



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

Distr.: General  
28 March 2001

Original: English

---

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

**Summary record of the 477th meeting**

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 20 June 2000, at 3 p.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Gonzalez

**Contents**

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

*Initial report of Cameroon (continued)*

---

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of this document* to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

Any corrections to the record of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.



*The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.*

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

*Initial report of Cameroon (continued)*  
(CEDAW/C/CMR/1)

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

*Article 12*

2. **Ms. Goonesekere**, continuing the questions posed during the previous meeting, noted that the report provided no statistics on the correlation between the country's high maternal mortality rate and illegal abortions. Referring to exceptions to the very strict abortion laws under article 339 of the Criminal Code, she asked whether the "authorized persons" who performed abortions were medical professionals or paraprofessionals and requested a more specific interpretation of "the need to save the mother's life". She would also appreciate more information on abortions allowed in cases of pregnancy resulting from rape, after the State Prosecutor had attested to the materiality of the facts.

*Article 14*

3. **Ms. Ouédraogo** praised the delegation warmly for its inclusion of table 16 on the percentage of farms run by men and women, table 17 on the characteristics of rural housing and table 18 on methods of drinking water supply in rural housing, which provided exactly the type of data necessary to enable the Committee to make recommendations. Noting the reliance on the *marigot* (backwater) for drinking water (table 18), she stressed the need to ensure an adequate supply of drinking water and water for domestic hygiene in the rural areas. She would have appreciated more details on women's access to credit and the State party's plans to assist them. She wondered whether community kitchens would be an informal means of generating savings by women. More information on rural women's health, particularly efforts to reduce the maternal mortality rate, would have been useful. In particular, the State party should give some idea of the proportion of unattended births in the rural areas and any measures to reduce the phenomenon, such as the

programme of the United Nations Population Fund, for providing traditional midwives with modern equipment and training them in modern techniques.

4. **Ms. Corti** expressed her wholehearted support for Ms. Ouédraogo's remarks. She was particularly concerned at the lack of social security coverage in rural areas, the school drop-out rate among rural girls and problems related to access to drinking water and the physical strain endured by women in fetching it. In that connection, she wondered whether Cameroon had considered seeking assistance from non-governmental organizations in European and other developed countries which specialized in ensuring a supply of drinking water to women.

*Article 16*

5. **Ms. Myakayaka-Manzini** expressed concern at the coexistence of written and customary law in Cameroon, particularly since the two systems had almost equal powers in matters of marriage, filiation and succession. Unfortunately, women were often unfamiliar with the laws and did not know which system to invoke. She wondered whether any consideration had been given to harmonizing the two systems with a view to eliminating negative and discriminatory provisions, such as the minutes of the family council which could be used to nullify a widow's right to inherit her husband's property under article 77 of the Civil Code. In general, she would welcome more details on the minutes of the family council, for example, who drafted it, and when, and the extent to which the husband and wife were involved in the process. Lastly, she said that the low minimum marriageable age for girls (15 years) was very likely a factor in parents' decision not to enrol girls in school, and she urged the State party to raise it.

6. **Ms. Goonesekere** stressed the need for set time frames for the reform of the Family Code, adding that constraints on a woman's contractual capacity and right to manage property could easily be removed by introducing amendments in the Civil and Commercial Codes. She hoped the State party would do so.

7. She wondered whether the failure to recognize cohabitation and the concept of illegitimate children derived from the State party's customary law or its written law, which was a product of French colonialism, and asked whether there was any

compulsory system of registration in order to distinguish between marriage and cohabitation.

8. Lastly, she expressed concern at the outmoded and unrealistic provision under article 77 of the Civil Code requiring a widow to wait 180 days after her husband's death before remarrying, noting that it actually reinforced the customary practice of levirate.

9. **Ms. Cartwright** agreed with previous speakers that simple and incremental changes in the family law could be made pending completion of a new Family Code. The Government should ensure that the new Family Code incorporated only those aspects of customary law that were favourable to women. Under the new Family Code, polygamy should be prohibited and subject to strict sanctions.

10. **Ms. Aouij** noted the persistence of laws which discriminated against women and called for concrete action to remedy the situation. She wondered whether the State party could provide statistics on the frequency with which men invoked the right to prevent their wives from holding jobs. Discrimination against women with regard to management of property and choice of the marital home, and the continuing practices of polygamy and female excision must also be eliminated; indeed, many other African countries had achieved significant progress with regard to the latter. The authorities must not have the power to choose whether to apply customary or written law, depending on the circumstances. Every effort must be made to retain and integrate only the most positive aspects of the customary law in redrafting the Family Code. She noted that, although Cameroon had ratified the Convention without reservations in 1994, it had not, as yet, repealed or amended a single discriminatory law. She urged the Government to demonstrate its good will, and suggested that the Ministry of Women's Affairs could start by drawing up a list of laws to be repealed or amended.

11. **Ms. Acar** said that more statistics were needed in respect of matters covered by article 16 of the Convention. Few quantitative data had been provided concerning, for example, the percentage of polygamous marriages. She would also welcome statistics on the prevalence of the two types of dowry; in some countries, the system whereby the bridegroom made a payment to his future bride's family was known as "bride price", and she wondered what was the incidence of that system in Cameroon and whether the

Government had any plans to deal with the negative effects of both kinds of dowry customs.

12. The last paragraph on page 96 of the English version of the report referred to women being "regarded as an inheritable good". More details should be provided regarding that violation of women's human rights, the extent to which it was practised, and whether the Government planned to amend the law in order to deal with such matters.

13. **The Chairperson** recalled that the meeting scheduled for the morning of 26 June 2000 would give the delegation of Cameroon an opportunity to respond to the members' questions and observations.

14. **Ms. Ngo Som** (Cameroon) said that while it was true that the report did not contain much statistical data, it was, after all, only an initial report. Her Government planned to collect gender-disaggregated data in all areas of the country's life, and had already established a triennial plan of action for women; it would thus soon be in a position to provide responses to many of the members' observations.

15. Cameroon was endeavouring to deal with a variety of problems in the area of women's rights and development. One was the issue of human resources — for example, those responsible for implementing health programmes for women often did not have the necessary technical knowledge. Another issue affecting women's socio-economic status concerned financial resources — although Cameroon had considerable natural resources, it lacked the financial means needed to develop those resources. Other major problems included education, water resources, energy, transport and child-care facilities so that mothers could work. It was essential to understand the social, ethnic, cultural and economic diversity of Cameroon in order to successfully bring about sustainable development and promote the advancement of women. Her Government was endeavouring to gather the necessary information, promote awareness among the population and establish dialogues with traditional leaders, without whose cooperation any new measures were unlikely to be successfully implemented.

16. *The delegation of Cameroon withdrew.  
The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.*