



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

Distr.: General
9 February 2011

English only

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

Summary record of the 969th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 25 January 2011, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Pimentel

Contents

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

Combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Bangladesh

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

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

Combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Bangladesh (CEDAW/C/BGD/6-7; CEDAW/C/BGD/Q/7 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Bangladesh took places at the Committee table.*
2. Ms. Chaudhury (Bangladesh) said that the Government of Bangladesh firmly believed that gender equality was a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance. Women, in its view, were important agents of social transformation. Article 28 of the Constitution of Bangladesh guaranteed women equal rights with men in all spheres of public life and prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex. It also stipulated that nothing in that article should prevent the State from taking special measures to promote the advancement of women and children or any other disadvantaged social group. All citizens were equal before the law and entitled to equal protection by the law.
3. The parliamentary elections of 2008 had ushered in a new era of democracy. Under its new platform, entitled “Vision 2021”, the Government was committed to mainstreaming gender issues into the macroeconomic framework and creating policies that would change the lives of women. Initiatives to ensure equal rights for women and to protect them from discrimination had been gaining momentum in Bangladesh. Women’s participation in both rural and urban income-generating activities had increased significantly, as had their mobility in general. The Government was working relentlessly to adopt policies and strategies for the empowerment of women. Those pro-woman policies had reduced poverty among women in recent decades. Women worked in the garment, shoe and cosmetic industries, as well as in crop production, livestock, forestry and fisheries, and a growing number of women were working in construction sites. Gender parity continued to prevail in school enrolment, infant and maternal mortality had decreased, and women’s health was improving thanks to better health services and greater access to nutritional foods.
4. The Committee, in its concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Bangladesh, had praised the Government for a number of significant advances in the areas of women’s health and empowerment and had identified a number of concerns. Measures taken to respond to those concerns included the adoption of a comprehensive approach to combating violence against women; the enactment by parliament of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, extensive efforts to raise mothers’ and daughters’ awareness of their rights under the law and the remedies available in case of a breach of those rights; programmes to raise awareness among community leaders with a view to altering traditional and patriarchal attitudes; and campaigns to prevent child marriages, the use of dowries and sexual harassment. Concerts had been organized for young people to spread the message: “Say no to violence against women”.
5. In addition, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives had been carrying out a number of projects to ensure a supply of safe drinking water for rural women, and the Ministry of Women’s and Children’s Affairs had undertaken a pilot project, sponsored by the Climate Trust, to provide safe drinking water and sanitation to women and children in disaster areas in the Bhola district.
6. Although the Convention could not be directly applied by the courts, many of its provisions had been incorporated into domestic law by way of judicial interpretation. In addition, discriminatory provisions had been eliminated in conformity with the Convention. In particular, women’s right to independent choice in marriage had been recognized by the

High Court Division of the Supreme Court. A number of significant judgements had been handed down in the areas of sexual harassment, forced marriage, guardianship, post-divorce maintenance, discrimination on the basis of marital status in the selection of public employees and discrimination in the allocation of responsibilities to elected officials.

7. Women had made significant progress in the national political arena: there were six women ministers in the Cabinet, one of whom was Prime Minister. In Parliament, the Whip, the Chairperson and members of various standing committees were women. Progress was also being made in the empowerment of women at the local government level through a unique strategy of affirmative action.

8. Bangladesh had been globally acclaimed for promoting secular and progressive values, fostering the empowerment of women and combating extremism. The Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs had launched a number of poverty-alleviation programmes whose objective was to ensure women's equal and active participation in social and economic life and to empower women through skill development, job opportunities and support for women entrepreneurs. The economic empowerment of women was a priority for the Government. A social safety net programme had been created under which allowances were provided to widows, destitute women, pregnant women and lactating mothers working in urban areas, and food security for indigent women was ensured. It also provided awareness training in reproductive health, self-employment and income-generation. Credits for income-producing activities were given to destitute rural women to encourage them to become self-reliant. Throughout the country, training programmes were familiarizing women with skills in such areas as agriculture, computer use, handicrafts, block batik printing, sewing and the repair of electronic devices. Collateral-free loans and credit facilities were also available to women entrepreneurs.

9. In the area of education, three women's polytechnic institutes had been established, large numbers of books had been distributed free of charge throughout the country, and the Asian University for Women had been founded in Chittagong. In the area of health, 10 women-friendly model district hospitals and three subdistrict health complexes had been established for women and children. In addition, maternity leave for women had been extended to six months, and the number of day-care centres provided by the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs had risen.

10. There had been considerable increases in the number of women working in the civil service, the judiciary (including six women judges in the High Court Division), the armed forces and the police. Bangladeshi women were participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations, and an all-female Formed Police Unit was at work in Haiti in the areas of conflict resolution and rehabilitation, as mandated in Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

11. Bangladesh had a number of laws specifically prohibiting violence against women, including the Criminal Code, the Dowry Prohibition Act, the Prevention of Cruelty to Women and Children Act, and the Acid Crime Control Act. The High Court Division of the Supreme Court had declared illegal all extrajudicial punishments, including those established in fatwas. It had also issued a set of guidelines for action in cases involving the harassment of women, and committees had been formed in the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs for receiving complaints of sexual harassment. In addition, there were one-stop crisis centres in various parts of the country that offered medical treatment, legal support, police assistance and rehabilitation services to women victims of violence. A gender-responsive community policing programme was working to ensure security for women and girls, and the Women Support Centres provided shelter to women victims of violence. The country's mobile courts had recently been empowered to take immediate action against persons engaged in sexual harassment. Awareness-raising and advocacy programmes focused on engaging men and boys in the prevention of violence against

women and in changing stereotypes. Those efforts included courtyard meetings on violence prevention and clubs for teenagers where young people were informed about reproductive health issues and the negative impact of dowries, child marriage, sexual harassment and exploitation.

12. Ten ministries had recently adopted gender-responsive budgeting practices, which were vital in order to ensure that resources for women were best used for their welfare. Gender mainstreaming in the areas of development and poverty reduction was a priority for the Government in seeking to ensure that programmes for men and women distributed benefits equitably between them. In all, 28 ministries were working in the areas of women's employment and self-employment; education, awareness-raising and training; health; violence against women; social welfare; protection against food shortages and disasters; and access to utilities, infrastructure and services.

13. Bangladeshi women were autonomous agents of their own economic and social development, capable of making their own decisions, claiming their own rights, identifying their needs and finding ways of responding to them. In strengthening its response to the challenges of climate change, however, the Government had to bear in mind that the greater vulnerability of women to natural disasters and climate alterations must be taken into consideration in its policies and programmes.

14. It was essential for the objectives of the Convention, Beijing +15 and the Millennium Development Goals to be pursued in a synergistic way with a view to attaining gender equality. As Mary Wollstonecraft had famously stated, the beginning was always today.

15. **Ms. Patten** said it was clear that the State party had the political will to eliminate discrimination in that country. She would like to know, however, what its current position was on its reservations to article 2 and to article 16, paragraph 1 (c). Bangladesh had also declared that it would not undertake the obligations arising out of articles 8 and 9 of the Optional Protocol, explaining that it did not want the burden of further reporting obligations. She was sure that the State party had come to understand that no additional reports were requested under the Optional Protocol, and she therefore wondered if it intended to withdraw its declaration to that effect.

16. Noting that, under the recent Citizenship (Amendment) Act, women could transmit their citizenship to their children but not to their spouses, she asked whether the State party had plans to remove that discriminatory provision. In addition, she asked whether the Government had plans to set up a task force with a view to bringing domestic legislation into conformity with the Convention. It would also be useful to know what measures were being taken to ensure implementation of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act through, for example, training for law enforcement officers, awareness-raising and the collection of statistics on domestic violence.

17. **Ms. Acar** welcomed the clear improvements in the legal structure of Bangladesh with regard to women's rights, but said that the State party's reservations to article 2 and to article 16, paragraph 1 (c), of the Convention continued to give cause for concern. To argue that those provisions were incompatible with sharia law was a very sweeping assertion. She wondered whether the Government was planning to withdraw the reservations and whether there was any time frame for doing so. The State party should try to narrow down the reservations as a step towards eventual withdrawal.

18. Unfortunately, a number of laws which discriminated against women remained in force in Bangladesh, particularly in the area of personal status. She was disheartened by the blunt statement in the responses of the State party to the effect that there were no plans for putting in place a uniform family code (CEDAW/C/BGD/Q/7/Add.1, para. 88), and she

asked the delegation to explain why that was so and to describe the current state of affairs in that regard.

19. She enquired about persistent problems in enforcing court judgements, in disseminating information on them and in taking them into account in policymaking, law enforcement and the educational system. It would also be interesting to know whether the legislative branch referred to those judgements to ensure that new legislation was in conformity with the Convention.

20. Without sufficient data, it was impossible for the Committee to assess to what extent new policies and measures had helped to promote the advancement of women and combat gender discrimination. In its concluding observations on the State party's previous report, the Committee had already referred to the problem. She urged the Government to see to it that the next report contained gender-disaggregated data.

21. **Ms. Šimonović** said that, like other speakers, she would like to know why the State party's reservation to article 2 had not been withdrawn. Article 2 was a key provision; if it was not applied, it meant that the Convention was not being used to advance the rights of women. Article 27 of the Constitution of Bangladesh provided that all citizens were equal before the law and were entitled to equal protection by the law, and article 28 specified that women had equal rights with men in all spheres of public life. She therefore failed to see what objection the State party could possibly have to withdrawing its reservation to article 2 of the Convention. If the reservation to article 2 was maintained, it raised the question of whether the Convention had in fact been incorporated into national law. It was also unclear how women could avail themselves of the Optional Protocol if article 2 of the Convention was not applicable.

22. **Ms. Bareiro-Bobadilla** asked the delegation to explain how measures for the advancement of women took into account the definition of discrimination contained in the Convention and whether the State party's definition was consistent with the Convention's.

23. **Ms. Ameline** said that the question of the State party's reservations to the Convention posed a problem of constitutional and legislative consistency because gender mainstreaming, which Bangladesh had been promoting, must be based on an overall vision in terms of legislation, and article 2 of the Convention was essential in that regard. Religious laws governing personal and family matters which were applicable in certain minority communities might well be incompatible with the principle of equality and freedom of expression and conscience as set out in the Constitution. She would like to know whether any attempt had been made to overcome those contradictions and whether there had been a dialogue on those questions with religious authorities. In that connection she referred to the many cases in which women in Bangladesh had been victims of an extremist interpretation of religious practices or principles. She also asked whether Government policy took into account the situation of the Dalit minority.

24. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** acknowledged the complexity of a situation in which the Constitution made allowance for religious laws in the area of personal matters. Thus, in theory, there was no possibility of direct judicial review to determine whether such laws were consistent with the provision on equality enshrined in the Constitution or with the Convention. Islam was not monolithic, however, and the fact that there was no one school of Muslim jurisprudence provided an avenue for developing religious law that was consistent with human rights, in general, and women's rights, in particular. She urged the State party to use legislative measures to encourage judicial progress. Even though, regrettably, no uniform family code was envisaged in the near future, narrower legal measures could and must be taken to supplement existing religious laws and encourage the courts to bring them into line with the Convention.

25. **Ms. Neubauer** asked whether the Women in Development Focal Points to which reference was made in the report involved persons employed full-time. The report noted that the focal point mechanism would be called upon to play a greater role in coordinating and monitoring implementation of gender equality initiatives, and she asked how well coordination and monitoring had functioned in the past, what weak points had come to light and what steps would be taken to address them.

26. It would be useful to obtain updated information on the National Policy for Women's Advancement, which apparently was under review, and to learn whether Bangladesh intended to devise a comprehensive national action plan to ensure non-discrimination and gender equality.

27. **Ms. Chaudhury** (Bangladesh), referring first to the issue of reservations, said that the Government was fully committed to implementing the Convention and complying with all its obligations as a State party. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act and many other legal provisions reflected the spirit of the Convention. Article 65 of the Constitution had been amended to increase the number of seats set aside for women Members of Parliament from 30 to 45. Since 2000, the name of a child's mother must be included in official documents. New guidelines on the leasing of land called for documents to be issued in the names of both spouses on an equal partnership basis. Those steps showed that, despite the reservations, the Government had taken a number of measures to ensure equality and combat gender discrimination. It was to be hoped that, in the remaining three years of the current Prime Minister's mandate, action could be taken to withdraw the reservations, in particular the reservation to article 2; article 16, paragraph 1 (c), was somewhat more problematic. The Government was considering the experiences of other countries which had withdrawn their reservations to see how it had worked for them and whether there was any conflict with their domestic law.

28. Bangladesh had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention in 2000; that testified to its commitment to complying with its obligations as a State party. She thought that it might be possible for Bangladesh to withdraw its reservation to article 10, paragraph 2, of the Optional Protocol.

29. Recent amendments to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act had repealed discriminatory provisions by allowing mothers to pass on citizenship to their children, but the question of transmitting citizenship to one's spouse had not been addressed. The Government would work to abolish any remaining discriminatory provisions.

30. The report had given the mistaken impression that there was no possibility of introducing a uniform family code. In actual fact, there had been considerable discussion on matters which lent themselves to uniform codification, such as marriage and divorce. If the various religions could come to an agreement, a step could be taken in that direction. Thus, a uniform family code could not be ruled out.

31. Once judgements had been handed down by the Supreme Court, the Government implemented and disseminated them. To cite the recent landmark judgement concerning sexual harassment, the Supreme Court had laid down guidelines and had directed the Government to treat them as law until legislation on sexual harassment could be enacted. Another Supreme Court directive required the formation of sexual harassment committees, which must include women members. Those committees had been set up, and anyone could refer complaints of sexual harassment to them. The judgement of the Supreme Court in the case on sexual harassment was a good example of coordination between the legislature and the judiciary, because the Government would now submit bills on sexual harassment to Parliament to address the problem at the workplace, in schools and in the public domain. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act had been dealt with in a similar fashion.

32. Bangladesh had taken steps to implement the Committee's recommendations following consideration of its fifth periodic report. However, efforts must still be stepped up in a few areas to ensure full compliance. The gender-disaggregated database was an example. Gender-responsive budgeting had been introduced in 2009 in 4 ministries and would be extended to a total of 10 ministries in the financial year 2010/11, and gender-disaggregated data were essential in order to make gender-responsive budgeting more effective. The midterm budgetary framework had been put into place to assess how allocations could best be used to promote women's welfare. Thus, Bangladesh was still working to implement the Committee's recommendation in that area.

33. Any judicial interpretations found to be in conflict with the Constitution could be declared null and void. Family courts, which dealt with marriage, divorce and maintenance issues, were civil courts. For Muslims, the Muslim Family Law Ordinance of 1961 was applicable to family matters. Bangladesh did not have religious courts.

34. On the question regarding national machinery for implementation, she said that the persons working for the Women in Development Focal Points were not always gender specialists, but they had extensive training in gender mainstreaming and were appointed specifically to deal with the gender dimension in their particular ministry. At meetings attended by officials of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, reports from the other ministries on progress made in gender mainstreaming were assessed and suggestions were made for tackling any remaining difficulties.

35. The National Policy for Women's Advancement had been promulgated in 1997 following a long struggle in favour of women's rights. The policy had been modified in 2004 and had become much less effective, giving rise to considerable protest. The current Government had committed itself to reinstating the 1997 policy and was in the process of updating it to include climate change, natural disasters, food security and other issues affecting women. It was hoped that the policy could be reinstated in a month's time.

36. **Ms. Ameline** asked whether the State party had a specific policy on women who suffered from double discrimination on the grounds of gender and social class or origin.

37. **Ms. Zou Xiaojiao** asked whether the State party planned to introduce any specific measures to combat discrimination against women in the private sphere, particularly as no reference was made to such discrimination in the Constitution.

38. **Ms. Chaudhury** (Bangladesh) said that the Constitution guaranteed equal protection and equal access to justice to all persons. If minority women suffered discrimination of any sort, they could seek redress before the courts and the National Human Rights Commission. While the Constitution contained no reference to discrimination against women in the private sphere, it was currently being amended in the wake of a recent Supreme Court decision. It was therefore possible that that aspect of discrimination might be included as part of the amendment process.

39. **Ms. Hayashi** commended the State party for the legislative and other measures it had taken to combat violence against women and children. However, the level of such violence remained alarmingly high and was on the increase, according to reports that the Committee had received, as well as police statistics and media reports. It would be useful to learn whether that was the result of an actual rise in such crimes, or whether women had become more aware of their rights and were therefore reporting those crimes more often rather than remaining silent. She wished to know whether it was true that some women who were subject to or threatened with violence were placed in safe custody in sheltered accommodation against their will. If so, how many women had been placed in such custody and what was the average length of their stay? What measures had been taken against the perpetrators of the violence while those women had been in custody? She asked whether articles 1 and 2 of the Convention formed the basis of the training provided to legal

professionals and law enforcement officers on the implementation of the 2010 Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act. It would be useful to know whether the Act made provision for psychological intervention programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence and, if so, whether the State party made any budget allocations for such programmes. The State party should indicate whether it planned to codify the case law based on the Supreme Court guidelines for action in cases of sexual harassment.

40. **Ms. Awori** said that the Committee had received reports that, despite the introduction of specific legislation to prevent such acts, violence against women continued to exist in the form of domestic violence, rape, acid-throwing, dowry-related violence, fatwa-instigated violence and sexual harassment in the workplace. It appeared that few incidents of wife-beating and marital rape were ever reported, since such acts were widely believed to be acceptable within marriage. She asked whether the State party had any comprehensive data on gender-based violence. The Committee would welcome details of any research that had been conducted to assess the impact of the measures that had been put in place to prevent violence against women.

41. **Ms. Gabr** asked whether the State party took advantage of the expertise at its disposal, particularly in view of the past and present participation of illustrious Bangladeshi women on the Committee. While some women held high positions in the Government, many negative stereotypes of women persisted. She asked how the State party used the media, educational curricula and the involvement of religious leaders to combat such stereotypes. It would be useful to have additional information on the training given concerning the legislation that had been passed to prevent violence against women and uphold their rights.

42. She asked whether human trafficking was defined in domestic law and whether the State party had any data on the main purposes of trafficking in women in its territory. Did the Government plan to enter into any regional agreements concerning human trafficking? She urged the State party to cooperate with the Organization of the Islamic Conference in its efforts to compile comparative data on human trafficking in the region.

43. **Ms. Neubauer** asked whether commercial sex workers faced harassment and violence from law enforcement officers, their procurers and customers. She also wished to know whether reports that they had very limited access to health care, including for treatment of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, were well-founded. She would welcome information on the prevalence of prostitution in the State party and any efforts to improve the protection of sex workers' rights.

44. The Committee would be grateful to receive additional details on the trafficking of women in the State party. She enquired about the steps that the Government was taking to discourage demand for commercial sex services and to combat forced labour, slavery and practices similar to slavery, and servitude. She requested an explanation for the large gap between the number of traffickers arrested by the police and the actual number convicted and asked how the Government planned to remedy that situation.

45. **Ms. Šimonović** requested clarification of the percentages of women and men making up the population. The Committee had received reports indicating that there were significantly more men than women and would appreciate an explanation of the disparity. If it could be due to a preference for sons rather than daughters, she asked what measures the Government was taking to address that issue.

46. She requested additional details on the interactive provisions between criminal and civil law and the permanent and temporary protection orders which had been introduced under the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act. It would be useful to learn how many people had been prosecuted for the crime of acid-throwing.

47. She asked whether the State party planned to ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In that regard, she asked about the plight of Rohingya women who were living in refugee camps, many of whom were elderly and were unable to register for refugee status.

48. **Ms. Chaudhury** (Bangladesh) said that the Government took a zero-tolerance approach to violence against women. Much work remained to be done to establish a credible database on that phenomenon. Current statistics came from the media, the police force and hospitals. It was likely that many more cases were being reported than before, partly owing to the freedom of the press and the digitization of the media, but mostly because women themselves were more aware of their right to be free from violence. Shelters were available to women who had suffered violence in many areas of the country. While the courts had ruled that women should be placed in safe custody in the past, to the best of her knowledge, there were currently no women in such custody. Perpetrators of violence against women were dealt with by the criminal justice system. There were no psychological intervention programmes for them, as the priority in resource allocation was placed on support for victims. There were, however, campaigns involving, not just women, but also men, in efforts to combat violence. Community leaders and imams participated in those initiatives as well.

49. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act had been a major achievement, particularly as it recognized wife-beating as a serious crime, whereas, previously, it had commonly been regarded as acceptable practice. The Government was drawing up the implementation strategy for the Act in consultation with relevant NGOs. The strategy would include training for law enforcement officers who would provide initial assistance to victims of domestic violence. The Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs also had female officers at the district and subdistrict levels who played a key role in helping women victims to seek shelter and report their cases to the police. Gender-based community policing had also been introduced as a pilot scheme in two districts with a view to helping victims of domestic violence to report those crimes to the police. Victim support centres had been set up in police stations. Victims could also receive psychosocial assistance at trauma counselling centres.

50. Case law based on the Supreme Court guidelines for action in cases of sexual harassment would eventually be enacted into statutory law. The Acid Control Act had been effective in reducing the number of acid-related crimes. The incidence of fatwa-related violence had also decreased. A clear message had been sent that such violence was illegal, and the Government had been working to disseminate that information at grass-roots level. Girls and women had become much more aware and willing to report incidents of sexual harassment in educational institutions, in the workplace and in Government bodies. The Government had noted the increase in the number of reported cases and was in the process of drafting legislation to prohibit sexual harassment.

51. In order to be effective, efforts to combat violence against women must be based on a comprehensive approach, with cooperation among the Government, NGOs and the general public. It took time to change attitudes and break down stereotypes, and school curricula were a good starting point for such efforts. The media were also widely used to broadcast public service announcements discouraging, inter alia, child marriage and sexual harassment. The country's prestigious experts in women's rights worked with the Government to develop policy, strategies and programmes.

52. In July 2002, the Government had signed the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution and had ratified it recently. Human trafficking was a punishable offence under several domestic laws, and perpetrators were subject to harsh penalties, including capital punishment. The Government was currently drafting a new law

on human trafficking which specifically addressed trafficking in women and children. A multidimensional and inter-ministerial strategy was being used which included a monitoring unit at police headquarters; screening of persons at airports and land posts; rescue, recovery and rehabilitation of victims; and the training of law enforcement officials to deal with trans-border crime. In addition, the Government had entered into bilateral negotiations with India, and a task force composed of officials from both countries had recently been set up to combat human trafficking.

53. Bangladesh was party to the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and was integrating its provisions into a domestic law that was currently at the drafting stage. The Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs and the International Organization for Migration were working to rehabilitate trafficked women and to provide them with employment in special cafeterias called *Kafé Mukti*, which meant "liberated". The Government was considering expanding the programme, perhaps through public-private partnerships.

54. In reply to the question about the situation of commercial sex workers, she said that the Constitution discouraged prostitution, and women involved in prostitution as a result of poverty or other socio-economic factors should be offered an alternative means of support. Bangladesh's legal system afforded equal protection to all, and if those women encountered any form of discrimination or were harassed by the police, they had a right to the protection of the law.

55. In response to a question about permanent and temporary protection orders, she noted that, in the past, a female victim of domestic violence would have had to leave her home, with no access to shelter or support. Under the new legislation, the courts could grant a woman a temporary injunction against her assailant, which would enable her to remain in her home, with special provisions in place to punish perpetrators who violated the injunction. Women also had access to shelters.

56. The number of acid-related crimes had fallen, thanks to the work of a special national task force and legislation that regulated the possession, transport and use of acid. Acid-throwing was a criminal offence in itself and the regulatory system was very strong.

57. **Ms. Tasneem** (Bangladesh) said that, according to the Bangladesh Economic Review of 2009, there were 100 women to every 105 men in the population. Although certain gender stereotypes did persist and some persons still had a preference for male offspring, those statistics simply reflected a natural demographic phenomenon, as Bangladesh did not have the medical resources to enable poor people to select the gender of their child.

58. Responding to a query concerning Rohingya women in Bangladesh, she noted that her Government preferred the term "Myanmar refugees", since they were nationals of that country. Over the years, large numbers of such persons had come to Bangladesh, which was a tolerant and sympathetic country. After hosting the refugees for over a decade and following consultations with the Government of Myanmar, the repatriation of refugees had begun, in line with the principle of non-refoulement. Although Bangladesh was not party to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, it respected international law. Repatriation was voluntary, and returning refugees had to give their full consent to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Adequate support was being provided to women in refugee camps, including food and other aid for every newborn child, and there were at least six United Nations agencies working in the camps. Irregular migrants from Myanmar, living outside the camps and without refugee status, had access to employment and services, as the Bangladesh authorities were sensitive to their lack of economic opportunities. Rather than arresting irregular migrants, the authorities encouraged Bangladesh's development partners to invest in Myanmar. Attempts were being made, at a political level, to find a solution to the refugee problem and to enter into a dialogue with the Government of Myanmar.

59. **Mr. Hannan**, replying to a request for information about training programmes for imams, said that those programmes focused on issues such as dowries, literacy, universal access to education and family planning. Bangladesh was one of the few countries which had successfully implemented family planning campaigns by bringing NGOs and even traditional opponents of such measures on board as part of a broad and inclusive consultative process.

60. **Ms. Zou Xiaojiao** welcomed steps, such as the establishment of one-stop crisis centres and shelters, to provide legal services and support the rehabilitation of victims of violence. However, given the size of Bangladesh, six crisis centres or shelters were insufficient. She asked whether there were plans, at grass-roots level, to set up more shelters.

61. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega** said that, while she welcomed Bangladesh's achievements to date, she wished to know whether it was true that perpetrators of acid-related crimes, which permanently disfigured victims, could be granted bail.

62. **Ms. Rasekh** said that she welcomed the involvement of imams and religious leaders in various areas, including family planning, as that approach had proved very effective in other countries, such as Afghanistan. In highly traditional societies, the only way of changing women's situation was to involve men in promoting family planning and combating certain practices that stereotyped women. She enquired as to the current status of the training programmes for imams, whether they had been implemented throughout Bangladesh and whether the Government planned to use them as part of a national campaign to change attitudes towards women.

63. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, requested additional information on new laws on sexual harassment. When implementing new legislation, the Government should take positive, preventive measures into account as well as punitive sanctions. She also asked whether there were special courts responsible for enforcing the Domestic Violence Act, as there was a risk that judges who had not received the relevant training would be unable to properly enforce the legislation.

64. **Ms. Chaudhury** (Bangladesh) said that there were one-stop crisis centres in seven divisions of the country, each of which contained several districts. As the programme had been a success, it was being expanded and would be implemented in all districts. Although current funding levels permitted implementation only at district level, the programme might be expanded to include subdistricts in the future.

65. Other support mechanisms were also available, such as special police units for the prevention of violence against women, including units at subdistrict level headed by female officers. Perpetrators of acid-related crimes were granted bail only at the judge's discretion. She agreed with the Chairperson that new legislation on sexual harassment should provide for both positive, preventive measures and punitive sanctions. Although there were no special courts to handle cases involving violence against women, Bangladesh had implemented programmes to raise judges' awareness of gender-related issues, especially domestic violence, and a Government fund provided medical support to victims of acid burns.

66. **Mr. Hannan** (Bangladesh), in reply to Ms. Rasekh's query, said that imams from all over the country were offered training which was broad in scope and formed part of an ongoing scheme.

67. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega** said that the Convention stressed the importance of women's participation in political life. According to the periodic report, only 5 of the 49 ministries in Bangladesh were headed by women. She wished to know whether ministers were able to review and report on any new legislation, in more than a merely consultative capacity, before it was submitted to Parliament. Since, although a number of seats in Parliament were reserved for women, female candidates faced a variety of obstacles, she

wished to know what policies existed to promote women's involvement in politics and create a positive image of women in public life. She also wished to know whether Bangladesh had achieved its target of electing female candidates to one third of all seats in municipal elections. Was the Government planning to introduce quotas to promote women's involvement in politics? On another front, given the fact that women were Bangladesh's primary economic asset, particularly in the agricultural sector, she would like to know what steps the Government was taking to support women's role in the economy.

68. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** said that the provisions contained in article 28 of the Constitution, which guaranteed equality and banned discrimination on the basis of gender, reflected the progress that the country had made. However, much remained to be done. Although Bangladesh did have female representatives in Parliament and at international level, including in the Committee, very few women played a role in local politics or the judiciary, and more could be done to promote women's participation in the international political and diplomatic arena. She requested data on female judges in the Supreme Court and encouraged the Government to expedite the withdrawal of the remaining reservations to the Convention.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.