



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

Distr.: General
27 April 2009

Original: English

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Forty-third session

Summary record of the 873rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 23 January 2009, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gabr

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (continued)

Combined third and fourth periodic report of Armenia (continued) (CEDAW/C/ARM/4, CEDAW/C/ARM/Q/4, CEDAW/C/ARM/Q/4/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Armenia took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 7 to 9 (continued)

2. **Ms. Aghajanian** (Armenia), responding to a question on domestic violence, said that the Criminal Code, the Civil Code and the Family Code contained specific articles that covered domestic violence, while Chapter 18 of the Criminal Code covered sexual violence and crimes against sexual integrity.

3. Annual training programmes were held for media and journalists to raise awareness of discrimination. The Yerevan Press Club, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, had devised and adopted a journalists' code of conduct. A weekly police broadcast provided the public with information on cases of trafficking and domestic violence and there had been television talk shows on those issues to raise public awareness of existing legislation and how to access the courts.

4. The Criminal Code had included an article on trafficking since 2003, so no earlier data was available. There had been 14 cases in 2007, involving 36 victims. In 2008, there had been 11 cases, with 20 perpetrators, including 19 women, and 4 women had been convicted. The 39 victims had all been women and 20 of them had been referred to NGOs for assistance.

Articles 10 to 14

5. **Ms. Bailey** said that although in principle women had equal opportunities in Armenia, their access to those opportunities was affected by the uneven allocation of resources and privileges, and cultural norms and expectations, which resulted in de facto inequalities.

6. Despite the increase in the education budget, she had heard from other sources indicated that school fees had risen, which would affect socially vulnerable groups. Apparently up to 28 per cent of dropouts were

girls. Dropping out could expose them to teenage pregnancy, trafficking and other dangers. She asked what was being done to reduce the dropout rate, especially among ethnic minorities in rural areas.

7. Educational reforms had led to the amalgamation of some schools and the closure of others. Teachers, who were mainly women, were losing their jobs, while according to alternative reports, the closure of some pre-schools meant that mothers had to leave their jobs to care for their children. She asked if there was any strategy to support those women.

8. Despite the higher retention rate for girls at the secondary level, they tended to cluster in education and the arts, especially in higher education, while they were less well represented in the natural sciences. She asked if there was any policy in place to address that issue.

9. More women than men were studying for master's degrees, but they were underrepresented at the doctoral level. There seemed to be discrimination in favour of men to enable them to defer their military service and she wondered how that situation would be addressed. Women were also underrepresented in decision-making in education, both as heads of institutions, colleges and universities, and in the Ministry of Education. She asked whether any special measures were in place to rectify that situation. It would also be interesting to receive information on how the gap in reproductive health education for adolescents would be addressed.

10. **Mr. Bruun** said that labour market segregation meant that women were generally in lower-paid jobs, earning on average a little over half the amount earned by men. According to a report from the International Labour Organization (ILO), Armenia did not fully meet the ILO requirement concerning equal pay for work of equal value. The Labour Code had an article referring to equal pay for equal or similar work and he asked whether there were plans to amend that legislation. He also asked about the results of programmes to tackle women's unemployment and the structural problem of women being employed mainly in fixed-term or short-term jobs, while permanent jobs seemed to be mainly for men.

11. Details on sexual harassment provisions in the Labour Code should be provided. As the report said little about gender mainstreaming or positive action in the work place, it would also be useful to hear about

the results of the 2004-2006 ILO programme on gender mainstreaming and collective bargaining.

12. **Ms. Bailey** noted that there were high rates of teenage pregnancy and abortion, although the report stated that there were no restrictions on adolescent access to reproductive rights and health services. Perhaps cultural norms and geographical location acted as barriers to services. She wondered if there was a plan to increase the number of youth-friendly health centres, especially in rural areas, where the abortion rate was much higher. On average, 13 per cent of women had unmet family planning needs and she asked whether action was being taken to remedy that situation and reduce the use of abortion as a means of birth control.

13. A reduction in the health services budget had led to a deterioration in those services in rural areas, which had led to increased infant and maternal mortality rates and malnutrition. She asked whether there was any plan for programmes to address those issues, particularly in rural areas.

14. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** reminded the delegation that the Committee, in its previous concluding observations, had expressed concern at the widespread use of abortion as a birth control method, particularly in rural areas. Despite the Government's initiatives to reduce the number of abortions, statistics from other sources indicated that the number of abortions per 1,000 women aged from 15 to 49 years had increased from 9.2 in 2001 to 11.9 in 2005. If those figures were correct, the initiatives had not been successful. She asked for further information on the Government's plans and for clarification of whether contraceptives, including birth control pills, were distributed free of charge to everyone, including teenage women.

15. It seemed from the report that women's health was mostly dealt with in terms of their reproductive function. She asked for information on other health concerns of women, including the main causes of death, sex-disaggregated data on heart disease, cancer and other illnesses, and the trends in those areas. She also wished to know whether the programmes for people with disabilities had any specific provisions for women in areas such as access to reproductive clinics and simple procedures such as examinations.

16. **Mr. Bruun** referred to Armenia's entrepreneurship programmes for women and wondered whether there were any provisions to assist them with access to

credit, which was essential for running a business. It would also be interesting to hear about any measures regarding unpaid work at home, which was mainly done by women.

17. **Ms. Popescu** asked whether the Government had any plans for special projects or measures for refugees. In another area, in view of the Government's plan for a transition to the European model for disabilities, she noted that the European model was gender-sensitive rather than gender-neutral and took into account the specific needs of women. She also requested information on any measures of plans to support women who were single heads of households, especially as a result of men's migration. The report referred to around 700,000 migrants but alternative sources suggested a higher figure of around one million, most of whom were men.

18. **Ms. Aghajanyan** (Armenia) said that everyone had the right to education. She referred to the Constitution (article 39 included in report). Basic general education was free and compulsory for all and everyone had the right to free higher and professional education on a competitive basis.

19. After secondary education, pupils could take competitive examinations for entrance to higher institutions, which could be either free or fee-charging. In 2007, girls accounted for 63.1 per cent of students at free institutions and 65 per cent of students at fee-charging institutions. Girls accounted for 54.5 per cent of students attending State higher education institutions free of charge in 2007.

20. Over the period from 2004 to 2007, 7,251 teachers had participated in the school optimization programme, and 90 per cent of them were women. The social support programme had ended in 2007 because the optimization process had been completed. Over the period from 2003 to 2008, about 71 schools had been closed or merged, but the process was limited to neighbouring schools in urban areas and did not include schools in remote areas. The introduction of the 12-year system of education had increased the numbers of both students and teachers in the educational system. There were still more male students studying scientific subjects, because girls usually got married and had children rather than continuing their studies.

21. The Healthy Lifestyle programme was being evaluated in the senior classes of general education

schools. The framework, specifications and curriculum had all been adopted. A sex education textbook and additional brochures and materials had been produced for schools and special training was provided for the teachers.

22. **Ms. Avagyan** (Armenia) said that the teenage pregnancy rate was high compared to Western countries, with mothers aged under 18 years accounting for between 20 and 30 of every 1,000 births. One factor was early marriage, as 6 per cent of girls aged 17 or 18 years were already married.

23. With regard to teenagers' reproductive rights, she pointed out that Armenia was a very small country of about 3 million inhabitants. The number of centres providing reproductive services to teenagers had been increased from 6 to 37. Armenia had been one of the first members of the Commonwealth of Independent States to provide sex education for children and teenagers. For the past 10 years, schools had been offering a life skills programme which included sex education and sexual health. That programme was also part of the effort to eradicate stereotypes, as it was important to start early if attitudes were to change.

24. As for general health, there was no discrimination, unless it was in favour of women, as women's morbidity and mortality rates were lower than men's in all age groups. The emphasis was on reproductive health because most women's health problems were in that area. Women's average life expectancy was six years higher than that of men. There were many programmes for maternal health: 97 per cent of pregnant women made at least one visit to a qualified health worker and 98 per cent of births took place in hospitals. The cervical cancer prevention programme was already in its third year and provided free services in both urban and rural areas.

25. Armenia recognized the extent of the abortion problem and its first strategy had been to initiate a programme on reproductive health and family planning. Yerevan had 22 family planning services and there were 55 in the 10 regions, which meant that women in rural areas also had access to family planning. Family planning services had been provided free of charge since 1995 and modern contraceptives were available, including birth control pills, intrauterine devices and condoms. Both the birth rate and the abortion rate were higher in rural areas. Measures were being taken to improve medical

services and staffing levels in rural areas, including by providing special benefits and higher salaries for staff assigned in those areas.

26. **Ms. Aghajanian** (Armenia) said that Armenian legislation contained provisions for equal pay for equal work, which implied work of equal value. Civil service and private sector salaries were fixed according to qualifications, regardless of gender. Sexual harassment was covered by the Criminal Code, although the Labour Code also had specific articles on that issue.

27. Microcredit programmes for women in vulnerable groups, including refugee women and women from low-income families, had been quite successful. Another effort to reduce unemployment was a one-year wage subsidy for employers who provided a job for an unemployed person through a job agency.

28. There were no gender-specific programmes for persons with disabilities. They all had the same rights and there was no discrimination against women in terms of medical treatment or employment. Qualifications were the key factor and some private businesses were participating in programmes to help persons with disabilities to find employment.

29. Migration statistics were available for the period from 1992 to 2002. As of 2002, net migration had been close to zero and sometimes even positive, with more people entering than leaving. If a woman was a head of household or her husband was abroad and her family's income was below the poverty line, she would receive family social benefits. An increase in those benefits had reduced the number of persons living below the poverty line and the targets of the poverty reduction strategy had been increased accordingly.

30. Military service did play a role in the number of men embarking on postgraduate studies. A draft amendment had been prepared which would provide for all men to do military service regardless of their educational level. More girls than boys were now studying in higher education, and more girls were entering non-traditional areas of study, such as economics, international relations and political studies.

Articles 15 and 16

31. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** asked for information on legal aid programmes and wondered whether they were available only in criminal cases or also for family and other matters. It would be interesting to have

sex-disaggregated data on legal aid applicants. She asked for clarification of the fact that women worked mainly in the lower courts and for information on special family courts, if they existed.

32. Information should be provided on the legal framework for the rights and obligations of couples in de facto relationships and whether women's rights were guaranteed. It would also be interesting to know how the children of such couples were affected and whether same-sex couples were recognized.

33. She would welcome clarification of the report's reference to the dissolution of marriage through legal proceedings or in a registry office. Information should also be provided on the types of property that were shared in the case of divorce and whether it was distributed equally, including intangible property and employment-related property rights such as severance payments and pension rights.

34. It would be interesting to hear about alimony arrangements for women after a divorce. In many cases, women had invested their time in unpaid family work rather than in building earning potential and then had been left without means of support. Maintenance was paid to former spouses only in very limited circumstances, which could be contributing to the growing feminization of poverty. She asked whether there would be any additional provisions in that area in the new family code.

35. **Ms. Tanashyan** (Armenia) said that the State provided a lawyer for men and women requiring free legal assistance. No financial support was provided for women after a divorce but all of the property accumulated by the couples during the marriage was divided equally between the spouses. That provision did not apply to intangible property such as pensions, which were awarded to a specific person and not considered marital property. If the spouses were divorcing by mutual agreement and did not have children or any property to divide, the divorce could simply be recorded at the registry office. However, if they had claims against each other they would need to go to court. Armenia did not have family courts.

36. **Ms. Aghajanian** (Armenia) clarified that same-sex couples were not required to register in Armenia. They had the same property, educational, health and political rights as other citizens.

37. **Ms. Avagyan** (Armenia) said that special protection was available for the children of single mothers. If the father declared his paternity, his name was included on the birth certificate.

38. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** asked whether the property accumulated during a de facto relationship would be distributed in the same way as property accumulated during a marriage. She was also interested to hear what kind of post-divorce award was possible in the case of a woman who did not have children but had spent years taking care of the household.

39. **Ms. Pimentel** said that the number of deaths resulting from illegal abortions was a clear indication that Armenia's sexual and reproductive health strategy was not effective. Policy changes, strong mechanisms and more funding were needed and also a perspective more centred on women's human rights. A monitoring mechanism with an ombudsman should be created so that policies and programmes on maternal morbidity and health could be constantly improved. Health protocols were needed, together with health audits that looked beyond the clinical reasons to discover and address the major socio-economic and cultural factors related to maternal morbidity and mortality.

40. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega** asked about measures in the private sector. The legislation was very clear, but implementation was also important. She asked what specific programmes were in place for entrepreneurial management and whether there were any equality plans. Positive action measures were needed to combat discrimination against women at work and she recommended that the delegation make full use of the Committee's recommendations.

41. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** reminded the delegation that, in addition to the Convention, Armenia had ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child without reservation. All of those instruments set the age of majority at 18 for both boys and girls and Armenia should therefore amend its legislation accordingly.

42. **Ms. Bailey** asked whether school places were available for every child of school age, and requested information on measures to address the dropout rate. It would be interesting to know whether the teachers who had lost their jobs had been reabsorbed into the labour market after retraining. She also wondered what was

being done to change the cultural expectation that women should decline leadership positions.

43. **Ms. Zou** Xiaoqiao asked about the proportion of girls among the 8 per cent of children who were not attending school. She also asked what measures were planned to promote women's entrepreneurship and facilitate their access to credit.

44. **Ms. Šimonović** asked whether the new law against violence against women would include provisions for prevention and protection. She also requested information about the availability of shelters for women victims of violence, including the number of places in shelters, and about the free 24-hour telephone help line. She asked if Armenia was continuing with its own campaign and with its participation in the Secretary-General's campaign against violence against women.

45. **Ms. Rasekh** congratulated the Government on its accomplishments. She asked for more details of the free preventive examinations for women aged 15 years and between 30 and 60 years. She wondered whether that meant one examination per woman in a lifetime and whether there was any free service for women aged between 15 and 30 years.

46. She asked for information on the prevalence of depression, post-traumatic-stress disorder and other types of mental health disorders and on services to treat them. Studies had indicated that many victims of the 1988 earthquake in Armenia suffered from depression. She also asked what the Government was doing about the increase in HIV/AIDS infection in heterosexual women.

47. **Mr. Bruun** suggested that the reference in legislation to equal pay for similar work should be given a broad interpretation, so that the principle could be used to compare work of a different nature, which was very important in a segregated labour market. He wondered whether a comparison of, for example, the pay of a female teacher with the pay of a construction worker could be used as evidence of discrimination.

48. **Ms. Awori** said that many measures were in place but they did not necessarily cover all of the provisions of the Convention. She asked whether efforts were being made to have written laws on: marriage, including the registration of various types of unions and arrangements for divorce, maintenance and custody; property, especially marital property;

succession; and domestic violence and victim protection.

49. **Ms. Tanashyan** (Armenia) said that the Family Code included written laws on marriage, divorce and other matters.

50. **Ms. Avagyan** (Armenia) said that the Government was making efforts to reduce the abortion rate and certainly did not consider abortion to be a birth control method. The statistics available showed that the number of abortions was decreasing. Over the period 1985-1990, there had been equal numbers of births and abortions, which was an improvement on the earlier situation. Alternative independent research also confirmed the downward trend in abortion.

51. Efforts were being made to raise public awareness of contraceptive methods. Independent research showed that 97 per cent of the women surveyed knew of at least one modern contraceptive method, but only 20 per cent used them, while 60 per cent used traditional methods. Sometimes traditional methods were preferred because of migrant husbands who were absent for long periods, but those methods were not very effective in preventing pregnancy.

52. As boys aged between 15 and 18 years received a medical check-up prior to their military service, a programme had been introduced in all schools to provide a check-up for girls aged 15 years, in order to address that discrimination. It was a very expensive programme but was expected to have positive results. Women aged from 15 to 30 years had access to outpatient facilities which were free of charge for all age groups. Armenia had instituted a free cervical cancer prevention programme. As for breast cancer, there were 14 centres providing mammography services and women were also instructed in self-examination. Women receiving a medical examination for any reason were routinely checked for breast and cervical cancer. Primary medical care and hospitals were free of charge for the whole population, regardless of an individual's financial position.

53. Armenia had gone through many crisis situations, including the earthquake and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which had naturally increased the rate of occurrence of depression. The international community had provided assistance for establishing rehabilitation centres to address that problem. The rate of occurrence of depression was less for women than for men. In general, the rates of addiction to drugs, alcohol or

tobacco were also much lower among women than among men.

54. Voluntary HIV/AIDS counselling and testing was available. Women accounted for about 27 per cent of the 600 registered cases of HIV/AIDS. Five children had been born to infected mothers, all of whom had been infected through a heterosexual partner.

55. **Ms. Aghajanyan** (Armenia) clarified that in 2005, the general education enrolment rate had been 91.8 per cent of children aged 7-10 years. By 2007, it had risen to 93.2 per cent: 93.5 per cent for girls and 92.9 per cent for boys.

56. In 2008, 3,206 children had not attended school, including 1,293 girls. Some had dropped out for economic reasons, others were children with special educational needs. The Ministry of Education and Science had established a programme that provided vocational orientation to students to help them to move to a secondary or higher vocational school, as appropriate. There was a pilot programme for parents' education and another for preschool reform, which helped parents to take a more serious attitude to their children's education. As boys sometimes dropped out of their secondary school education to go to work or to move to vocational schools, there were more female than male students at the higher levels of education.

57. **Ms. Aghajanian** (Armenia), in response to a question about de facto unions, said that the State ensured that a single mother received all the relevant childbirth benefits. As for alimony after a divorce, it was paid to support children who were minors, but there was no support payment for the mother. If her income was below the poverty line, she would in any case receive social benefits for her family.

58. Women were more likely than men to apply for jobs with low pay, but that was not due to discrimination. The man was usually the main family breadwinner and was seeking a higher salary. State efforts to improve pay for teachers and doctors had led to a situation in which men were now returning to those professions, and gender equality should be achieved in the coming years.

59. With the introduction of the new 12-year system, mandatory education would continue until grade 9. Children would then move on to vocational schools or to work.

60. The Government had not funded any shelters so far, but there was a 2009 budget provision to fund shelters for victims of trafficking and a 2010 provision for shelters for victims of domestic violence. The Government worked closely with the NGOs that operated existing shelters with grants from international donors and organizations.

61. With regard to equal pay for work of equal value, she was unaware of any international standard for comparing jobs of a different nature. There could only be a clear comparison when women and men were doing identical work and women in Armenia could not be paid less for doing the same job.

62. She thanked the members of the Committee for their challenging questions. It was unfortunate that the recent years of economic decline in Armenia had created many problems for women and driven them out of public life. The Government was open to discussing all of the issues that had been raised, including with civil society and NGOs, in order to address problems at an early stage, before they became unmanageable.

63. **The Chairperson** welcomed the progress achieved in Armenia, which had had become a party to both the Convention and the Optional Protocol without any reservation. The Committee hoped that it would soon ratify the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention. Stereotypes had not been entirely eradicated, but women were playing an increasing role in Parliament, the diplomatic service and political life in general. The plans for new legislation were very interesting. Further efforts should be made in the area of family planning and the Government should establish shelters for the victims of human trafficking and domestic violence as soon as possible. She hoped that the delegation, on its return to Armenia, would report to Parliament in order to share its experience of the dialogue with the Committee and would undertake further efforts to raise awareness of the Convention at all levels.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.