services as men. The Government's resources were limited however in the provision of health-care centres to villages. Regarding rural living conditions, he mentioned that the Government was trying to provide a telephone network to every village or to at least every district.

238. With regard to the reason for the lack of schools in rural areas, the representative said that the Government was trying to have a primary school in each village or at least in each district. Distances were often far and arduous for young children.

239. In his reply to the question why only women were designated to carry water to homes, as that practice created a serious health risk for them, the representative referred to the high sense of responsibility of Yemeni women. Sometimes drinking water had to be carried over long distances. Yemeni women had an attitude that that was just a fact of life. Sometimes men did participate in carrying water.

240. Asked about the equal right to own and inherit land, the representative stated that the Shariah stipulated that men inherited twice as much as women. The Government could not change that. However, if a woman inherited property from her father, she had equal rights to that property. Based on experience in other countries, the Committee proposed further options, in accordance with the Shariah, for parents to treat all their children equally. As a will was not allowed under the Shariah, parents could give a gift during their lifetime so that all children would inherit equally. The representative replied that a written explanation was required if parents wanted to donate a portion of their property to a daughter or a son. No answer was provided to a question about the percentage of women that owned land.

241. The Committee requested information on government measures to improve the status of women in rural areas. The representative answered that the Government was providing education, including literacy programmes and training, for example in handicrafts.

Article 15

242. With regard to women's legal capacity in court proceedings, the representative said that women could file lawsuits in courts and institute proceedings themselves. They could also become judges. He said that women could be effective in defending their rights and thus obtaining equality.

Article 16

243. The Committee requested clarification on polygamy in Yemen as well as on the most important recent changes in family laws. The representative said that, after the unification, the Government had had to rethink its policy on polygamy. Polygamy was permitted under certain conditions. The representative referred to the Shariah as the main source of law that the Government had to obey. The Government could only impose conditions on polygamy; it did not encourage it. It was noticeable that, as their economic situation improved, parents more often wanted to provide a good education for their children. As awareness increased, polygamy became less prevalent and among young people especially the phenomenon was decreasing. Education therefore played a major role. The task was not easy, especially in Yemen, as the illiteracy rate was so high.

Concluding observations

244. The Committee drew the attention of non-governmental organizations and Governments to the serious financial constraints under which two United Nations bodies, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), had to operate. Many developing countries had had good experiences of their work in promoting women's equality, especially at the grass-roots level. Experts and others present were requested to pressurize their Governments to increase their contributions to the two United Nations organizations.

245. The Committee underlined the necessity for statistics, especially gender-disaggregated data, to provide a full picture of the de facto situation of women in the country as a basis for planning. The Government of Yemen was urged to give a high priority to education, especially among young women. The Committee suggested that the Government should include a women's dimension in its requests for foreign assistance programmes in particular, in view of the fact that programmes with a women's dimension existed. Furthermore, the right of illiterate persons to participate should not be undermined.

246. The Committee expressed its hope that the Government would, in the light of the reforms that had already started in the country, examine its cultural and historical traditions with a view to achieving the full equality of men and women. It was pointed out that economic, social and cultural development always depended on progress in respect of women's rights.

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370. The Committee considered the fourth and fifth periodic reports of Yemen (CEDAW/C/YEM/4 and CEDAW/C/YEM/5) at its 580th and 581st meetings, on 14 August 2002 (see CEDAW/C/SR.580 and 581).

(a) Introduction by the State party

371. In introducing the reports, the representative of Yemen emphasized the great progress made in the country since its unification in 1990 through an approach that allowed for democratic participation and freedom of expression as well as the full participation of civil society. The representative informed the Committee that, from the moment Yemen acceded to the Convention in 1984, many policies had been introduced in order to enhance the status of women, particularly in legal reforms. The Constitution of Yemen granted rights to all citizens, without distinguishing them on the basis of sex. Many proposals had been made by the National Women's Council with respect to legislative changes, including the elimination of a provision in the Penal Code which gave a husband the right to kill his wife in cases of adultery. A Social Care Law had been introduced which allowed single women and widows to make full use of social care programmes. In order to improve their standard of living, women received a monthly stipend. Furthermore, a revision of the Nationality Law to grant widowed and divorced women the right to give their nationality to their foreign-born children was under consideration.

372. The representative informed the Committee that prostitution and trafficking in women were prohibited under the Islamic law - Sharia - which provided the basis for all legislation in the country. She noted that, despite the fact that the current electoral law granted women and men the same rights to vote, to be nominated for office and to be elected, many traditions, especially in the rural areas, where 75 per cent of the population lived, limited women's political participation. It was pointed out that, no more than 15 per cent of women participated in political parties. However, some progress had been made recently. In the 2001 local elections, for example, 125 women were nominated, of whom 35 elected. Women's participation in the Government had increased and there was now one female minister and several female deputy ministers. Women's participation in trade unions continued to be limited as women did not understand the significance of such work.

373. The representative informed the Committee that the National Women's Council, which had been established after the Fourth World Conference on Women in order to set policies and strategies for the development of women in the fields including education and health and on such issues as violence against women, had been expanded in March 2002. The National Women's Council, headed by the Prime Minister, worked in close cooperation with non-governmental organizations and executives from departments active in the field of women's development. In addition, there were other non-governmental mechanisms working for the advancement of women. Most of them concentrated their work in urban areas, despite the fact that the urgent need for development was in rural areas.

374. The representative stressed that the education gap between boys and girls continued to be very wide, with only 34 per cent of girls attending primary school. Many girls, especially in the rural areas, dropped out of school in order to help their families in the fields. Girls were also withdrawn from schools because most were co-educational and parents opposed the mixing of the sexes in schools. The representative also stated that, owing to the persistence of stereotypical gender roles, girls did not usually attend vocational or technical training courses. She noted that it was important to change girls' perception of that type of training as it was very important for the promotion of development in the country.

375. The representative informed the Committee that life expectancy was 64 years for women and 60 years for men. Fertility rate continued to be very high: 5.8 in the cities and 7.4 in the rural areas. Less than 20 per cent of women used family planning services. Maternal and infant mortality was high due, inter alia, to the fact that women were reluctant to visit health-care centres as most doctors were male. The representative also stated that female genital mutilation is not a common practice in Yemen, and it is limited to the coastal area of Yemen. The Minister of Health had prohibited female genital mutilation in government hospitals, and an awareness-raising campaign on the dangers of female genital mutilation had also been launched.

376. The representative stated that Yemen had a per capita income of \$300 a year and 23 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line. In order to combat poverty, different mechanisms and programmes, including the Social Fund for Development and the Fund for Microcredit, had been established, aimed at providing income for poor women. The representative indicated that the work of women in agriculture was not valued and considered as part of a woman's reproductive role, with food being grown for family needs rather than for market purposes. In order to assist rural women who worked hard and had limited access to health-care services and education, a division catering specifically to their needs had been set up in the Ministry of Agriculture. She added that it was hoped that the situation of rural women would improve through the implementation of the 2002-2005 strategy to combat poverty.

377. The representative noted that laws related to social status still discriminated against women, although most were taken from Sharia, which contained positive provisions for women, such as the right to inheritance and to manage money. However, the National Women's Council, assisted by civil society organizations, was working to bring about law reform. The representative assured the Committee that the National Women's Council considered the Convention as well as the Beijing Platform for Action as basic tools for improving the status of women, and had convened a symposium on the Convention and would shortly be publishing a simplified version of the treaty.

(b) Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

378. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the State party for submitting its fourth and fifth periodic reports which are in accordance with the Committee's guidelines for the preparation of periodic reports and which were prepared in cooperation with civil society. The Committee also expresses appreciation for the written replies to the issues raised by the pre-session working group.

379. The Committee commends the State party for its delegation, headed by the Deputy to the President of the National Women's Committee, and appreciates the frank and constructive dialogue that took place between the delegation and the members of the Committee, which provided additional information on the implementation of the Convention in Yemen.

Positive aspects

380. The Committee welcomes the State party's commitment to implementing the provisions of the Convention as reflected in a range of policies, plans and programmes.

381. The Committee welcomes the establishment of the National Women's Committee as the national machinery for the advancement of women and gender equality. It notes with appreciation the National Women's Committee's ongoing review of discriminatory legislation.

382. The Committee commends the appointment of a woman as Minister of State for Human Rights and the appointment of women as judges and prosecutors and to the foreign service.

383. The Committee welcomes the State party's ongoing cooperation with women's organizations in efforts to implement the Convention effectively.

Principal areas of concern and recommendations

384. The Committee is concerned at the existence of many discriminatory legal provisions which contradict the Constitution and the Convention.

385. The Committee recalls the State party's obligation to implement the provisions of the Convention, particularly to ensure that article 1 of the Convention is fully reflected in the Constitution or other legislation. The Committee also urges the State party to engage in and continue the process of comprehensive legislative review and reform to ensure that all laws are in harmony with the Constitution and the Convention.

386. While acknowledging the statement made by the State party that education is a cornerstone for development and a key element in the improvement of the status of women and the achievement of equality between women and men, the Committee notes with concern the high levels of illiteracy among women and girls, particularly in rural areas, and the high rate at which girls drop out of school.

387. The Committee calls upon the State party to strengthen its efforts to eradicate female illiteracy, especially among girls, particularly in rural areas, and to take general as well as temporary special measures to ensure primary and secondary education for girls and lower the high dropout rate among girls. The Committee recommends the introduction of measures to create an environment that increases the enrolment and retention rates of girls in schools at all levels through increased training and employment of women teachers, addressing parents' concerns related to co-education and the setting of precise targets and timetables to measure progress.

388. The Committee notes with concern that the persistence of patriarchal stereotypes and discriminatory traditional cultural and social norms, particularly those relating to the role and responsibilities of women, impedes progress in the implementation of the Convention and the full enjoyment of women's human rights.

389. The Committee urges the State party to take measures to change stereotypical attitudes and negative cultural norms about the responsibilities and roles of women and men and to design and implement awareness-raising programmes directed at all levels of society.

390. The Committee expresses concern that several provisions of the Penal Code discriminate against women. It notes in particular article 232, which provides that a husband or other male relative who kills his wife in relation to adultery is not charged with murder.

391. The Committee urges the Government to eliminate any discriminatory penal provisions, and in particular article 232 as proposed by the National Women's Committee, in line with the Convention and to ensure that homicides committed against women by their husbands or male relatives are prosecuted and punished in the same way as other murders.

392. Noting the link between women's subordination in the family and their ability to participate fully at all levels of society, the Committee is concerned about discriminatory provisions in the Law of Personal Status, which permits polygamy and sets differential standards for women and men in marriage and family life. The Committee is also concerned that the 1999 amendment to the Law of Personal Status has led to further discrimination against women in the family by denying women the right to equality in marriage and divorce.

393. The Committee urges the State party to review existing legislation and amend discriminatory provisions affecting women's rights within the family in order to bring them into harmony with the Constitution and the Convention. The Committee urges the State party to ensure that laws, policies and programmes with regard to the family affirm and incorporate the principle of equality and partnership between women and men and the full realization of women's human rights. The Committee also encourages the State party to obtain information on comparative jurisprudence, where the link between Islamic law has been codified in legislative reforms and Court decisions.

394. The Committee is concerned about the high rate of early marriages, which creates a serious health risk for girls and prevents them from completing their education.

395. The Committee urges the State party to take measures to raise the minimum age of marriage for girls, in line with article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines a child as being below the age of 18, and the provision on child marriage in article 16, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Committee urges the State party to develop awareness campaigns on the negative implications of early marriage on the health and education of girls.

396. The Committee notes with concern the high maternal mortality rates.

397. The Committee recommends that the State party take urgent measures to develop health programmes aimed at reducing the maternal mortality rate and to make contraceptives affordable and accessible.

398. The Committee is concerned about all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual violence and female genital mutilation, and notes with concern the lack of information and systematic data on these matters.

399. The Committee recommends that the State party conduct research into the extent of violence against women and girls and collect data on all forms of violence, including violence committed within the family. With regard to the practice of female genital mutilation, the Committee calls on the State party to enhance its activities to eradicate this harmful, traditional practice, especially through awareness-raising campaigns. In the light of its general recommendation 19, the Committee calls upon the State party to ensure that all forms of violence against women are prosecuted and punished adequately and that victims have immediate access to redress and protection. The Committee requests the State party to ensure the full sensitization of law enforcement officials, the judiciary and the public on all forms of violence against women and girls.

400. In view of the fact that rural women constitute the majority of women in Yemen, the Committee notes with concern that the traditional division of labour in agricultural production disadvantages women and that, for cultural and social reasons, women do not control the means of production and face difficulties in obtaining loans. The Committee is concerned that rural women have little or no access to health-care services.

401. The Committee urges the State party to take special measures to support the integration of rural women in all sectoral policies and programmes and to eliminate discriminatory practices through awareness-raising and educational programmes targeted at women and men. The Committee also recommends the State party to take urgent measures to increase rural women's access to health-care services.

402. While welcoming the State party's plans to ensure women's participation in the upcoming electoral registration process, the Committee is concerned about the low rate of registration of women as voters and their low representation on electoral lists and in political decision-making bodies.

403. The Committee requests the State party to take measures to increase the political representation of women as voters and as candidates at all levels. It also calls upon the State party to explore the use of temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, such as quotas, in order to increase women's access to decision-making positions. The Committee also suggests that the State party offer support and training programmes to women leaders and candidates to future elections and carry out awareness-raising programmes on the importance of women's participation in political decision-making aimed at both women and men and throughout the society.

404. While acknowledging the economic difficulties faced by the State party, the Committee notes the close connection between the success of development policies and the promotion of gender equality. The Committee considers that the combined effects of high illiteracy rates among women and girls, the high rate of school dropouts and early marriage of girls, the high rate of child labour among girls and the low level of women's political participation negatively impact on the implementation of national development policies.

405. The Committee encourages the State party to ensure that measures to achieve the goal of gender equality are fully integrated into all national development policies and programmes in line with the provisions of the Convention and welcomes the National Women's Committee's plan to increase awareness of the human rights of women within the public at large.

406. The Committee urges the State party to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention and invites the State party to accept the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, concerning the meeting time of the Committee.

407. Taking account of the gender dimension of declarations, programmes and platforms for action adopted by relevant United Nations conferences, summits and special sessions (such as the special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (the twenty-first special session), the special session on children (the twenty-seventh special session), the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the Second World Assembly on Ageing), the Committee requests the State party to include information on the implementation of aspects of these documents relating to relevant articles of the Convention in its next periodic report.

408. The Committee requests the State party to respond to the concerns expressed in the present concluding comments in its next periodic report submitted under article 18 of the Convention. It also requests that the report address the general recommendations of the Committee and provide information on the impact of legislation, policies and programmes to implement the Convention.

409. The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Yemen of the present concluding comments in order to make the people of Yemen, 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 required in that regard. It also requests the Government to continue to disseminate widely, 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".