



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women  
Fifty-first session**

**Summary record of the 1020th meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 14 February 2012, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Pimentel

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

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

*Sixth periodic report of the Congo (CEDAW/C/COG/6; CEDAW/C/COG/Q/6 and Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Mr. Okio** (Congo), introducing the sixth periodic report of the Congo, said that various constraints, particularly difficulties in collecting data, had delayed its submission. The present report covered the period from 2003 to 2006; the period from 2007 to 2011 was covered by the subsequent report that his Government had submitted in January 2012.
3. The Congo had made many advances but continued to face a number of challenges in implementing the Convention. The first involved institutional mechanisms. The Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Integration of Women in Development, the main body responsible for women's issues, coordinated its efforts with the legislature, other departments and public and partly State-owned companies through gender focal points. It was engaged in dialogue with women's organizations, civil society, religious organizations, political parties and trade unions, and it encouraged their involvement in the drafting of national policies and periodic reports. The Ministry also backed a centre for the promotion of women in politics, free legal advice centres, a network of non-governmental organizations and associations working to end violence against women, functional literacy centres and women's mutual savings and loan microfinance institutions. Gender issues had also been mainstreamed in the work of the parliamentary commissions on health, social affairs and the family. Nevertheless, no public funds for gender-related activities had been allocated to departments other than the Ministry, which hobbled its efforts to advance the status of women, despite its cross-cutting approach. Furthermore, the gender focal points did not hold high-level posts in their respective departments.
4. The national gender policy for 2009–2013 was aimed at promoting gender mainstreaming in development programmes, helping women to increase their productivity and income, improving production support services, increasing access to social services, promoting women's participation in decision-making and combating violence against women. The national policy for modernizing and industrializing the Congo would also afford women ample opportunities to participate in the country's development. Furthermore, a gender perspective had been incorporated into the Government's bilateral and multilateral relations and partnerships.
5. With regard to legal safeguards for women and children, the Congo had become party to several relevant international instruments and had adopted new domestic legislation, including a 2010 law authorizing advocacy of contraception. Until then, the advertisement of contraceptives had been regulated by legislation dating back to 31 July 1920 which had prohibited abortions and the promotion of birth control.
6. With support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Government had launched a campaign to raise awareness about the Convention among male members of parliament, local officials, religious and community leaders, heads of NGOs and company directors in the country's major cities. Campaigns to raise awareness about violence against women had also been conducted in 2009 and 2010 for senior military, gendarmerie and police officers. The Convention and the national gender policy had been translated into the country's two recognized regional languages.

7. Another challenge was to ensure that women were equitably represented in decision-making bodies. Several laws had been adopted for that purpose, particularly the Political Parties Act, which provided that women must be represented in every political, elected and administrative office, and an electoral law, which set a quota for women candidates in legislative and senatorial elections at 15 per cent and local elections at 20 per cent. Moreover, a bill to ensure gender balance in political, elective and administrative office was being considered by the executive for submission to the parliament. Despite those provisions, women remained underrepresented the legislature, with their share of seats declining from 9.6 per cent in 2007 and 2008 to 8.6 per cent in 2011. The share of women in the Cabinet had remained the same since the early 2000s and stood at 13 per cent, or 5 out of 37 members.

8. A further challenge was the elimination of discrimination against women and girls in health and education. Several steps had been taken to promote education, including the introduction of free textbooks and adult literacy programmes and the removal of stereotypes from textbooks. Merit scholarships had been awarded to enable girls to pursue higher education who could not otherwise afford to do so, and boarding schools for girls had been built. Training had also been provided to girls who had dropped out of school. Community-based campaigns were being launched to raise parents' awareness of the importance of keeping their daughters in school. The collection of gender-disaggregated data on education had also been improved.

9. Health measures that had been taken included campaigns to combat malaria, promote safe motherhood, reduce maternal and infant mortality, and promote family planning and sexual and reproductive health. Nevertheless, effecting behavioural change through awareness campaigns and strengthening national measures to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS remained major challenges.

10. The Government supported organizations that worked to combat violence against women, such as the national network of associations to combat gender-based violence known as Renalvisco (Réseau national des associations de lutte contre les violences sexospécifiques au Congo), and had created a body to monitor the incidence of violence against women. It had also adopted legislation to protect indigenous women and children in the Congo against any form of trafficking or sexual exploitation.

11. Legislation had been adopted to promote women's access to land, resources and credit. Domestic law provided that all land belonged to the State but was transferable to private persons, and public authorities continued to recognize the existence of customary landowners. Rural development projects that took into account the concerns of women had been launched in 2006 and 2009 with support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Women had received less than 12 per cent of the public funds allocated to support individual and community farming initiatives in 2009 and less than 9 per cent in 2010 owing to the paucity of feasibility studies submitted by women. Access to the microcredit sector, however, continued to improve, and the Congolese Mutual Savings and Loan (MUCODEC) was very much in demand by informal-sector entrepreneurs, including women. Unfortunately, women's access to microfinance institutions could not be assessed because of the lack of gender-disaggregated data on loan recipients.

12. Demographic and health surveys showed that women in the Congo continued to experience considerable inequality. Although advances had clearly been made in primary education, maternal and child health, and institutional mechanisms, sustained efforts must also be made in several other areas, including employment, gender-related violence and women's representation in decision-making bodies. Reducing inequality was possible, but social and cultural constraints must still be overcome through legal measures, gender mainstreaming at every level, public funds for women's activities, capacity-building for

relevant national stakeholders and partnerships with bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies.

*Articles 1 to 3*

13. **Ms. Popescu** said that the rule of law could not prevail without gender equality. The Committee needed information on how its previous recommendations had been implemented, as none had been provided. Clarification was also needed on the status of the proposed amendments to the Family Code and Criminal Code, legislation on adultery, and tax laws concerning married women. There was a general lack of awareness of the law among Congolese women and men alike, and judges were often not familiar with women's rights. She wished to know more about training for judges and any technical assistance received for that purpose. More information was needed on current measures to stop violence against women and to resolve the issues posed by the sexual violence suffered by women during the war. Noting with concern that the current amnesty law might allow for impunity, she asked what steps had been taken to provide reparations to victims and prosecute perpetrators. She also wished to know whether there were plans to introduce a definition of discrimination into domestic legislation in accordance with article 1 of the Convention.

14. **Ms. Patten** said that she was concerned by the amnesty law adopted by the National Transition Council. Clarification was needed on the scope of the law and specifically on whether it covered rape and sexual violence. She would also appreciate data on the number of cases of sexual violence that had been prosecuted and noted that the environment in the country did not seem conducive to prosecution of such offences. She asked whether the State party had a timetable for the ratification of the Optional Protocol. It would also be useful to have further details on law enforcement efforts to protect refugee women, who were particularly vulnerable to abuse.

15. **Ms. Ameline** said that it was important for legislative reforms, which were described in the report as an important part of the political reconstruction of the country, to be founded upon a global and highly operational strategy that included all sectors of society. In terms of the institutional structure and the Government's efforts to promote equality in employment, it would be of interest to learn what budgetary resources were earmarked for that purpose. While the list of institutions dealing with equality issues was impressive, it appeared that the results were as yet unclear. She requested more information about the role of the parliament and how its legislative initiatives tied in with the country's decentralized institutional structure. Were local institutions fully involved in the process? She asked whether the State party intended to grant the National Human Rights Commission more independence in line with the Paris Principles.

16. **Mr. Okio** (Congo) said that his Government was taking steps to ensure that the National Human Rights Commission could function in conformity with the Paris Principles.

17. **Ms. Adou Ngapi** (Congo) said that the commission established to examine texts containing discriminatory provisions had begun reviewing the Family Code and the Criminal Code in that light. Some topics, such as sexual harassment and incest, that had not been covered in the Criminal Code were now being included. The work had, unfortunately, been held up by financial issues which her Government was seeking to resolve.

18. To overcome the lack of familiarity with the Convention's provisions among judges and the public, a training programme for members of the legal profession had been established with support from the African Development Bank and the Convention had been translated into regional languages to facilitate its dissemination.

19. The Tax Code had been revised to give married women more rights, but the new version still contained some inconsistencies that needed to be addressed. In response to an

earlier question, she was pleased to confirm that her Government did indeed intend to develop a definition of discrimination in accordance with article 1 of the Convention to be used in national legislation.

20. While sexual violence was a taboo issue, there was no impunity for those who had committed such acts during the war. It was sometimes hard for women to identify their attackers, however, since they might, for example, have worn uniforms or obscured their faces. A project supported by the United Nations Development Programme had helped female victims of sexual violence to secure medical and psychological help and support for their socio-economic reintegration.

21. As to the question of institutional processes, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Integration of Women in Development worked closely with other ministries and parliament. Each of the parliament's two chambers had a committee that dealt with gender, health and social issues. Two bills had been proposed: one on propaganda against birth control use, and one on the protection of children which upheld the principle of equality between girls and boys.

22. **Mr. Mbossa** (Congo) said that the amnesty law of 1999 had focused on war crimes; when other crimes — such as rape, whether committed by members of the Armed Forces or civilians — had been identified, they had been prosecuted.

#### *Articles 4 to 6*

23. **Ms. Ameline** said that the most urgent and crucial response to sociocultural barriers to acceptance of the Convention's principles was to harmonize national legislation with the Convention. The State party had made significant efforts in that area, but more were required. Another highly important element was education. Teachers needed to be trained and educational materials revised. Furthermore, it was important to make all of society, including men, in general, and decision makers, in particular, understand that the promotion of women's rights played an essential role in national development. Those sorts of measures were essential in order to combat harmful traditions such as female genital mutilation. Did the State party plan to reinforce the measures in that regard which were described in its report?

24. **Ms. Gabr** said that, in her view, stereotypes and harmful sociocultural attitudes were the main challenge to promoting the role of women in society and in the development process in Africa. The State party should implement an emergency action plan to combat harmful traditions such as abusive widowhood rites and female genital mutilation, and that plan should involve not just the decision makers, but society at large. Was the Ministry for the Advancement of Women ready to establish such a plan and oversee its implementation?

25. Regarding human trafficking, the State party needed to analyse in greater depth such questions as who was being trafficked and how. She asked why the State party had not ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Although the State party's legislation did criminalize trafficking, it was unfortunate that there was no specific law on trafficking. She would be interested to learn whether the Ministry for the Advancement of Women had a unit responsible for monitoring trafficking issues. According to information provided to the Committee, the State party had recently implemented its third anti-trafficking action plan, but that was not mentioned in the report. She would like to invite the State party to provide information on the plan and to provide information, including supporting statistical data, on the issue of trafficking in its next progress report. The State party might wish to consider establishing agreements with African countries that had made progress in combating human trafficking.

26. **Mr. Okio** (Congo) said that his Government had begun updating its legislation to cover issues relating to discrimination against women, and he hoped that, in its next periodic report, his country would be able to show progress in that regard.

27. **Ms. Adou Ngapi** (Congo) said that she agreed that more awareness-raising efforts were needed to overcome stereotypes that prevented women from enjoying their rights. The Ministry for the Advancement of Women was implementing a programme, with support from the United Nations Population Fund, to convince men, especially religious and business leaders, to support the principles of the Convention. In addition, the new action plan for the implementation of the national gender policy included an awareness-raising component targeting opinion leaders.

28. An in-depth study of the problem of female genital mutilation was needed. Though it appeared to be confined to a few areas, her Government did not really know how widespread it was. To complicate matters, some foreigners living in the Congo sent their children abroad to undergo the operation. Her ministry was considering including the issue of female genital mutilation in draft legislation on violence against women that was currently being developed.

29. **Mr. Mbossa** (Congo) said that parliamentary committees were working to revise key legislation, including the Family Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure. The text of a new labour code had been submitted to the Ministry for the Advancement of Women for review. The Ministry's 2012 budget provided for an audit of current laws in order to identify gaps, the goal being to have a consistent and coherent legal framework. It was also necessary to analyse why existing laws were not being implemented.

30. A study on stereotypes in textbooks had shown that teaching materials used in Congolese schools were not geared towards promoting gender equality. The Ministry of Education was working with the teachers' union to revamp them. He agreed that sociocultural factors were another major impediment to eliminating discrimination against women. For example, while there was a law governing inheritance and succession issues, it was not always respected because widows were sometimes pressured into giving up their rights. Despite ongoing awareness-raising efforts, changing attitudes was a slow process. Some 2.1 billion CFA francs had been budgeted for 2012 to tackle issues relating to gender inequality, and his Government hoped to increase that amount.

31. In its next progress report, his Government would provide more detailed information on the issue of trafficking, which fell within the purview of the Ministry of Health, Social Affairs and the Family and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.

32. **Ms. Adou Ngapi** (Congo) said that there was no question of impunity. If a victim reported an assault to the authorities, the perpetrator was brought to justice. In a recent case in Pointe Noire, a girl had reported an assault by a powerful foreign national living in the Congo who had boasted that he was untouchable, yet he had received a fine and had been sentenced to more than 5 years in prison. The perceived shame involved in reporting violence, especially rape, was a more serious problem.

33. **Ms. Ameline** asked if the bill on gender balance in political office was likely to be promulgated in time for the upcoming legislative and local elections; if minorities such as pigmy women were fully aware of their rights; and whether the law on promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous populations was being fully enforced.

34. **Ms. Rasekh** said that it was the responsibility of the Government to do away with the taboo that discouraged women from reporting sexual violence and to conduct long-term awareness and education campaigns. The issue had been raised in connection with the previous periodic report and the Committee had received the same reply. She would

therefore like to know if anything concrete had been done in the intervening years, such as providing shelters for women who were threatened after reporting an assault.

35. **Ms. Awori**, recalling that women and girls remained the often silent victims of various forms of violence, asked if the awareness-raising campaigns on violence discussed in the written replies to the list of issues were nationwide initiatives. She would appreciate additional information on the 2011 seminar held to sensitize indigenous populations to the issue of violence against women and would like to know how many workshops on that issue had been, and would be, conducted. Information would also be appreciated on the status of the bill on the offence of rape; the steps being taken to develop a comprehensive approach to combating violence against women; any strategies, action plans or bills dealing with the various forms of gender-based violence; the protection measures available to women victims; and gender sensitivity training for public officials, such as law enforcement personnel, health-care professionals, parliamentarians and the judiciary.

36. **Ms. Šimonović** asked whether gender-related forms of persecution were a criterion in determining a person's refugee status and requested further information on the asylum bill currently being drafted. Concerning the amendments to discriminatory provisions in the Family and Criminal Codes, she asked if all such provisions had been identified and if a time frame had been set for adopting the amendments. She welcomed the planned prohibition of female genital mutilation in the bill on domestic violence against women, but the State party should also make the practice a specific offence in its own right under criminal law.

37. **Ms. Popescu** asked which law would include the planned definition of discrimination against women and if the State party was considering a specific law on equal opportunity. There were several laws on trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation, but they protected only certain groups, such as children and indigenous women. Were there plans for an omnibus law on violence against women or on domestic violence?

38. **Ms. Gabr** said that sexual harassment in the workplace should not be overlooked. She would welcome the adoption of a comprehensive law on trafficking in persons that did not focus solely on exploitation for the purpose of prostitution.

39. **Ms. Patten** asked what measures the Government was taking to provide support, health care and legal services to victims of violence who were living in camps. She welcomed the list of planned ratifications, but wondered if the State party was also considering ratifying the Optional Protocol, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.

40. **The Chairperson** said that the critical analysis of taboos and stereotypes was a tremendous challenge and should be broached systemically across all institutions, especially schools. She asked if there were any cases of women bringing charges of sexual violence against powerful Congolese men, as opposed to foreign nationals, as in the Pointe Noire example.

41. **Mr. Massamba** (Congo) said that the principle of non-refoulement applied to all individuals who crossed the border into the Congo. An eligibility commission was in place to review all applications for refugee status and, once that status was granted, a person enjoyed all the same health, education and labour rights as Congolese nationals did. The only exception that was made in some cases concerned the exercise of political rights in ways that would be detrimental to neighbouring countries.

42. **Mr. Okio** (Congo) said that changing stereotypes was a long-term endeavour and the Congo was focusing its efforts in that respect on redesigning curricula for young children. Action was being taken in refugee camps to protect those who were most

vulnerable, but it was impossible to prevent all rights violations. Women had brought legal action against powerful Congolese men, including divorce proceedings in which they were also compensated for any violence that they had suffered.

43. **Mr. Mbossa** (Congo) said that efforts were under way to secure passage of the bill for gender equality in political office before the upcoming elections, but it had yet to be submitted to parliament. The electoral law did set obligatory quotas for women's participation in both legislative and local elections. The rights of indigenous peoples were respected, and the law on indigenous rights was the subject of awareness-raising campaigns. As part of the Government's efforts to dispel taboos and combat discrimination, a review of legal texts was planned with a view to facilitating their application and enforcement. Nationwide campaigns were under way to sensitize the Congolese people to the need to combat violence, and the appropriate amendments would be made if the judicial system proved to be too lenient. A definition of domestic violence would be included in the Family Code, but violence against any person was already prohibited under the Constitution. Measures were being taken to help the legislative committees to carry their work forward, but it was as yet impossible to determine a definitive date for the completion of amendments.

44. **Ms. Adou Ngapi** (Congo) said that dealing with the issues faced by indigenous women was made more difficult by the fact that indigenous populations often lived in isolated communities. Studies had shown that those women tended not to avail themselves of reproductive health services in hospitals. A seminar had therefore been organized in Likouala Department to make those women aware of the benefits of hospital care, and activities focused on that objective had also been carried out in other departments. A project was under way to encourage indigenous women to participate in the upcoming elections, both as candidates and voters. Indigenous persons often did not possess identification papers, and that issue was being addressed by, inter alia, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women. The offence of sexual harassment would be included in a forthcoming bill, and the scope of the problem was being studied in greater depth.

45. **Mr. Okio** (Congo) said that female genital mutilation, sexual harassment and domestic violence were all considered forms of violence against women and would be dealt with as such in any amendments to the relevant legal codes.

*Articles 7 to 9*

46. **Ms. Schulz** said that she had a number of concerns about women's integration in political and public life. Firstly, the representation of women in decision-making bodies had declined, particularly in parliament. Secondly, the Congo fell short of the African Union's gender targets in all sectors. Thirdly, the State party still lacked adequate gender equality legislation, despite having been urged to take all necessary measures to increase the number of women in decision-making positions in the Committee's concluding comments on its previous combined periodic reports (A/58/38).

47. She welcomed the bill to ensure gender balance in political, elective and administrative office but was concerned that it might not be enacted before the next national and local elections. Because that law would be an important tool in dismantling discriminatory traditional and cultural practices, the State party should make every effort to achieve its promulgation before the country went to the polls. It was also important for the bill to be free of exceptions that might undermine its efficacy. Clarification of the bill's scope would also be appreciated. She would be particularly interested to know whether it encompassed all levels of the State administration, including local authorities and courts, whether its provisions would apply to semi-public entities and enterprises, and whether the private sector would be subject to similar gender equality requirements.



48. **Mr. Okio** (Congo) said that the bill was in the fine-tuning stages and that the Committee's advice would help flesh out certain elements. As the text of the bill was a draft version subject to further scrutiny and amendment, it was impossible at that point to confirm its exact scope or say when it would be enacted.

49. **Mr. Mbossa** (Congo) said that the bill was due to be discussed at a forthcoming Cabinet meeting and would be submitted to parliament for approval following those discussions. The political momentum behind the bill, particularly at the presidential level, ought to ensure its early promulgation. He could assure the Committee that it contained no exceptions. He also wished to mention that it was an increasingly standard practice in his country for recruitment notices to clearly state that, whenever skill sets were equivalent, female candidates would be given preference.

*Articles 10 to 14*

50. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega** said that the grave imbalances reflected in educational statistics, including literacy and school enrolment rates, must be addressed. Since one of the multiple deterrents to girls' education was sexual harassment in schools, she would like to know whether the State party had a timeline for the promulgation of specific legislation outlawing sexual harassment in educational and other institutions. Enrolment and dropout rates for girls in secondary education, where boys outnumbered them by a considerable ratio, were a particular cause of concern, as those disparities fed into occupational segregation in later life. The domination of the teaching profession by men had ramifications for girls' school attendance, and the vast majority of students in the fields of accountancy, finance and technology were male. The provisions of article 168 of the Family Code, concerning parental authority, perpetuated traditional roles and responsibilities by denying women the right to take decisions about their children's education. She would therefore like to know what the State party was doing to address the many inequalities and disparities that existed in the education system.

51. **Ms. Patten** asked what the Government was doing to identify the underlying causes of the gender pay gap, which had been proven to have negative consequences for economic growth and well-being. Past research had indicated that direct gender discrimination and occupational segregation were key factors in wage inequities, and the situation in the Congo, where women tended to be concentrated in poorly paid secretarial, health-care and teaching work, supported those findings. Information about Government measures to address the gender pay gap and the related issues of occupational segregation, gender stereotyping and equal opportunities would therefore be appreciated. She would also like to know whether the Government planned to amend article 80 of the Labour Act to align it with the provisions of the relevant International Labour Organization convention, as that article's current wording appeared to limit the possibility of comparing remuneration to situations where men and women were engaged in the same type of work.

52. Since the report confirmed that growing numbers of women depended on the informal economy for their livelihood and therefore lacked social protection entitlements, she wondered whether Government policymakers were addressing the challenges that those workers faced and whether they were examining best practices in neighbouring countries to that end. An explanation would be appreciated of how the private sector was regulated and how the Government ensured that employers did not discriminate against women based on their marital status or the likelihood that they might become pregnant.

53. **Ms. Rasekh** said that she had been disappointed by the report's lack of information on women's health, in general, and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, in particular, especially since Congolese women faced multiple health issues and had only limited access to medical care. She asked the delegation to provide an update on the specific policies, programmes and services that the State party had introduced since setting the goals of

adequate, affordable health services, reduced infant and maternal mortality, and improved living standards cited in paragraph 148 of the report (CEDAW/C/COG/6).

54. Up-to-date information on maternal mortality and its causes would also be welcome. The rate had apparently fallen to below 600 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2008 but was still very high. In any case, more recent data were needed to substantiate the downward trend. The report appeared to attribute the high rate of maternal mortality to health issues such as high blood pressure, anaemia and gynaecological cancers, whereas, in reality, the majority of maternal deaths were attributable to pre and post-natal complications associated with a lack of proper obstetric care during delivery. That imprecision highlighted the need for research into the specific causes of maternal deaths and the preventive role of proper care. Information on any services introduced to help prevent deaths during delivery would be useful, as would clarification as to which major obstetric surgical procedures had, as indicated in paragraph 95 of the responses to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/COG/6/Add.1), been available free of charge since March 2011. Had a specific law been enacted to guarantee the availability of those procedures and were all women in the country eligible? More detailed information about HIV/AIDS programmes and the reasons behind women's greater exposure to infection was also needed. Lastly, she would like to know whether the State party received international technical, financial and capacity-building support to help improve women's health and, if not, whether such support was needed.

55. **Ms. Zou** Xiaoqiao said that she had been surprised by the lack of information in the report about the poverty reduction strategy announced almost a decade ago and asked for details on the strategy's implementation and the ensuing benefits for women. She would also like to know about the extent of cooperation between government bodies and NGOs in that area.

56. In its report the Government had acknowledged that strict banking regulations and complex procedures restricted access to credit for women. However, that recognition needed to be followed by specific measures and legislative amendments to simplify the loan application process for women. Women also faced unacceptable obstacles in terms of land ownership. According to the report, women could obtain land through inheritance, marriage or renting, but none of those routes was easily accessible in practice. She would like to receive further information about Congolese land laws and to know what proportion of land in Congo was currently owned by women.

57. Information about the situation of older women and women with disabilities should be included in the next periodic report, since alternative sources spoke of multiple discrimination against such women in education, employment and other areas. Details on any specific laws dealing with disability and age issues and on any plans to address the problems that those women faced were also needed.

58. Lastly, she would like to know whether the State party had a timetable for ratification of the Optional Protocol.

59. **Mr. Okio** (Congo) said that, while the country's literacy rates were indeed low, his Government was committed to finding an effective solution. Measures to address sexual harassment in schools were being developed, and preventive campaigns were under way in universities. In relation to the issue of parental authority, there was a cleavage in Congolese society, with urban couples being much more likely to take decisions regarding their children's educations jointly than parents in rural areas were. The predominance of male teachers was a consequence of boys' higher school enrolment and completion rates, and those imbalances were replicated across all sectors of employment, including the army, the health sector and foreign affairs. Such entrenched patterns could not be changed overnight, but the State party was committed to gradually changing the status quo. He was confident

that, in a few years' time, the figures presented to the Committee would be considerably improved.

60. He did not believe that women's underrepresentation in positions of responsibility could be described as occupational segregation and he questioned the existence of a gender pay gap in the public sector. He had worked alongside women throughout his career and had always received the same salary as his female colleagues. Moreover, since family benefits were paid to women, their salaries could in some cases be marginally higher than men's. Direct discrimination in recruitment was a universal problem that was very hard to address. It could not be denied that family and maternity considerations sometimes led employers to pass over women when taking recruitment and promotion decisions, but such cases were not unique to his country.

61. He accepted Ms. Rasekh's observations concerning the links between maternal mortality and inadequate obstetric care, and would ensure that more thorough research into causes of maternal mortality was undertaken.

62. He did not believe that women were subject to deliberate or specific discrimination in relation to land use or ownership, and there were no restrictions on women's right to inherit.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*