



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Thirty-fifth session

Summary record of the 734th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 25 May 2006, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani (Vice-Chairperson)

later: Ms. Manalo (Chairperson)

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In the absence of Ms. Manalo, Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

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

Combined third, fourth and fifth periodic report of Cyprus (continued) (CEDAW/C/CYP/3-5; CEDAW/C/CYP/Q/5 and CEDAW/C/CYP/Q/5/Add.1)

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

Articles 7 and 8 (continued)

2. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus), responding to the question regarding citizenship, said that the Civil Registry Law established that children born to a Cypriot mother between 16 August 1960 and 11 June 1999 were given the option to acquire Cypriot citizenship if they so wished. A child acquired Cypriot citizenship automatically if either parent was Cypriot or would have been entitled to Cypriot citizenship during that period.

3. **Ms. Varnavidou** (Cyprus) said that the Government was working in collaboration with the media, representatives of women's organizations, and leaders of political parties to identify ways to encourage and improve women's access to politics and the media, and was encouraging research to determine why such access was not adequately supported or encouraged by the education system, the family and the media. It had conducted a campaign to raise public awareness of the benefits of balanced representation and the need to eliminate gender stereotypes, and a study was to be carried out to determine whether that campaign had been influential, particularly in recent elections.

4. Research showed that women in Parliament and in other official positions were becoming role models, which encouraged a greater number of women to become involved in politics. The National Action Plan for Gender Mainstreaming would encourage local authorities to play a more active role in ensuring balanced representation of women and men at the local level. The Government was planning to hold a further

awareness-raising campaign prior to local elections in December 2006, and to organize gender awareness training for all men and women elected at local authority level.

Articles 10 to 14

5. **Mr. Flinterman** asked what policies the Government had adopted to increase the number of women in decision-making positions in education, and whether the National Action Plan for Gender Mainstreaming would establish temporary special measures to address the overall lack of equality among educators. It was worrying that female and male teachers did not enjoy equal opportunities for promotion. In that regard, the State party should explain why female teachers possessed fewer additional qualifications than their male counterparts, on what basis grades were assigned and whether interview committees comprised only men. It should also indicate what strategies were envisaged to redress gender segregation in the various fields of study, given that such segregation had far-reaching implications for the future careers of men and women.

6. The low proportion of women among teaching staff in tertiary-education institutions suggested that women were underrepresented in competitive research and development programmes. The Government should take urgent action to correct that trend. Independent sources reported that it was difficult for working mothers, unemployed women and female returnees to gain admission to institutes of higher education. In that regard, it would be interesting to know the status of the proposals for the establishment of an open university, and whether the gender dimension would be taken into account in establishing such an institution.

7. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said that the report of the State party gave the false impression that part-time employment was a popular choice among women rather than an unavoidable necessity for women who had no choice but to combine work with family life. That distinction was important in formulating relevant policies. She asked whether the assumption made in the report that the fall in the birth rate was linked to women's economic activity was supported by research. The assertion that female entrepreneurial efforts were "hit or miss" (CEDAW/C/CYP/3-5, para. 151) also appeared to have no clear basis. The State party should indicate whether the chances of success in business were limited by inexperience and lack of relevant

studies to the same extent for both men and women, whether there was a greater rate of failure among women entrepreneurs than among their male counterparts, and the number of men who had relevant training or background when they set up a business. It was important to determine whether entrepreneurial businesses in general or only women's businesses were at risk of failure, since that distinction had a bearing on the formulation of appropriate policies to address the problem.

8. It would be useful to know whether any research had been carried out on women who re-entered the labour market after a period of absence, their motivation for doing so, possible obstacles to re-entry, whether employment promotion laws encouraged such re-entry by providing support structures such as childcare, and whether there were retraining programmes tailored to the specific needs of such women within the context of the current demands of the labour market. She asked whether the Law on Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training provided for temporary special measures in that regard. Lastly, the provisions of the Social Insurance (Amendment) Law relating to benefits (CEDAW/C/CYP/3-5, para. 155) appeared to be discriminatory. It would be useful to know how the benefits and pensions available to men differed from those available to women.

9. **Ms. Khan** asked whether the Government had adopted a plan of action and set a time frame to decrease the high level of gender segregation in employment, which was directly related to the considerable wage gap between men and women. She wondered whether that gap was partly attributable to the fact that many women were confined to traditional occupations and therefore had fewer income-earning opportunities than men. Further research on that possibility and other contributory factors would be welcome. Women should be given greater opportunities to work as employers and managers and thus to formulate recruitment policies that helped women to find employment suited to their individual educational level and availability.

10. The State party should give details of the employment status and overall situation of migrant women. It would be useful to know what measures the Government had adopted to integrate those women into the labour force, how many were legally employed and whether they were provided for under the Law on

Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training. The State party should also indicate whether their employment contracts were drawn up by the Ministry of Labour or by the Migration Department, since the two bodies were likely to have very different approaches to the issue that would be reflected in the legal provisions of those contracts.

11. It would be helpful to know whether foreign workers, particularly third-country nationals, were protected by legislation relating to equal pay and the burden of proof in cases of discrimination based on sex (CEDAW/C/CYP/3-5, para. 154 (d)). Lastly, referring to the legal provisions relating to sexual harassment, she asked whether women working in the domestic sector could file a complaint of sexual harassment or any other kind of contract violation, particularly before the Gender Equality Committee, and whether such complaints could be forwarded to the Labour Inspectorate for further inquiry.

12. **Ms. Tavares da Silva**, echoing the concerns of the previous speaker regarding female migrant workers, said that the next State party report should include information on the de facto situation of all minority and ethnic groups, including refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly with regard to access to education, employment, health services, accommodation and social security, indicating the specific situations of vulnerability that those groups faced. While the report set out the legal provisions that regulated the situation and the rights of those groups, it would be useful to know what guarantees were in place to ensure that those provisions were enforced. In that regard, she asked whether any complaints had been filed claiming violation of those rights. Referring to paragraph 3 of the annex to document CEDAW/C/CYP/Q/5/Add.1, she said that the situation of displaced women should not be an exception to the principle of gender equality, and that the provision that granted the status of displaced persons only to children of displaced fathers discriminated against both mothers and children.

13. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that the next report would give a fuller picture of both legislation and the de facto situation in Cyprus. She explained that no specific mention had been made of the various minorities and special groups in the country because they had been included under other categories being discussed.

14. **Ms. Varnavidou** (Cyprus) said that a woman was now heading the Ministry of Education and two of the five members of the Educational Committee were women. It was true that there were very few women professors at the university level, but they were very active in sensitizing their colleagues and sponsoring initiatives within their university. The Government collaborated with them in research and in developing its own sensitization programmes within the educational system.

15. The scheme to encourage female entrepreneurship — the result of joint efforts by various government departments — had made great advances, almost doubling the number of businesswomen in three years, so that they now comprised one quarter of all entrepreneurs. In addition, six conferences had been held on the subject; women's cooperative banks existed to support women's initiatives; and a Ministry of Industry programme to encourage young entrepreneurship had a special scheme, covering women from 18 to 55, that provided generous start-up grants and fostered the entry of women into both traditional businesses and those relying on new technologies.

16. **Mrs. Droushiotou** (Cyprus) said that the new Strategic Development Plan would focus on establishing the Open University, and that the National Action Plan for Gender Mainstreaming would make it a priority to increase the number of women professors in universities and research institutes.

17. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that the 2002 law mandating equal treatment in employment and vocational training, whose provisions had been discussed in the report (CEDAW/C/CYP/3-5, para. 153), allowed for affirmative action on behalf of women in all the fields covered by the law and also under collective bargaining or similar agreements and in programmes to foster gender equality in the public or private sector. Having prohibited sexual harassment, the law provided for sensitization programmes in that regard, and in any complaints brought against an employer, the burden of proof lay with the employer rather than the complainant.

18. **Ms. Droushiotou** (Cyprus) said that, as a way of combating stereotyping, the Government had made childcare services and flexible forms of work available in the public sector to both men and women, so that professional and family lives could be reconciled. The

Government also had a programme to advise private businesses on the creation of a family-friendly environment. The public employment services had been modernized and now took a more individualized approach to job applicants. To help women enter or re-enter the labour force, there was a specific programme to train and find jobs for unemployed women. Six hundred were enrolled, and it was estimated that the system would find jobs for 3,000 women.

19. In order to tackle the pay gap between men and women and counter the glass-ceiling effect, preparations had been made, after a review of the best practices of other countries, to conduct a survey at the end of 2006 analysing the pay gap by occupational category, sector of activity, educational level, participation in training programmes and glass-ceiling constraints. The Government would develop its strategy on the basis of the survey. Lastly, to reply to a request at the previous meeting for updated statistics on high-ranking female civil servants and judges, she pointed out that the 2005 data showed that women now represented 30 per cent of civil service professionals and 32 per cent of the judiciary.

20. **Ms. Aristodemou** (Cyprus), referring to gender segregation in employment, said that many Cypriot women worked in the service sector and the Government would focus on training them for work in more technical areas. With the modernization of traineeship programmes, it was hoped that more students would be encouraged to get vocational training in combination with their schooling. Also, the system of technical and vocational education was being reformed to attract more girls.

21. **Ms. Varnavidou** (Cyprus) said that while women were as qualified as men in the teaching profession as a whole, there were more men with PhDs. Teaching was a profession dominated by women because of the ease of employment of qualified applicants and the comparatively high pay. However, women did encounter the glass ceiling, even in primary schools, for instance, where they represented 75 per cent of teachers.

22. The availability of childcare facilities was crucial for the participation of women in the labour force and in political life. The Government's target of 90-per-cent coverage for children between the ages of 3 and 6 by 2010 had almost been reached, while it was not

quite half way to its target of 33-per-cent coverage for all children up to the age of 3. In that age group, however, the extended families were very supportive in providing childcare. The Government was also doing research to identify the needs of members of the general population requiring special care such as the ill or the disabled, and would develop a strategy there as well.

23. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that the Government had a very clear-cut policy on asylum-seekers, which sought to strike a balance between implementation of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which had been incorporated into domestic law, and the determination to protect its own asylum system. The latest report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees recognized that 99 per cent of the applications for asylum in Cyprus were unjustified. The 1 per cent of asylum-seekers whom the Government could approve as refugees received the full benefits of the law and had no problem finding jobs.

24. The other 99 per cent — essentially illegal immigrants, some of whom did not even apply for asylum — were the ones who were experiencing practical problems living in the country and making complaints. The porous borders in the north allowed a huge influx into the Republic of illegal immigrants from the European Union and the near and Far East, speaking a wide range of languages, and thousands of them sought asylum. There was admittedly hostility among the public, and even among individual government officials, towards such illegal immigrants.

25. The incident that had occurred the previous week in the capital had involved a mass protest under the umbrella of asylum-seekers, whose ranks had been swelled by many who were simply in Cyprus illegally, and it had been agreed that the Government would review all applications for asylum, affording all benefits guaranteed by the Refugee Convention and national law, pending decisions. The Red Cross had offered to accommodate those involved in the interim. Asylum-seekers were permitted to work in the agricultural field while their applications were pending, and some 600 were currently so employed. The number of asylum applications being reviewed had declined from an initial 17,000 to 4,000 in 2006, with a backlog of some 10,000.

26. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** requested information on the number of female immigrants entering Cyprus, either illegally or as asylum-seekers, and asked whether national law contained gender-specific asylum provisions, such as recognition of the risk of female genital mutilation as grounds for seeking asylum. She would also like to know whether married women could be granted asylum independently from their husbands.

27. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that national law contained gender-specific asylum provisions and that women could be granted asylum in their own right.

28. **Ms. Economou** (Cyprus) said that gender-disaggregated data on asylum would be available as of January 2007. Asylum-seekers were entitled to stay in Cyprus, move freely within the country and apply for work, welfare benefits and a medical card. The Asylum Service was formulating a policy for the integration of asylum-seekers and refugees and had conducted an assessment, in conjunction with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), of the difficulties they faced, with a view to giving them a stronger voice in the integration process. Refugees and asylum-seekers had the right to education in Cyprus and could attend Greek-language courses, some of which were geared specifically towards women. With regard to the immediate accommodation needs of refugees and asylum-seekers, women and families were given priority.

29. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that, in a recent decision of the Ombudsman, the law on displaced persons had been deemed discriminatory because it accorded displaced person status to the children of displaced men but not those of displaced women. The Ombudsman's recommendation that the law should be changed to eliminate that discrepancy would be considered by the Government.

30. **Ms. Gaspard** said that the information provided on asylum was of a general nature, whereas the Committee was interested in issues specific to women. She recommended that the State party's next report should provide information on the extent to which women were granted asylum on grounds such as the risk of female genital mutilation, forced marriage or trafficking for the purpose of prostitution.

31. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that such information would be provided in the next report.

Articles 15 and 16

32. **Ms. Gaspard**, noting that almost one quarter of births were classified as “extramarital”, asked whether that meant children born to couples in de facto unions or those born to single mothers. She would welcome statistics in the next report on the number of children in single-parent families. She also asked whether de facto unions were recognized in civil law. For example, what were the pension rights of a woman who survived a long-term partner to whom she had not been married, and to what extent were the rights of unmarried fathers recognized?

33. **Ms. Khan**, referring to article 13 of the Convention, said that a more precise measure of poverty than that given in the report was needed in order to determine what proportion of the population lived below the poverty line. She would like to know whether the income levels of women working in agriculture were comparable to those of urban women. Given that the only vulnerable groups mentioned in the report were single mothers and retired older women, she asked whether special measures were in place to support other vulnerable groups, such as immigrant single mothers, women with disabilities and female refugees and asylum-seekers.

34. Turning to article 16 and referring to the Family Courts (Religious Groups) Law of 1994, she asked whether members of religious groups were subject to the jurisdiction of the civil courts or whether the Law provided for such groups to have their own family courts reflecting the principles of their religions. She also asked what had been done to ensure that any such religious courts fully complied with the principles of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in national law and the Convention.

35. **Ms. Kouroumba** (Cyprus), referring to a previous question on foreign domestic workers, said that a Government committee had been set up to hear complaints by domestic workers against their employers. A recent change to the law allowed such workers to work for another employer pending the outcome of their complaint. If the complaint was upheld, the employee was released permanently from the employment in question and in some cases the employer was prohibited from hiring foreign workers again.

36. The law did not recognize de facto unions and there were therefore no rights arising from them. On

the other hand, the law now allowed anyone to get married in a civil ceremony; previously, only marriages consecrated in religious ceremonies had been recognized in law. Inheritance and property rights were determined by the State in accordance with the relevant laws. Dissolution of marriages between Cypriot nationals was performed by the civil courts even if the marriage had been consecrated in a religious ceremony. Foreigners were entitled to marry in Cyprus, either in a civil ceremony or in accordance with the rites of a religion of their choice, since the Constitution guaranteed freedom of religion.

37. **Ms. Varnavidou** (Cyprus) said that measures were in place for the social inclusion of all vulnerable groups of women, not just single mothers and retired older women. Programmes had been set up to provide those dependent on welfare benefits with training and other types of support. In addition, the budget for welfare benefits had been substantially increased in recent years. Particular support was available for elderly women as they were at the greatest risk of poverty, and many of them had no social insurance.

38. In 2001, the law had been amended to ensure that all self-employed rural women had access to social insurance. In addition, the social pension was available to all persons not covered by any other social security scheme, most of whom were women. The amount of social pension paid had recently been increased. Specific initiatives had been introduced to provide rural women with jobs or to help them become self-employed by providing them with loans to set up their own businesses. With regard to poverty, Cyprus used the European Union standard measure of the poverty line: 60 per cent of national equalized median income.

39. **Ms. Khan** said that she had not yet received a response to her questions about migrant workers, in particular whether domestic workers from outside the European Union received equal pay in accordance with the law and whether their employment contracts were drafted by the Ministry of Labour.

40. **Ms. Tan** asked whether rural women who worked without payment in family businesses and were not officially considered employees were entitled to social insurance under the Social Insurance (Amendment) Law of 2001. She requested further clarification of the welfare benefits available to rural women.

41. **Ms. Varnavidou** (Cyprus) clarified that the Social Insurance (Amendment) Law, 2001 (L.51(I)/2001)

granted rights to self-employed rural men and women and the Social Pension Law, 1995 (L.25(I)/1995) introduced social pensions for men and women who were not covered by any other social security scheme. An amendment in 2000 to the Social Pension Law increased the social pension to 81 per cent of the amount of the full basic pension provided under the Social Insurance Law.

42. **Ms. Tan** wished to know how many women had benefited from the education programmes for rural women. It would also be useful to know whether the Government had conducted an assessment of the Rural Development Plan for the period 2004-2006.

43. *Ms. Manalo took the Chair.*

44. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** commented that the report did not contain any information on the situation of disabled women and recalled that general recommendation 18 of 1991 requested detailed information in that regard. The Committee would appreciate receiving relevant data in the next periodic report. She commended the Government for having established a social pension scheme for citizens who had never worked and hoped that the next report would contain additional information on the situation of the elderly.

45. **Ms. Zou** said that the next report should provide more details on the situation of rural women and expressed concern that so few people had taken advantage of the “Encouraging Young People to Stay in the Rural Areas” scheme, whereby loans were extended to young people at low interest rates. She noted that the Government had established machinery for the advancement of women at the national level but wondered whether there was any machinery at the local level.

46. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** noted that both the report and the statement by the delegation had mentioned the inclusion of the gender perspective in various national development plans. She wondered whether that meant that the policies and plans contained specific measures or simply that they were evaluated in view of their impact on women and men.

47. **Ms. Kouroumba** (Cyprus) said that the Government was investigating possible discrimination with regard to salaries of third-country nationals, particularly foreign domestic workers. Concerning the various gaps in the report, information had not been

provided either because there were no available data or because there were no data pertaining specifically to women. The delegation would recommend that gender-disaggregated data should be collected.

48. **Ms. Varnavidou** (Cyprus) said that the delegation was unable to provide an evaluation of the “Encouraging Young People to Stay in the Rural Areas” scheme. However, it was likely that so few people had taken advantage of the scheme because they had preferred to participate in others, such as the National Scheme to Enhance Female Entrepreneurship. The Government was making every effort to inform rural women of the different options but had not developed machinery at the local level as yet.

49. The Government had developed various programmes for the disabled, but they did not target women specifically. Programmes for disadvantaged women would be set up once the needs of the different groups had been identified. The delegation was proud that both rural and urban women had easy access to education and health care and that there was little discrepancy between their situations.

50. **Ms. Aristodemou** (Cyprus) said that the Government had developed various schemes offering disabled persons vocational training, employment opportunities and grants to start a business.

51. **Ms. Droushiotou** (Cyprus) said that, unlike previous development plans, the Rural Development Plan (2004-2006) incorporated a gender perspective and that, although it had not been designed specifically for women, it did include measures that targeted the female rural population. The medium-term goal was to introduce gender-based budgeting.

52. **Ms. Shin** said that disabled women were particularly vulnerable to domestic violence and exploitation. She therefore recommended that the next report should contain information in that regard.

53. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that the next report should contain complete gender-disaggregated data. In its previous concluding comments, the Committee had emphasized the need to increase the number of women in decision-making positions, particularly in the civil service and parliament. She therefore strongly recommended that the Government should take into consideration the provisions of the Convention on temporary special measures and, in particular, general

recommendation 25. There was a need for temporary special measures in the areas of employment and social security, especially for women who worked part-time. Temporary special measures should also be implemented under article 10 to bring female teachers up to the level of male teachers.

54. She welcomed the abolition of the so-called “artiste’s” visa but called upon the Government to take serious measures to protect women who were truly artists. The Government was also urged to develop stronger programmes to protect aliens, particularly female immigrant domestic workers, and rural women. Finally, the Government should work closely with non-governmental organizations and civil society to encourage women to report all forms of violence, and law enforcement officers and the judiciary should receive additional training in handling such cases.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.