



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
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Summary record of the 852nd meeting

Held at Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 21 October 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Simms (Vice-Chairperson)

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*In the absence of Ms. Šimonović (Chairperson),
Ms. Simms (Vice-Chairperson) took the Chair.*

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

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

*Combined fifth and sixth periodic report of
Belgium (CEDAW/C/BEL/6; CEDAW/C/BEL/Q/6
and Add.1)*

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

2. **Ms. Fastre** (Belgium) said that the Belgian Constitution provided explicit guarantees of equality between men and women. It urged lawmakers to adopt specific measures to ensure the full enjoyment of rights and freedoms, including equal participation of men and women in the political life of the country.

3. During the reporting period, institutional mechanisms for the prevention of discrimination based on sex and the promotion of gender equality had been substantially strengthened, including through establishment of the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men. The Institute, which had an annual budget of 4.5 million euros and a staff of 30, provided legal protection to victims of discrimination, developed tools and strategies for gender mainstreaming into federal policies, conducted research, provided funding to organizations working in the field of gender equality and drafted and implemented the Government's decisions on gender equality at the national and international levels. It had also prepared the report that the Committee had before it. Three new federal laws on anti-discrimination had been adopted in May 2007 and the Communities and Regions had also improved their legislative measures to curb discrimination against women.

4. She highlighted the range of complaint mechanisms available through the courts, in which the convention could be invoked directly; the Institute; and various public bodies in all Regions. A decree establishing complaint bureaux throughout the Flemish Region had been adopted in July 2008. Since its ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, in 2004, Belgians had had direct recourse to the Committee. Priority had been placed on comprehensive reform of discriminatory legislation and on the

development of tools for the structural, systematic and sustainable integration of gender issues into the decision-making and operational aspects of all policies. The imposition of quotas and the adoption of voluntary policies had increased the number of women in elected office and decision-making posts.

5. In order to reinforce the application of article 3 of the Convention and in response to the Committee's recommendations, a law providing family housing for victims of domestic violence had been adopted as a complement to the Penal Code, and the National Action Plan against conjugal violence (PAN) for the period 2004-2007 had been implemented. In addition to the overall strategic objectives of the Action Plan, compensatory measures had been incorporated as a crucial element of assistance to victims of violence. A simplified procedure for the consideration of asylum requests provided for specific treatment of cases involving sexual violence, gender-based persecution and violence against children. A new action plan, currently in preparation, would also address forced marriage, honour crimes and female genital mutilation, as well as violence against older persons.

6. New legislation and substantive reform of existing laws had strengthened the implementation of articles 6, 11, 15 and 16, including with regard to the criminalization and punishment of human trafficking and protection of the victims; the elimination of sexual harassment, gender-based disparities and discrimination in the labour market; the provision of social coverage for self-employed workers; and the introduction of pension benefits for homemakers. Initiatives affecting marriage, adoption and family life were introduced, the divorce procedure streamlined, and family maintenance benefits improved.

7. An active campaign against traditional gender stereotypes in education had been conducted in the three Communities through a focus on textbook content and incorporation of the gender dimension into teacher training programmes. The issue of sexism in the media had been the subject of studies, surveys and literature targeting young people and teachers.

8. While measures had been taken to combat psychological and sexual harassment in the workplace and to introduce parental leave, including for adoptions, the "glass ceiling" persisted. There was a 15 per cent wage gap in the private sector and most part-time jobs were held by women. Since January,

2005, spouses who assisted their self-employed partners were entitled to social benefits as self-employed persons in their own right. Steps had also been taken to ensure that working women's pensions did not suffer from the years that they took off for child-rearing.

9. The National Action Plan for Inclusion, which covered the social integration of women and children for the period 2008-2010, as envisaged under article 13, provided social housing and allowances while expanding the supply of childcare facilities, encouraging training opportunities for women and strengthening parental support.

10. The Government had done its utmost to improve women's access to health-care services and promote respect for their reproductive rights. Since 2002, breast cancer screening and cervical cancer vaccines had been offered free of cost to women in the high-risk age groups, and the costs of fertility treatments and in vitro fertilization had been covered since 2003.

11. Divorce, alimony and child support procedures had been reformed. The contracting of "sham marriages" in order to obtain residency status had been criminalized, while marriage and adoption by same-sex couples had been legalized.

12. Belgium had made strides in promoting respect for women's rights, but discrimination persisted in certain crucial areas. Civil society had drawn attention to the issues of poverty, women's health, gender-related violence and the position of women in the economy and in decision-making. Although the Convention had been incorporated into domestic law in 1983 and 1985, it was not usually invoked in the courts. The Government planned to publicize the Convention in order to raise awareness of its provisions and protective mechanisms and to improve monitoring of its implementation.

13. Her Government's coordination of policies affecting various departments and levels of power, such as gender equality, took place within regular inter-ministerial conferences. The outcome of the Committee's deliberations would be conveyed at the next such conference and feedback would be provided to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A summary would also be transmitted to the specialized parliamentary commissions.

14. **Ms. Šimonović** (Chairperson), speaking as a member of the Committee, asked whether the Government had followed up on the Committee's recommendation, in its concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Belgium (A/57/38, paras. 141-142), concerning the importance of the Convention as a binding human rights instrument, and as a basis for the elimination of discrimination and the advancement of women. She asked whether the Convention had acquired greater visibility at all levels of administration, including within the Communities and Regions, and whether the judiciary received special training in its implementation. It was worrying that although the Convention had been incorporated into domestic law and could be invoked in the courts, it was not actually used by lawyers or women to support claims of violation of rights protected therein. She asked the delegation to comment on the status of the Convention in terms of its self-executing provisions and to explain how the Government planned to apply it as a binding instrument in the courts.

15. **Mr. Flinterman** noted that little information had been submitted to the Committee by Belgian NGOs. He wondered whether, apart from women's organizations, general human rights NGOs had also been consulted during preparation of the periodic report. Furthermore, data pertaining to the Communities and Regions were either scant or uneven and it appeared that little effort had been made to ensure that an adequate overview of the situation in Belgium was presented.

16. It was puzzling that the report stated explicitly that the Region of Brussels had ratified the Optional Protocol, without mention of the Flemish Region or Wallonia. He asked the delegation to clarify whether the Optional Protocol applied to all Regions, whether its ratification implied recognition that all provisions of the Convention were self-executing and, if so, whether the judiciary shared that view. He was also curious to know whether the definition of discrimination under the Convention, was reflected in Belgian legislation on gender discrimination and equality.

17. Further information on the scope of work of the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, its competence with respect to the Communities and Regions and the role of the Convention in policies and activities carried out by the Institute would also be welcome.

18. He took it that federal rather than regional, policies were applicable to decisions on asylum and invited the delegation to comment on reports that the outcome of requests for asylum depended on the Community to which application was made. He requested an explanation of the use of male interpreters when female asylum-seekers were interviewed since women might be less forthcoming in discussing their plight in the presence of men. It would also be useful to know whether the new system for handling persons who were denied asylum protected their rights in a sufficiently fair and effective manner.

19. **Ms. Shin**, in an attempt to clarify the role of the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men as distinct from that of the Centre for Equal Opportunity and the Struggle against Racism, asked which of those bodies was considered the appropriate channel through which migrant women could seek redress. She was curious to know whether victims had the freedom to choose between them and to what extent the two institutions coordinated their activities or divided their responsibilities.

20. From the information presented by the Government, the Committee had been informed that a remarkable number of complaints of discrimination had been lodged by men; she would be interested to know the nature of those complaints. In that context, she wondered what message on gender equality the Institute sought to convey to society.

21. The Committee had urged the Government to ensure uniform results in the implementation of the Convention through “effective coordination of efforts at all levels in all areas” throughout the territory. She asked how the federal Government could ensure that its policy on gender equality was implemented in the Communities and Regions, and whether there were incentives for compliance or sanctions for non-compliance.

22. **Ms. Fastre** (Belgium) said that the language of the Convention was reflected in a number of domestic laws and that reference to its provisions could be made before the courts if the presiding judges considered that those provisions were sufficiently clear and precise to have a direct effect in specific cases. The Convention was not sufficiently invoked in Belgian courts because complainants tended to rely more on provisions of Belgian or European law.

23. She agreed that greater emphasis should be placed on the Convention when training key actors in the effort to combat discrimination, such as magistrates. Nevertheless, the series of seminars organized by the Centre for Equal Opportunity, the Institute and the Federal Department of Employment, described on page 6 of the replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/BEL/Q/6/Add.1), had played an important role in raising awareness of legislation and other available mechanisms for effective implementation of the Convention.

24. Regarding the reporting process, she recalled the specific features of the federal structure and the distribution of authority and responsibilities at the federal, Community and Regional levels. Equality between women and men was a fundamental right and a cross-cutting issue to be implemented by all entities, which, in turn, could adopt legislative measures within their areas of exclusive competence in order to guarantee respect for the principle of non-discrimination and to protect the rights of women. The reporting process was spearheaded by the Federal Public Service for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, in concert with the cabinets and departments of the Communities and Regions. NGOs had been invited to contribute to preparation of the report and to voice their opinions on the reporting process, but surprisingly few had taken the opportunity to participate in those consultations.

25. The definition of discrimination included not only direct discrimination based on gender, but also sexual harassment, and was found in all legislation enacted by the federal parliament and federated entities.

26. A protocol had been prepared in order to formalize coordination between the Centre for Equal Opportunity and the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men at the federal level. It was important to focus specifically on gender-based discrimination and gender equality. A decision had therefore been taken to establish a separate body, with its own budget — the Institute — devoted entirely to the promotion of equality between men and women and to countering gender-based discrimination. If a woman was the victim of discrimination based on several factors, an informal process of information exchange between the Centre and the Institute was launched so that each body might assist the victim within its area of expertise.

27. With regard to the nature of discrimination complaints raised by men, she stressed that every effort was made to secure equality between women and men in federal policy and legislation on employment, social security, goods and services, and access to cultural, economic and social activities. Men had problems in areas such as childcare, but they lodged fewer claims than women for unequal remuneration or sexual harassment in the workplace.

28. In order to ensure the implementation of federal gender policy at the level of the Communities and Regions, the competent ministers held regular meetings at which they collectively took decisions and formulated plans for concerted action. The process was further enhanced by the distribution of tasks and activities among the federal, community and regional components. As stated in the preliminary comment to the combined periodic report, policy was implemented in all areas of action as a function of the powers held by the different levels of authority in Belgium.

29. **Ms. Adriaenssens** (Belgium) emphasized that the Communities and Regions were not subordinate to the federal Government, but that each component had the same level of authority as the others within its specific area of responsibility. The Institute did not have competence concerning discrimination in the Regions. Legislation was being developed in order to enable men and women to bring complaints of gender-based and other forms of discrimination before the courts in the Flemish Community, and a cooperation agreement between the Institute and the Centre for Equal Opportunity in the French Community was being prepared.

30. **Ms. Franken** (Belgium) said that the Flemish Government combined all the competences of the Community and Region into one authority and had taken the comments made by the Committee in 2002 into consideration in the elaboration of a framework decree on equal opportunity and equal treatment that had been adopted in July 2008. Article 3 of that decree referred explicitly to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Moreover, articles 15 to 19 of the decree dealt with the definition of four types of discrimination, including gender-based discrimination.

31. NGOs had, in fact, been involved in preparation of the reports. After the combined third and fourth report of Belgium (CEDAW/C/BEL/3-4) had been considered by the Committee in 2002, meetings had been convened with the Flemish Women's Council and other relevant bodies in order to brief them on the dialogue with the Committee and its recommendations. The same pattern was expected to be followed after the current meeting and her Government would endeavour to ensure even wider distribution of the outcome.

32. The Flemish Government had ratified the Optional Protocol in March 2004, prior to its ratification at the federal level in June of that year.

33. **Ms. Hautot** (Belgium) explained that the Supreme Council of Justice was responsible for the training of judges and that gender issues formed part of the basic curriculum. Annual training programmes on combating discrimination and on various aspects of equality were also offered.

34. **Mr. Gazan** (Belgium) said that the Government was currently discussing the improvement of course content on domestic violence in the training of magistrates and that the provisions of the Convention would be central to those discussions.

35. **Ms. Fastre** (Belgium) said that while every effort was made to engage interpreters of the same sex as the applicant during interviews with female asylum-seekers, that was not always possible. If the language spoken by the applicant was rare in Belgium, the roster of interpreters speaking that language might be limited; in such cases, it was usually considered more prudent to expedite asylum requests rather than delay the interview while searching for an interpreter of a specific gender.

36. **Ms. De Ruyck** (Belgium) explained that requests for asylum were always submitted initially to the Immigration Department, which transmitted them to the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons. The Commissioner General examined asylum requests and determined whether they should be granted. She gave further details on the procedure and the options available to applicants who were initially denied asylum status, including the various levels of appeal. Under a law adopted in 2007, once requests for asylum were submitted to the authorities, applicants were entitled to material support until a final decision was handed down.

37. **Mr. Flinterman**, turning to the use of temporary special measures, in the context of the Committee's General Recommendation No. 5, asked whether there was a constitutional or general legislative basis for the adoption of such measures at the federal, community and regional levels. He asked whether the 1990 royal decree on measures for promoting gender equality in the public service was regularly evaluated and whether it was still relevant to the civil services of the Communities and Regions after the profound constitutional transformation of the Kingdom since that date. He asked the delegation to clarify the significance of that decree as a component of the "diversity" project that was planned to be implemented within the federal public function, as mentioned in the report.

38. He was somewhat surprised that the Action Plan 2005-2007 to Value Diversity was presented under article 4; he wondered whether the Plan was binding and what objectives had been established for the federal Government and its component parts.

39. The report mentioned a scheme to encourage use of paternity leave and a Charter for Change, to be signed by men who were committed to equality between men and women. He wondered whether the scheme and the Charter were expected to function as temporary special measures or on a permanent basis.

40. **Ms. Coker-Appiah**, referring to the Government's reply to question 13 on the list of issues (CEDAW/C/BEL/Q/6/Add.1), asked how effective the volunteer "social interpreters" in the Centres for General Welfare Work were and whether the Government intended to recruit any of them full-time, particularly for the dominant minority groups.

41. Banning the wearing of Islamic veils and headscarves could be interpreted as a form of legitimized racism and intolerance. The ban had been opposed in some regions and there were reports of negative consequences for the rights of women who wore a veil or headscarf, especially with regard to education and employment. She asked whether the Government had sought to establish a better understanding of the issue through engagement with the Islamic community prior to the imposition of the ban. She was also interested in knowing whether an assessment of the impact of the ban on women's rights had been conducted and whether the link between economic dependence and violence against women had been examined.

42. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** acknowledged that much effort had been deployed in the struggle against sexist stereotypes in a wide range of areas. However, sexist views were among the root causes of discrimination and violence against women and deserved specific treatment. Recent research had shown that young peoples' perceptions of the roles of men and women had not changed significantly. She asked whether the recommendations made by the authors of the various studies had been implemented and, if so, what results had been obtained. In the same vein, she requested information on the findings and recommendations of the study on the definition of "sexism" conducted by the University of Antwerp, what action had been taken thus far and what plans were being made to raise awareness and to address the issues of gender stereotypes and sexism in a comprehensive and coordinated way in the media, schools and advertising.

43. **Ms. Chutikul** welcomed the 2005 amendment of provisions that had brought Belgian legislation into line with the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons.

44. With regard to the interdepartmental unit and the special prosecutors mentioned on page 57 of the report, she requested further information on their role, functions and achievements in the campaign against trafficking. She also wondered how much of an effect the prosecutors could have on the policies implemented in the Communities and Regions.

45. She asked the delegation to provide statistics on domestic and cross-border trafficking and smuggling cases, the extent to which minors were exploited, and cases of repatriation linked to trafficking. In 2002, the Committee had recommended that Belgium should seek to establish bilateral cooperation with the Governments of the countries from which victims originated, while aiming to address the root causes of trafficking. She wondered what progress had been made in implementing those recommendations.

46. She asked whether there was data on the number of Belgians responsible for trafficking or sexual crimes against children, particularly abroad, whether there were laws governing those situations and, if so, how they were enforced. Bringing perpetrators of those crimes to justice was as important as providing protection for the victims. In that connection, she noted that the statistics on sentencing had not been updated and asked why trafficking sentences were sometimes

suspended and why the number of suspended sentences had risen.

47. **Ms. Fastre** (Belgium) said that laws adopted at the federal level and decrees adopted by the federated entities formed the legal basis for the application of temporary special measures. Under the 1990 royal decree, diversity units within government departments had been set up as temporary special measures. The Action Plan 2005-2007 to Value Diversity was aimed at promoting equality and non-discrimination, paving the way for women to attain high administrative posts and increasing the number of disabled and foreign women in managerial positions. A 2007 anti-discrimination law also contained a provision that encouraged the adoption of temporary special measures in the public and private sectors, but the scope of measures taken under that law was still to be determined. Until further notice, the royal decree of 1990 would continue to apply to the use of temporary special measures.

48. The Charter for Change was based on the notion that in order to secure men's commitment to the advancement of women, they must be encouraged to share responsibility for domestic tasks and must be sensitized to problems relating to domestic violence. In the same vein, the acceptance of paternal leave by men and their work colleagues would promote balance in family relations and help erase de facto discrimination.

49. Migrant women who felt unfairly treated because of the ban on veils, headscarves or other forms of religious apparel could lodge complaints of discrimination based on religious grounds with either the Institute for the Equality of Men and Women or the Centre for Equal Opportunity. In the interest of fostering mutual understanding, the Institute had organized a women's debate that had attracted broad participation, including by representatives of religious denominations, civil society and academia. Nevertheless, the constitutional principle of neutrality empowered administrations, for instance in the education sector, to ban veils in certain situations. The Belgian courts had considered the issue on several occasions, taking into account European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence and the principle of neutrality, which set limits on the wearing of veils. She assured the Committee of the Government's genuine commitment to reconciling the constitutional principles of Belgium with the individual religious views of women.

50. On the issue of sexist stereotypes in the media and advertising, the reply to question 6 on the list of issues described a major breakthrough. The Brussels Industrial Court had concluded that the release of a particular advertisement constituted an act of discrimination based on sex under the Law of 25 February 2003 and had ruled that it should be discontinued. Several types of studies, including popular surveys, were being conducted by the Institute in an attempt to identify a comprehensive legal response to sexist stereotyping.

51. **Mr. Gazan** (Belgium) said that the interdepartmental unit on human trafficking, mentioned by Ms. Chutikul, had been reorganized; its work was currently conducted by a team of officials dealing with various aspects of trafficking, including high-level decision makers and representatives of the police and the judiciary. The unit had been involved in a number of legislative amendments affecting the implementation of policies on trafficking. The Communities and Regions were not represented in the unit since it was a federal body, but they voluntarily provided input for the Government's biennial report on the issue.

52. Concerning the work of the special prosecutors, he said that specialized networks on trafficking within the judiciary had been developing, implementing and evaluating directives. The Communities and Regions were not directly involved with the work of the special prosecutors, which fell under federal jurisdiction, except in subsidizing centres for victims.

53. He acknowledged that the data on sentencing might appear somewhat ambiguous, partly due to the timing of compilation of the statistics and the adoption of new legislation in 2005. Some data recorded at a later stage actually referred to sentences handed down under the previous law, while other data was simply unavailable. As a small country, Belgium had not been able to compile statistics on sentencing or on the commission of sexual crimes by Belgians with the level of detail requested, but he assured the Committee that an effort would be made to supplement the data available thus far.

54. **Ms. Franken** (Belgium) said that a new decree provided for the adoption of temporary and positive action, when necessary, provided that those measures could be justified objectively by a legitimate purpose and that the means for achieving that goal were adequate.

55. With respect to complaints against the ban on veils, she explained that since schools in Flanders were autonomous, each school could establish its own regulations on such issues. In addition, the concept of neutrality implied that teachers must be neutral towards all pupils, irrespective of their dress. The system of focal points for processing complaints in 13 cities supported efforts to resolve disputes at the local level; if that was not possible, complaints could be referred to the federal level, which held the ultimate responsibility for justice.

56. Promotion of the principle of equal opportunity required constant effort since societies were always evolving. Raising awareness was therefore a recurring theme for the Flemish administration in its formulation of tools and policies to bridge the gaps between *de jure* and *de facto* equality.

57. Since 2006, follow-up to all gender mainstreaming action by the Flemish authorities had fallen within the framework of the open coordination method, which involved a process of annual goal-setting and evaluation.

58. The assessment of sensitization policies, which had shown no significant change in perceptions of sexual stereotypes over a ten-year period, clearly indicated that continued effort was required. However, large shifts had been detected among specific sectors of the population and, based on those findings, the Government had determined that it could divert its focus to other groups.

59. **Ms. Adriaenssens** (Belgium) said that schools in the French Community were also autonomous with their own internal regulatory code concerning issues such as the wearing of veils, headscarves or other religious manifestations. Before imposing the ban, the administration of the French Community had held consultations with several associations of Muslim women, some of which were not in favour of young women wearing veils in schools since, within their own group of practising Muslims, it was felt that women who preferred not to be veiled might be exposed to ridicule and discrimination by others.

60. The Committee's recommendations on sexual stereotypes and sexist portrayals of women in the media and advertising were at various stages of implementation. An extensive range of activities and projects had been undertaken in all branches of mass communication, journalism, film and advertising with the support of artists, the Supreme Council governing

media affairs, and civil society. Much interest had been generated from discussions on the potential role of professional women in the media. Textbooks, other forms of literature and broadcast programming that promoted positive perceptions of female identity and non-violence had been produced for younger audiences in order to help them develop a critical awareness towards media and advertising content.

61. In terms of the empowerment of men, the third international congress on the theme "Paroles des hommes" ("Men's words"), had been held in Brussels in October 2008 with the full support of the Government of the French Community.

62. **Mr. Peeters** (Belgium) said that the French Community provided social support for migrant women. The administration, in association with the regional integration centre, funded a network of "social interpreters" from which migrant women could select a female interpreter if they wished. The Walloon Region conducted campaigns on many themes, including the elimination of sexual stereotypes.

63. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said she was surprised that sexual stereotypes could still be found in textbooks, particularly in countries of the European Union. She asked whether all levels of teacher training included compulsory courses on the extent to which teachers' subconscious attitudes affected their students; even if all stereotypical images were removed from textbooks, there would be no progress unless teachers were aware of their potential to influence their students' perception of gender roles.

64. She enquired about the role of the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men with regard to gender mainstreaming and the effectiveness of its monitoring of the application of gender mainstreaming policies by the federal authorities. She asked whether there was a method for confirming whether gender impact analyses of existing programmes, policies, regulations or laws had been conducted and whether those mechanisms were evaluated periodically.

65. **Ms. Gaspard** (Vice-Chairperson), commenting on the delegation's statement that the Convention was rarely cited in Belgian courts because complainants preferred to invoke European law, said that the provisions of the European directives incorporated into the domestic law of European Union member States dealt only with discrimination in the sphere of employment; several articles of the Convention

provided a much broader scope. She was keen to hear what level of follow-up had been given to the recommendations made by the Committee in 2002 and believed that many general human rights NGOs were not fully aware of the Convention.

66. **Ms. Neubauer** said that the information provided in the report, and the replies to the Committee's questions, concerning the relationship between general policies and measures and temporary special measures were not clear. She wondered whether policymakers in the area of gender equality understood the meaning and scope of temporary special measures and encouraged the Belgian Government and authorities at all levels to use the General Recommendation No. 25 as a framework for developing temporary special measures.

67. She was surprised by the minimal quotas for women established in various decrees and actions designed to promote the representation of women in managerial and decision-making positions in public service. She wondered whether the Government was concerned that such low requirements might be incompatible with the principle of gender equality and whether it planned to raise the level of expectation by increasing the minimum quotas.

68. **Ms. Gabr** (Vice-Chairperson) said that the replies to the Committee's queries on Islamic headscarves and veils were neither clear nor convincing; the State's responsibility towards young migrant women and their integration into society was the real issue. The executive and legislative branches of the State, and not necessarily individual administrations, needed to take decisive action and implement clear policies in that regard. She quite understood the need for schools to exercise autonomy and for teachers to be neutral, but the position on the wearing of headscarves in other contexts was not clear. The issue of veils also related to the perception of stereotypes. She believed that continued vagueness incurred the risk of causing veiled women to be branded as misfits in society. Firm policies that went beyond consultations, studies and seminars were crucial.

69. **Mr. Flinterman** asked whether the Government intended to establish a national institute of human rights. The Committee welcomed the active participation of NGOs in the preparation of periodic reports and hoped that they would be inspired to produce their own reports on the situation in States parties.

70. It was surprising that sexual violence was still regarded as a crime against morality rather than a violent crime. The Government's power to combat violence against women was divided among the federal, community, and regional Governments, each dealing with a different aspect of the problem. He wondered how that division of power affected the practical implementation and coordination of policies and programmes.

71. **Ms. Dairiam** (Rapporteur) said that increasing resort to part-time work had clearly contributed to the wage gap between men and women; she considered the phenomenon to be a form of sexual stereotyping. In the period since its signing of the Convention, in 1980, Belgium should have achieved better results in gender equality. The Government should adopt a holistic approach; she wondered how its strategy was coordinated among departments and ministries at the various levels. Part-time work, which had originally served as a useful means by which women could balance family and work responsibilities, had become increasingly prevalent and further marginalized women, especially in European countries.

72. **Ms. Šimonović** (Chairperson) said that it was very important to focus on implementation of the Convention in light of ratification of the Optional Protocol. Greater attention should be paid to making the legal community aware of the possibility of lodging complaints under the Optional Protocol. The judiciary could also benefit from case studies that were relevant to the implementation of specific articles of the Convention. It was crucial to investigate methods of raising the visibility of the Convention and accepting it as a legally binding instrument. The Committee had recently conducted a visit to Luxembourg, where it had been able to monitor the implementation of its concluding comments and recommendations and to meet with members of the judiciary and the bar association and with members of parliament. Such a mission might also be useful in the case of Belgium.

73. **Ms. Fastre** (Belgium) said that the Government, fully aware of the difficulty of implementing gender mainstreaming effectively and equipping national bodies to that end, had adopted the Law of 12 January 2007 on integrating the dimension of gender within the totality of federal policies. Pages 5 and 12 of the report presented details on the provisions and aims of that Law, which constituted an ambitious attempt to create a gender mainstreaming "reflex" on the part of

planners, legislators and implementers. The Law sought to help government agencies identify clear, targeted goals on gender equality and imposed on all administrations an obligation to collect sex-disaggregated statistics in all areas of competence. An even more innovative aspect of the Law was its requirement of an advance impact assessment of all legislative and regulatory measures affecting men and women, followed by mid-term and completion analyses. The Institute for the Equality of Men and Women played a major role in developing the tools for training officials in the structured implementation of the Law.

The meeting rose at 1.10. p.m.