

## CUBA

### **CEDAW A/39/45 (1984)**

246. The Committee considered the initial report of Cuba (CEDAW/C/5/Add.4) at its 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting, held on 9 and 11 August 1983 (CEDAW/C/SR.20 and 23).

247. In submitting her report to the Committee, the representative of Cuba referred to the economic, political and social situation, in order to give the experts a better understanding of her country's report.

248. She added that, in the few years of the revolutionary process, all types of discrimination before the law had been eliminated and equality of access to education and free health services had been achieved. There had been a massive inflow of women into the work-place, and women had come to benefit from many other facilities which had been virtually non-existent or had been enjoyed by a tiny minority of the population of the country. The process of transformation had had to be carried out in the face of an economic and political blockade and constant threats and aggressions perpetrated against the economy, which had affected and greatly impeded the battle against underdevelopment and the ultimate objective of achieving full participation of women in the development process being carried out.

249. Despite those achievements, she indicated that some old and deep-seated prejudices, which were difficult to eradicate, still persisted. Those prejudices were founded on attitudes shaped over the centuries, when the male sex had been looked upon as superior to the female sex - what was commonly known as "machismo".

250. She added that, although there was no discrimination against women, they were still poorly represented in policy-making and decision-making jobs. But women had made impressive gains in employment, in March 1983, women accounted for 35.7 per cent of employment in the civil service.

251. In the field of education, equal access was also guaranteed to women, and there had been constant efforts to reduce the numbers of girls kept out of school, particularly in rural areas of the country. Good results had already been obtained in adult education, with women comprising 43.8 per cent of the students registered in those courses in 1980-1981.

252. The Cuban representative recalled that Cuba was the first country to sign the Convention, an instrument whose spirit was completely in conformity with its national legislation as well as with the wishes and desires of the Cuba Government and people.

253. The Committee expressed appreciation for the organization and structure of the report and particularly for the fact that it devoted to each article of the Convention relevant commentaries and information, including excerpts from legislation such as the Family code, maternity protection and labour regulations. Experts commended the frankness with which the report was introduced, in particular the reference to difficulties encountered in implementing the Convention due to the

problems of underdevelopment, the persistence of cultural inequality and the difference between the de jure and de facto situation.

254. Various clarifications were requested in the course of the Committee's consideration of the report. Noting that the Constitution explicitly guaranteed the equality of men and women, the experts were interested in knowing the extent of women's participation in the discussion and drafting of the Constitution.

255. With regard to article 2, experts asked whether the relevant provisions of the Convention could be invoked directly before the courts and enforced. They also wished to know what sanctions were applied in cases of discrimination and what was the machinery to deal with them.

256. With regard to efforts to abolish sex-stereotyping, it was asked whether co-education was the only means by which that could be achieved, what other policies were in existence and, in particular, those designed to remove age-old traditional perceptions and attitudes towards women, including "machismo", and what projects were being undertaken by the Federation of Cuban Women, the trade unions and the State in that regard.

257. Specific comments were directed to the Penal Code, where certain "indices of dangerousness" were outlined under what was described as a "state of danger". They included procuring, prostitution and the exploitation or exercise of socially reprehensible vices. The experts wished to know if, as was stated in the report, the problem of prostitution had been successfully resolved, or merely controlled and, in the latter event, what were the penalties established by the law. It was also wondered whether a prison term was imposed for procuring.

258. Commenting on women's participation in public life, data was requested regarding the proportion of women in Government, in the various ministries, as well as on their levels in the hierarchy, the composition of the municipal assemblies of popular power and the extent to which women participated in them as elected representatives.

259. More detailed information was requested on the role of the Federation of Cuban Women as a non-governmental organization, its power to initiate legislative reforms and the nature of its interaction with the Government. The experts also asked whether there were other women's groups and, if so, what were their status and power vis-à-vis the Federation and the Government.

260. More details were also requested on the involvement of women in the cause of peace at the national as well as the international levels.

261. Commenting on article 10 of the Convention, the committee noted the achievements of the State party in education. It was gratified to hear that there was a clear majority of women entering institutions of higher learning, and it noted that, in order to fulfil the requirements, those chosen had to have the highest grades. In that regard, it was also noted that students who had a "correct integral attitude" could proceed to higher education although it was also stated in the report that everyone had the right to education. That seemed to indicate discrimination regarding opinions and convictions which was noted in reference to article 13, since freedom in artistic creation was allowed provided that the artistic content was not contradictory to the Revolution. Information was also

requested on the number of fellowships and grants given to women and how they were allocated.

262. It was pointed out that it would be helpful if women were given guidance as to choice of profession in order to avoid occupational segregation. The Committee also noted that there was a contradiction between the number of women in schools, which appeared to be higher than men, and the fact that there were many women who lacked adequate technical qualifications. Questions were also asked about the method employed in the campaign to bring housewives up to the ninth-grade level.

263. Regarding women's integration in the labour force, more detailed statistics were requested on the types and fields of occupation and levels at which women were employed and, especially, as to whether they occupied decision-making and managerial positions. Figures were requested on unemployment and underemployment, overtime, night work and any other exemptions. More details were requested about efforts made to facilitate the combination of responsibilities at home with work or professional responsibilities. In that connection, the experts wondered whether the plan for encouraging productive labour at home was a sound one since it would double women's burden there.

264. Since Cuban women were reported to carry out a number of tasks in relation to public health and education, many on a volunteer basis, it was asked how women managed to find time to be involved in all those activities. The experts also noted that, with respect to protective labour regulations, certain types of work were prohibited to women and asked what exactly those jobs were.

265. With respect to conditions of work, clarifications were requested with regard to the meaning of expressions which described women as "physically weaker" and warranting "some small privileges and some small inequalities in their favour". Regarding social security, information was requested on how the extensive social security system operating in the country was financed. It was also asked why the retirement age for women was 55 while for men it was 60 years.

266. The report showed that Cuba was making major efforts to protect family unity, but gave no information on the incidence of divorce and what happened, in case of separation, to family property, children, etc. Furthermore, it would be of interest to know in what circumstances abortion was available.

267. Regarding nutrition, clarifications were requested on what "collective feeding" meant and on the scope of distribution of dietary supplements to pregnant women.

268. The representative of Cuba, in answering the experts' questions, explained that there had been massive participation by women in the public discussion of the Constitution and that the Penal Code provided sanctions for the offence of discrimination and also contained provisions for invoking the Convention before the courts.

269. With respect to activities on behalf of peace, the trade union movement was particularly active whenever it perceived that the survival of the human species was threatened.

270. Membership in the Federation of Cuban Women was voluntary and, at present, over 2.5

million women over the age of 14, or approximately 82 per cent of the female population, were members. Those who were not members could, however, participate in the social and cultural activities of the Federation. The President of the Federation was a member of the Council of State and President of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Childhood, Youth and Equal Rights for Women, and it was through her that the problems and concerns of women were brought before the highest authorities of the country.

271. The number of women members was large in non-governmental organizations, trade unions, local popular power institutions, student organizations and in any other mass organization. It was through those different organizations that fundamental changes had been made in the national life of the country.

272. As part of the campaign to bring housewives up to the ninth-grade level of education, the Federation of Cuban Women had organized classes for the general public with advice from, and using the curriculum of, the Ministry of Education.

273. Regarding education, scholarships and other facilities were granted according to scholastic proficiency and there was no distinction between the sexes. "Correct integral attitude" referred to punctuality, academic achievement, discipline and neatness.

274. Stereotyped thinking was avoided from the earliest level at school through co-education and by paying attention to textbooks, avoiding segregation in sports and through the mass media. That purpose was also served by vocational guidance in the so-called "interest circles" which operated at all levels of the educational process. Although there was equal access to education at all levels, there were women who had not received the necessary training, a circumstance which could be explained by the fact that access to education was an achievement dating back only 20 years. Another factor that had to be taken into account was the drop-out rate.

275. Among the measures which had been taken to help girls choose non-traditional occupations there were "interest circles", which had been established for the purpose of identifying and developing children's aptitudes in order to guide them more effectively towards the kinds of education and occupations which suited them. Such circles functioned in all schools and within them students were offered classes related to the spheres of agriculture, industry, science, technology and the arts; they were organized in primary, secondary and pre-university schools and were among the optional activities open to students. The courses were taught by specialized personnel and their aim was to educate young people and, above all, to eliminate all forms of prejudice with respect to the choice of studies, careers and occupations.

276. Although it was impossible to indicate the percentage of those working in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs who were women, it could be stated that while as yet few women were ambassadors or occupied managerial posts, the number of women advisers and technical specialists in the Ministry had increased in recent years, as had the participation of women in international bodies concerned with matters not ordinarily dealt with by women.

277. Regarding the family, counselling was provided through the National Group on Sexual Education. The courts took all pertinent decisions in relation to divorce, child custody and property.

Common property was divided between the spouses and the court also decided on the division of household goods, bearing in mind the interests of children.

278. Abortion was free and on request as long as it did not endanger the women's health. Also, the consent of the parents was required in the case of a minor girl in need of abortion.

279. Special maternity provisions existed, as stated in the report, and the dietary supplement for pregnant women consisted of milk and meat at a very low price, although the goods were available on the free market and at higher prices. The system of "collective feeding" described in the report referred to workers' canteens in factories and other places of work where workers could buy meals at low prices.

280. Prostitution had been eradicated through a long process of compulsory education, rehabilitation and social work. The Penal Code defined prostitution as a "state of danger" and provided specific sanctions in that regard not only for the prostitute but also for the procurer. The same was true of the sale of and public exposure of pornography and other socially deviant behaviour.

281. Some of the privileges accorded to women were based on their inherent biological differences. For that reason, a woman retired earlier than a man. However, men could also opt for early retirement if they were incapacitated by sickness or accident. The Law on Protection and Hygiene at Work indicated, for the same reason, tasks which could be harmful to women owing to their physical and biological make-up. The text of the law was not available, but the next report of Cuba would include details of the regulations envisaged in the law.

282. The Constitution guaranteed the right of all citizens to social security protection against old age, illness and accidents, and the social security legislation governed the implementation of that constitutional guarantee. The political rights of women were enshrined in the Constitution as stated in the report. Although statistics were not available, the Committee could rest assured that women held posts in the administrative and judicial branches of the Government. A great deal remained to be done in that connection, especially with regard to the presence of women in high-level posts.

283. The reference to freedom of artistic expression as long as the latter was not contrary to the Revolution had to be understood in its proper context, namely, that the Revolution had transformed the country from a colonial and neo-colonial stronghold to a place where human rights were observed. The Revolution had guaranteed the freedom and equality of all citizens and the right of all to employment, land, free education, medical care, social security, etc. Artistic expression could not be permitted to diverge from the principles of the Revolution, nor could the interests of the population as a whole be comprised by the interests of an individual.

284. The representative of Cuba assured the Committee that more statistical data would be provided in the next report and that all questions which remained unanswered for lack of time and certain information would also be included in Cuba's second report.

285. Some experts recommended drawing the attention of States parties to the desirability of using the positive experiences referred to in the above-mentioned report, in order to make further progress

in eliminating discrimination against women, not only de jure, but also de facto.

## **CEDAW A/51/38 (1996)**

197. The Committee considered the combined second and third periodic report of Cuba (CEDAW/C/CUB/2-3 and Add.1) at its 294th and 295th meetings, on 22 January 1996 (see CEDAW/C/SR.294 and 295).

198. In introducing the combined report, the representative of Cuba recalled that her country had been the first to sign and the second to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. That constituted an historic achievement for the country and showed the importance it attached to the Convention. Policies for women, however, had begun already in 1959, following the revolution, and they still constituted a priority.

199. Despite the economic and political circumstances in which the country had found itself since 1989 as a result of the stepped-up economic blockade by the United States of America, which had had severe repercussions on the situation of women and children and had led to the deterioration of the quality of people's lives, Cuba had not ceased to go forward towards achieving full equality between the sexes.

200. The representative said she was sorry that the report did not comply with the Committee's general guidelines and replied to the Committee's written questions on implementation of the articles of the Convention.

201. The elimination of all forms of discrimination against women was a major goal of the Government of Cuba, and its legal and practical implementation was under constant review by the Government as well as by the Federation of Cuban Women. Relevant ministries and institutions had developed and promoted programmes to change socio-cultural patterns of conduct between women and men and to educate women on their rights. For children between 6 and 14 years of age, the schooling rate was currently 99 per cent. Girls participated at every level, and constituted 58 per cent of the student population in higher education. In the most recent parliamentary elections, 98.7 per cent of the population had participated. There were, however, still more men than women in positions of political leadership.

202. Women currently make up 40.6 per cent of the labour force in Cuba, which represented a slight increase since 1989, and despite the dramatic drop in production and the subsequent changes in order to restructure employment, women had not been the most affected group. Efforts were being made, nevertheless, to provide more training for women and opportunities for redeployment, including special measures for female-headed households. The Government was studying the question of wage differentials.

203. While the improvement of women's health had been a major achievement, the embargo currently affected the daily diet of women and children. Furthermore, there remained a need to place emphasis on prevention and risk reduction. Women had a life expectancy of 77.6 years, and there had been a steady reduction in infant mortality. The rate of maternal mortality due to abortion had decreased to 6.4 per thousand but still represented the major cause of maternal mortality.

204. Women had the right to retain their nationality and that of their children after marriage. The violation of the right to equality was a criminal offence in Cuba, and the law offered protection in cases of violence against women. Efforts were being made to step up education for prostitutes and their families, as there had been a re-emergence of prostitution in recent years. Women enjoyed the same rights as men with respect to credit and bank loans and could have title to land on an equal basis with men.

205. Regarding the follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the representative said that a large-scale process of information and discussion of the commitments contained in the Beijing document had begun in which women and the whole society were taking part.

### Concluding comments of the Committee

#### Introduction

206. The Committee thanked the representative of the Government of Cuba for her detailed responses to the written questions which had been provided prior to the session of the Committee. Although the Committee noted that the second and third combined report of Cuba had not completely followed the guidelines established by the Committee, sufficient information on the implementation of the Convention had been presented to show the progress that the country continued to make in the area of women's rights. It welcomed the high-level representation in the delegation from the national machinery for women.

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

207. The Committee noted the negative effect of the economic embargo on the country. This, combined with the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its socialist allies, with which Cuba had maintained close economic, commercial and collaborative ties, had had serious repercussions for the Cuban economy. As a result, some of the programmes to promote equal opportunities and to eliminate stereotypes between women and men had been curtailed or suspended, and the food situation in general had deteriorated.

#### Positive aspects

208. The Committee noted that Cuban legislation was progressive in its provisions affirming gender equality and that discrimination was punishable under the law.

209. The Committee noted with satisfaction the Government support for the work of the Cuban Women's Federation, which represented 90 per cent of the women of Cuba.

210. The Committee also noted with satisfaction the significant increase in the number of women in all fields and levels of education, in the labour force in a wide variety of occupations, including science and technology, medicine, sports, etc., and, in particular, in policy-making at local, national and international levels.

211. The steady decline in maternal mortality, owing largely to improved care for pregnant women



and better care for children in their early years, was noted by the Committee. It was also noted that deciding the number and spacing of one's children had been proclaimed a fundamental human right.

212. The Committee noted that drop-out rates for girls had been declining, and adult education programmes had been developed for women.

213. The Committee noted with satisfaction that the Government had made the adjustments necessary to ensure that the effects of the drastic drop in economic growth were not felt especially or solely by women.

#### Principal subjects of concern

214. The Committee noted the fact that the Government intended to uphold its reservation concerning article 29. The Committee was concerned about the elimination of certain areas of progress for women owing to the embargo and the subsequent economic constraints.

215. The Committee observed that gender stereotypes persist despite the high levels of school enrolment, and domestic work and child care continue to be the responsibility of women.

216. The Committee pointed out the need to expand the participation of women at the highest levels of political power.

217. The Committee noted that, owing to the fact that women traditionally were less well paid, there was indirect discrimination in women's wages. Concern was expressed about the lack of information on women in trade unions.

218. The Committee noted with some scepticism that domestic violence was reported to be infrequent and that it was not considered to be a social problem.

219. The Committee also noted that the economic situation in Cuba resulting from the economic embargo had produced a serious shortage of essential products like medicines and contraceptive devices, which had been problematic for the population as a whole, and for women in particular.

220. The Committee was concerned about the re-emergence of prostitution in Cuba, which was linked to the growth in tourism and to the economic problems facing women.

#### Suggestions and recommendations

221. The Committee recommended that disaggregated data be collected concerning the number of complaints regarding discrimination.

222. Surveys and studies should be undertaken to determine the extent and impact of violence against women, in particular domestic violence, even if unreported, and to take steps in accordance with general recommendation 19.

223. Successful programmes to combat sexist prejudices and stereotyping, such as "Mujeres",

"Muchachas" and "Perfil F", should be revived as soon as possible, since they helped to address the attitudes of both men and women that need to be changed, particularly with regard to the need to share in the care and education of children in keeping with general recommendation 21.

224. The Government should do everything possible to meet the demand for contraceptives. Special information programmes relating to sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, should be strengthened for young girls, particularly those engaged in prostitution, in keeping with general recommendation 15.

225. Every effort should be made to further check the re-emergence of prostitution, to offer more and better job opportunities to women who engaged in prostitution, and not to place the sole responsibility for prostitution on the women themselves. Stronger measures must be adopted to prosecute procurers and clients who violated those women's rights.

226. An empirical study was needed to determine whether women were paid the same wages as men for work of equal value and to document occupational segregation and its relationship to income.

227. The Committee asked that more information be given in the next periodic report on women in the labour market and their income situation. The Committee would like to receive more information on the situation of women in trade unions in subsequent reports.

228. The Committee pointed out the need to expand the participation of women at the highest levels of political power, and suggested that efforts be continued to ensure that women have an effective voice in decisions that affected their lives.

## **CEDAW A/55/38**

244. The Committee considered the fourth periodic report of Cuba (CEDAW/C/CUB/4) at its 474th and 475th meetings, on 19 June 2000 (see CEDAW/C/SR.474 and 475).

### **Introduction by the State party**

245. In introducing the report, the representative of Cuba drew attention to the fact that her country had consistently adhered to the letter and spirit of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and upheld its value as an international legal instrument. Likewise, she noted that Cuba had expressed its political will to support the Optional Protocol to the Convention and undertaken a national evaluation of the actions adopted to implement the agreements of the Fourth World Conference on Women. She added that the evaluation showed the advances, the failures and the resulting new priorities on gender issues.

246. The representative informed the Committee that, during the period from 1996 to 2000, Cuba had adopted measures to solve pending problems and to outline national middle and long-term strategies to follow up the process aimed at the achievement of gender equality.

247. The representative stressed that, after the Fourth World Conference on Women, Cuba had implemented a series of actions to publicize the commitments made on the adoption of the Platform for Action among the policy-making State bodies. That wide process of social awareness-raising had culminated in a national seminar entitled “Cuban women from Beijing to 2000”, which examined the Platform for Action and elaborated recommendations for future work. The seminar had been a valuable part of the background to the establishment of the National Plan of Action to Follow up the Fourth World Conference on Women, which had been adopted into law in April 1997.

248. The representative informed the Committee that Cuba had strengthened the executive functions of each State body charged with implementing the relevant policies. She also drew attention to those bodies of the State Central Management which were involved in and responsible for the 90 measures included in the Plan. The 90 measures conformed with the national priorities established with regard to women’s employment, access to decision-making, the reflection of women’s images in the media, community participation in health services, community social work, improvement of legislation, attention to women’s human, sexual and reproductive rights and the improvement of research on women and gender relations.

249. The representative indicated that the substantial advances in the implementation of the National Plan of Action was due to the country’s gradual and sustained economic recovery, particularly during the last five years. The Cuban gross domestic product (GDP) had risen by 6.2 per cent in 1999, and had been accompanied by a 5.4 per cent rise in job productivity, and 8.8 per cent investment growth.

250. The representative informed the Committee that the continuing growth in the economy ensured a consistent policy of favouring social programmes, particularly those that benefited women and children. She emphasized that the Cuban national budget for social programmes had risen since

1995, and, in the year 2000, the State had devoted 70 per cent of its current expenditure to education, health care, social security, housing maintenance and repair and community services. The representative informed the Committee that, during the seventh Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women, held in March 2000, it had been indicated that women's employment in the civil-State sector had risen from 42.3 per cent in 1995 to 43.6 per cent in 1999. Moreover, in some middle- and higher-level job categories (i.e., technical and professional), women's employment had risen from 63.8 per cent in 1995 to 66.1 per cent in 1999. She also noted that the participation of women in decision-making had increased from 29.8 per cent in 1995 to 32.3 per cent in 1999. She stressed the qualitative and quantitative improvement of women's participation in Parliament, where women represented 27.6 per cent in comparison to the period from 1993 to 1998, when women accounted for 22.8 per cent.

251. The representative underlined the impact of the Helms-Burton Act and the economic, commercial and financial blockade of the Government of the United States of America, and described its differential negative consequences for women and men. She noted that those factors had prevented Cuba from fulfilling the purposes of the National Plan of Action as well as the principles of the Convention. She indicated that, owing to continuing gender stereotypes and traditional sexist behaviour patterns, many women were still responsible for family and children's care, and that the blockade took a particular toll on women who were responsible for productive and social activities in the home. She acknowledged that international solidarity, including through women's organizations, had counteracted some of the negative effects of the blockade and promoted projects for the advancement of women and girls in Cuba.

## **Concluding comments of the Committee**

### **Introduction**

252. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Government of Cuba for submitting on time a detailed fourth periodic report containing data disaggregated by sex. It commends the Government for the comprehensive written replies to the Committee's questions, and its comprehensive oral presentation that further clarified recent developments in the State party.

253. The Committee commends the Government of Cuba for having sent a large delegation, headed by the Vice-Minister for Science, Technology and the Environment, with a high degree of expertise and including officials from various branches of Government and from the Federation of Cuban Women. Their participation enhanced the quality of the constructive dialogue between the State party and the Committee.

### **Positive aspects**

254. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the Government's political will and commitment to implement the Convention under extremely difficult circumstances.

255. The Committee commends the Government for the adoption, at the level of a law, of a National Plan of Action to follow up the Fourth World Conference on Women, prepared in a consultative process among governmental bodies and entities of civil society, and containing a large

number of actions in various fields to be implemented by various government bodies. It also commends the Government for the legislative changes and programmes implemented since the consideration by the Committee of its third periodic report in 1996, including in direct response to the Committee's concluding comments. The Committee also commends the Government for clearly recognizing the link between the Convention as the legal framework, and the Beijing Platform for Action as the operational policy document, for realizing women's human rights.

256. The Committee welcomes the increase, since 1996, in the women's employment rate in the civil-State sector, which has reached 43.6 per cent, women's participation in the National Assembly at 27.6 per cent, in leadership positions at 32.3 per cent, and in technical and professional mid- and higher-level posts at 66.1 per cent. It welcomes the fact that women constitute 60 per cent of the judiciary. It also welcomes the improvements in women's socio-economic situation as a result of the country's sustained economic recovery in recent years.

257. The Committee commends with appreciation the State party for its encouraging national indicators for social development, especially women's generally high literacy rates, and the favourable indicators in the field of women's health, including access to basic health care, low maternal, infant and women's mortality rates and a decline in abortion rates.

258. The Committee welcomes the fact that Cuba invited the Special Rapporteur on violence against women to visit the country in June 1999.

259. The Committee commends the Government for having signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention in March 2000.

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

260. The Committee notes the ongoing economic blockade and its particular effects on women and on the full implementation of the Convention. These effects are compounded by the fact that women remain primarily responsible for household work and are clustered in professions that are seriously affected by the blockade.

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

261. The Committee expresses its concern about the persistence of stereotypes concerning the role of women in the family and society and of attitudes and behaviours of machismo in many areas of public and private life. The Committee is concerned that, notwithstanding the Government's recognition of this problem and the implementation of measures to address it, the persistence of such stereotypes continues to be an issue affecting efforts to fully implement the Convention.

262. The Committee calls on the Government to continue to undertake measures to address stereotypical attitudes in Cuban society. In particular, the Committee calls on the Government to continue efforts aimed at increasing women's participation in all areas and at all levels of decision-making, as well as to encourage men to share family responsibilities. It also calls on the Government to continue to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the impact of its measures to identify shortcomings, and adjust and improve these measures accordingly.

263. The Committee expresses its concern that there is insufficient assessment of the question of violence against women, in particular domestic violence, and sexual harassment in the workplace. It notes with concern that no specific laws are in place to penalize domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace. It also notes that insufficient statistical data are available about various types of violence against women, including elderly women and against children. The Committee also notes with concern that there is insufficient information on the response of law enforcement officials, the judiciary and health care providers to such violence.

264. The Committee calls upon the Government to assess, in a comprehensive manner, the possible incidence of violence against women, including domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as, in case of incidents, the root causes of such violence. It invites the Government to increase public awareness of the need to take measures to prevent such violence, to consider launching a zero-tolerance campaign on violence against women, as well as to increase the awareness of public officials and the judiciary about the seriousness of such violence. It also invites the Government to increase the availability of support measures for women victims of domestic violence, such as telephone helplines and shelters for battered women. The Committee invites the Government to provide in its next report data on women's access to the Courts in general, and with regard to violence in particular.

265. The Committee notes with concern that, while prostitution is not a crime, there is little information about the impact of programmes and other measures to prevent women from becoming prostitutes, and to rehabilitate and reintegrate them into society. Further efforts are needed to identify the root causes of the increase in prostitution in recent years, and of the effectiveness of measures to counteract this trend.

266. The Committee urges the Government to increase its understanding of the causes of prostitution, and to assess the impact of its preventive and rehabilitative measures with a view to improving their effectiveness, and to bringing them fully into line with article 6 of the Convention. The Committee invites the Government to expand its programmes for women's economic independence in such a manner as to attack the causes of prostitution and to eradicate the need for women to enter into prostitution. It also calls on the Government to include in its next periodic report detailed information on any developments related to preventive and rehabilitative measures taken with regard to prostitutes.

267. The Committee notes with concern that, while the introduction of the option of divorce by consent constitutes a viable alternative to a court-supervised divorce, it may involve inherent risks of disadvantage for women.

268. The Committee encourages the Government to monitor carefully the implementation of divorce by consent, and in particular any negative impact this option might have for women with regard to issues such as alimony payments, custody and maintenance of children and distribution of property.

269. While recognizing the increase since 1996 in women's employment rate in the civil-State sector, the Committee remains concerned that women make up a higher percentage of the unemployed, and at the persistence of obstacles to their full integration in all sectors of the labour

market, in particular the joint venture and tourism industry.

270. The Committee calls on the Government to implement temporary special measures targeted at women to reduce the level of unemployment and of disparities in access to some sectors of the labour market. It also recommends that such measures ensure that women benefit equally from the country's economic recovery. The Committee calls on the Government to increase its efforts to create new opportunities for women in non-traditional and high-growth areas, including in new information and communications areas and in the service sector, and to strengthen efforts to ensure that they can take full advantage of the mixed economy, in accordance with their high levels of education and skills.

271. While recognizing the Government's sustained efforts to ensure women's right to health, the Committee underlines the necessity of continued efforts to address HIV/AIDS, and in particular its potential impact on high-risk groups, such as prostitutes and young adults. The Committee is concerned about the occurrence of suicide among older women. The Committee calls on the Government to study the cause of women's suicide with a view to adopting preventive measures.

272. The Committee is concerned about the fact that insufficient information was provided on the situation of rural women.

273. The Committee calls on the Government to provide in its fifth periodic report a comprehensive picture of the situation of rural women, including data disaggregated by sex, and comparing the situation of women in urban areas. It also invites the Government to provide further information about the system of rural cooperatives and their benefits for women.

274. The Committee requests the Government to provide in its next report information, including statistical data, on the prevalence of tobacco use and alcohol, drug and substance abuse by women of different age groups and measures aimed at preventing and reducing such abuse. It also invites the Government to provide information about the availability of counselling and rehabilitation measures for women drug abusers.

275. The Committee requests that the Government responds in its next periodic report to the specific issues raised in these concluding comments.

276. The Committee encourages the Government of Cuba to deposit its acceptance to the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, and to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention as soon as possible.

277. The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Cuba of the present concluding comments, in order to make the people of Cuba, and particularly Government administrators and politicians, aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure de facto equality for women and further 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, the Committee's general recommendations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the further actions and initiatives adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-third special session, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

