



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

Distr.: General
7 August 2004

Original: English

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

Summary record of the 651st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 8 July 2004, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Açar.

Contents

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

*Combined second and third periodic reports and combined fourth and fifth
periodic reports of Equatorial Guinea*

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.

04-43946 (E)

0443946

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)*

Combined second and third periodic reports and combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Equatorial Guinea (CEDAW/C/GNQ/2-3, CEDAW/C/GNQ/4-5)

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

2. **Ms. Obono Engono** (Equatorial Guinea), introducing her country's combined second and third periodic reports (CEDAW/C/GNQ/2-3) and combined fourth and fifth periodic reports (CEDAW/C/GNQ/4-5), observed that the first step in the advancement of women had been the establishment of a Department for the Promotion of Women in 1980, now an independent ministry directed by women, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women. The Government was increasingly trying to ensure equal opportunities for women in compliance with both the Convention and the nation's Constitution, and to apply an anti-discrimination policy.

3. The National Policy for the Advancement of Women, adopted in 2002, clearly set out all the strategies to be followed, within a gender and development framework, to achieve equal opportunities for both sexes. The main lines of the country's development strategy had been determined at the National Economic Conference held in 1997 and through its subsequent reviews. It was based on the concept of the human person as the centre of the process of social and economic progress, and took a participatory approach involving all components of the society.

4. The National Policy for the Advancement of Women aimed primarily to improve the legal framework, the access of women to decision-making bodies and the sustainable economic advancement of women; ensure equitable access by women and men to basic services and a healthy environment; strengthen the institutional machinery for the advancement of women; and provide for women's education, training and literacy. A particularly forward-looking measure had been the presidential decree prohibiting the imprisonment of women for dowry-related reasons

upon dissolution of a customary marriage, although in backward rural areas the prohibition was not always observed.

5. As indicated in the fourth and fifth reports (p. 9), none of the country's laws ran counter to guarantees of equal rights and fundamental freedoms. However, practice had not kept pace with legislation, and efforts were being made to raise the awareness of both women and men throughout the country. The National Human Rights Commission, established in 1990, oversaw the observance of all the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international treaties to which Equatorial Guinea was a party. The Commission was empowered to investigate allegations of human rights violations brought before it.

6. A draft Family Code currently being drawn up would further help to improve the legal and traditional status of women, for it would harmonize customs and traditions with the Constitution and the applicable treaties. The provisions regarding the nationality rights of women were set out in the fourth and fifth reports (p. 13). As stated in those reports (pp. 10-11), stereotypes regarding the roles of men and women were difficult to overcome, and the lack of formal regulation of customary marriages, one of the strongest traditions, was the source of many abuses. Unfortunately, consideration of the draft Act for the Regulation of Customary Marriages had long been stalled by opposition.

7. Women in Equatorial Guinea had the right to vote and hold public and political office under the Constitution; and there were women in all three branches of government, although in much smaller numbers than men (fourth and fifth reports, p. 12). In the executive branch, there was one woman minister, one vice-minister, three State secretaries and one presidential adviser. In the judiciary, there was a woman judge in both the Supreme Court and the Appeals Court as well as a Supreme Court secretary and four district judges. Over 150 women had run for Parliament in 2004 and 14 per cent of those successful had been women, as opposed to 7.5 per cent in the previous legislature. Women served at all levels in the country's diplomatic missions and in high posts in subregional organizations.

8. Women were in principle free to study at all levels of the educational system, but as the fourth and fifth reports indicated (pp. 6 and 13), the percentage of

girls had declined significantly in secondary school and drastically at the higher levels. Girls tended to drop out of school because of pregnancy, early marriage, failure in school or the acceptance of unskilled jobs for lack of means. Indeed, the local culture encouraged families to favour the education of boys over girls, especially in adolescence. In addition to the sex education and consciousness-raising measures provided by the Government for girls to avoid premature pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, and in addition to the National Programme on Education for All and the various literacy programmes (fourth and fifth reports, pp. 10 and 13), which aimed at greater parity between males and females at all levels of education, the Government had built many new primary and secondary schools, set up primary- and secondary-level night schools for adults and offered programmes allowing school dropouts to resume their studies. Also, the secondary and upper-grade primary curriculums were being overhauled to conform to subregional and global standards, a major point being to make education compulsory through four years of secondary school.

9. Regarding the employment and economic status of women, the fourth and fifth reports indicated (p. 5) that women were not properly remunerated for their work, failing to receive equal pay for equal work; and that they were engaged primarily in the sectors of agriculture, freshwater artisanal fisheries and the informal sector. In order to help women compete with men economically, the Government gave preference to women in free vocational training, providing incentives to firms that employed them, and had adopted legislation giving women special protections during pregnancy. The fourth and fifth reports (p. 15) detailed the special programmes for rural women — agricultural associations, microcredit, training in crop cultivation, marketing and processing — that had been developed to make farming by women more profitable. A noticeably larger number of women were becoming involved in the formulation of development plans, especially in relation to gender issues, and women had taken an active part in the National Economic Conference and its medium-term and final reviews.

10. Although prostitution was illegal under the Penal Code, it had proliferated in recent years, especially in the major cities (fourth and fifth reports, p. 11). The upsurge could be explained by the growing economy, which required skills and training to enter the labour

force that women did not possess; the mass migration to the cities of women with no means of support; the oil boom, which had attracted many affluent, single Western professionals who had created a demand for sex workers; and traditional social pressures on women to become economically active very early. Trafficking in women (fourth and fifth reports, p. 12), while illegal and not deeply rooted in the society, had begun to spread in recent years in foreign communities, particularly among women and girls from Benin.

11. Women received superior, low-cost health care, especially in the case of pregnancy and maternity care (fourth and fifth reports, p. 14). The Family Planning Act, together with the draft Reproductive Health Act currently before Parliament would guarantee even better health services for women and children in particular. The draft Act, which criminalized abortion except in specified cases, also provided, *inter alia*, for HIV/AIDS treatment. Far more women were infected with AIDS than men in Equatorial Guinea, where transmission was heterosexual. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare collected statistics on birth and mortality rates, life expectancy, the prevalence of AIDS and medical coverage. Contraceptive methods were readily available in urban areas, but in rural areas there was not enough awareness, information or access. The family benefits available under the national social security system were discussed in the fourth and fifth reports (p. 14).

12. It was a fair conclusion (fourth and fifth reports, p. 17) that the Government had made unprecedented efforts to promote the advancement of women and the society as a whole; and that the status of women would be improved by increasing their spending power and offering them still better education and health care, which would have an impact in all fields and lead to the gender equality essential to the development process. A number of seminars had been organized with a gender perspective since 2001, there had been legislative and policy achievements and recommendations had been made for greater support from the Government and other partners to ensure gender equality and increased cooperation and coordination among public and private organizations in support of women (fourth and fifth reports, pp. 17-19). The adoption of the various draft laws concerning women referred to earlier must also be supported.

13. **The Chairperson** invited Committee members to pose questions to the delegation.

Articles 1 to 6

14. **Mr. Flinterman** requested additional information on the restructuring of the unsuccessful National Committee for the Integration of Women in Development. The Committee would also be grateful for information on the composition of the Commission on Human Rights of Equatorial Guinea established in 1990, including the number of female members, its mandate and capacity to conduct awareness-raising and empowerment programmes, the number of cases submitted to it, its budget and its relationship to the ordinary courts. Noting that judicial decisions, including Supreme Court decisions, were not published in Equatorial Guinea, he asked whether the judiciary was given training in international human rights law, particularly instruments relating to women's rights. Lastly, it would be interesting to know something about the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Equatorial Guinea, including their legal status, their freedom to undertake activities, and the extent of their involvement in both the execution of government policies and the preparation of the State party's combined reports to the Committee.

15. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** enquired about the difference between the draft Family Code and the draft act regulating customary marriages. What efforts were being made by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women to garner support among grass-roots village elders for codifying and, in some cases, revising the laws on customary marriages? The delegation should give the Committee an indication of the time frame for the completion of the two pieces of legislation and their likelihood of success. At its previous session, the Committee had learned of a Nigerian project to harmonize international, statutory and customary law that could prove useful to the State party. Was there any exchange of experiences among African women ministers on such questions?

16. Perhaps the delegation could provide some idea of the time frame for finalizing the Plan of Action based on the National Policy for the Advancement of Women. It would be useful to know whether grass-roots women were participating in the drafting process and were able to make their needs known through the local advisers of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women. She would appreciate information on the budget for implementing the Plan of Action, particularly whether it was funded by the State or by international and bilateral donors. Lastly, the

Committee wished to know the percentage of the overall national budget allocated to the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women in relation to other ministries, and the extent to which it was dependent on donor contributions.

17. **Ms. Patten** noted that the responses to the list of issues gave no information on the status of the Convention in the State party's legal system. Could the delegation provide specific examples of instances where articles of the Convention had been invoked before the Supreme Court? She wondered whether ongoing training programmes on the Convention and other human rights instruments were offered to the judiciary, and would appreciate further details on the composition of the customary courts, the Government's efforts to bridge the gap between the civil courts and the customary courts and its initiatives to increase women's access to the civil courts. It would be interesting to have a breakdown of the number of civil courts and customary courts, and statistics on the number of courts in the rural areas, where a significant proportion of the population lived. She wondered whether Equatorial Guinea had a legal aid system, and to what extent women were aware of the protection afforded them by national legislation.

18. Turning to violence against women, she noted that, in the responses to the list of issues, the State party indicated that men had the right to discipline family members and to strike their wives. Were there any legal provisions in place to address domestic violence against women or any data in that regard? Given the high illiteracy rate among women, had the training programmes and sensitization campaigns for women been evaluated?

19. **Ms. Achmad** requested additional information on the draft law to regulate customary marriages. Did it address such issues as dowry, domestic responsibilities and divorce proceedings in the traditional courts, which were key to the elimination of violence against women? It would be interesting to know the strategies being used to win over opponents to the draft law (mostly men, including legislators). She hoped the Parliament was making use of the guidelines for the application of the Convention prepared by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Division for the Advancement of Women.

20. She sought assurances that, in seeking to mediate and conciliate, the Dispute Settlement Division of the

Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women was not, in effect, encouraging women to revert to their traditional acceptance of ill-treatment. Lastly, she wondered whether the male-dominated Government was taking active steps to build grass-roots support for the adoption of draft legislation in favour of women.

21. **Ms. Saiga** requested clarification of the relationship between the National Gender Policy, under which most activities were being carried out, and the National Policy for the Advancement of Women, to be implemented through the Plan of Action still in the drafting stage. The delegation should indicate what the relationship was, if any, between the National Gender Policy and the draft Plan of Action and what the Government's main policy document on women's issues actually was.

22. **Ms. Ferrer Gómez** stressed that the foremost challenge facing the State party was the implementation of its commendable new legislation on eliminating stereotypes. The awareness-raising activities of previous years must be stepped up and urgently target the entire population, particularly the communities. It was unclear whether there was an ongoing relationship between the National Network of Non-governmental Organizations and the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women and whether they had the capacities and resources to pool their efforts and bring on board influential community leaders — judges, prosecutors, attorneys, deputies, doctors, journalists — in short, persons capable of transforming mentalities.

23. Many elements of marriage were detrimental to women, including the dowry, the conditions for divorce, the situation of widows, men's right to practice polygamy, and the infliction of physical and psychological abuse. The concept of women as inferior beings must be re-examined. Major strides had been made in disseminating the Convention and adopting legislation on women's rights. In that connection, it would be interesting to know who had participated in the elaboration of the Family Code and what its anticipated date of adoption was.

24. **Ms. Gnacadja** asked whether completion of the Plan of Action to Implement the National Policy for the Advancement of Women was being delayed by financial, technical or other difficulties confronting the State party. The utility of seminars and awareness-raising campaigns without a Plan of Action was

questionable. It would be helpful if the delegation could explain the difference between the draft act regulating customary marriages and the draft Family Code. Would one apply to traditional marriages and the other to marriage in the modern sense?

25. The State party had indicated that various sectors had been consulted in preparing the report but should provide more precise information on the input of NGOs. Although the responses to the list of issues made reference to a number of projects in the planning stages, including a local development project, it was important to know which projects had been initiated by the State. She was concerned that the Government was relying too much on civil society to fulfil its role in that regard. Lastly, the delegation had not responded to the Committee's question concerning a temporary special measure awarding scholarships to girls and should provide information on that very important action.

26. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** expressed the hope that, in the restructuring process, the National Committee for the Integration of Women in Development would retain the very broad and ambitious mandate outlined in the State party's initial report. What was the relationship between the National Committee and the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women? As previous speakers had indicated, stereotypes and cultural traditions were largely responsible for the unfavourable situation of the women of Equatorial Guinea, in marriage, the marginalization of girls in the educational system and violence against women. The delegation should indicate how women were made aware of their rights and how they were able to exercise them, because it seemed that most women in Equatorial Guinea followed the traditional practice of submitting to the male head of household. Were they able to bring complaints before the courts when their rights were violated? The adoption of legislation was not sufficient in itself. She wondered what action the Government planned to take to raise women's awareness of their rights, because if they did not know what their rights were, in effect, those rights did not exist.

27. **Ms. Morvai** enquired about the number of women's NGOs in Equatorial Guinea and requested information on the main ones, including their names, activities, sources of funding and interaction with the Government. She hoped that, in future, Equatorial

Guinea, like many other countries, would include NGOs as part of its delegation to the Committee.

28. The Dispute Settlement Division described in the responses to the list of issues (CEDAW/PSWG/2004/II/CRP.2/Add.2, page 13) sounded almost like an employment arbitration mechanism. Clarification would be appreciated. The delegation should explain the Government's position on domestic violence. Was it regarded as a private family matter, or as a human rights violation calling for government intervention? The Committee would also appreciate information on the role of the police in such matters, particularly whether they were authorized to issue restraining or protection orders.

29. Lastly, she detected a note of resignation by the State party — both in its responses to the list of issues and the delegation's introductory statement — with regard to Western businessmen in Equatorial Guinea without their families who used local women and girls as prostitutes. The Government should target those clients and make them understand by all possible means that such services were not part of the country's hospitality.

30. **Ms. Šimonović** asked how the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women made use of the Convention in its work, whether national law and customary practices in Equatorial Guinea were compatible with the provisions of the Convention and whether the State party had a definition of discrimination based on article 1 of the Convention. Noting the State party's many assertions in its report that its legal provisions were not discriminatory, she stressed that it was nonetheless obligated under article 2 of the Convention to eliminate discrimination by any person, or deriving from customs and practices.

31. **Ms. Kwaku** enquired about the reasons for the State party's late submission of its reports, noting that its previous report had been considered in 1989. She wondered whether the obstacles causing the delay had been overcome and whether the next periodic report would be submitted on time.

32. **Ms. Obono Engono** (Equatorial Guinea), replying to Committee members' questions, said that, like other African countries, Equatorial Guinea had inherited a tradition in which women were subordinate to men. Determined to improve the situation of women, the current Government was providing subsidies to address women's issues at all levels — national,

regional, provincial and municipal — and in all sectors of society. The Ministry also coordinated its work with all relevant government ministries dealing with social issues and gave them an annual subsidy to carry out their work.

33. **Ms. Librada** (Equatorial Guinea) said that the delay in submitting the second and third periodic reports was attributable to the serious economic crisis and social problems of the 1980s in the aftermath of a brutal dictatorship. As for the fourth and fifth periodic reports, the delegation's presence and the responses that it had provided to the Committee's questions testified to its determination to comply with its reporting obligations. Having been approved by both the President and Parliament, the Convention was legally enforceable in Equatorial Guinea.

34. **Ms. Obono Engono** (Equatorial Guinea) said that the National Policy for the Advancement of Women formed the basis for all actions taken by the Government and its partners, including bilateral and multilateral international organizations, to bring about gender equality in Equatorial Guinea. The 80-page document had been elaborated by the entire staff of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women and analysed internally at the highest level before being submitted to the Interministerial Council, the Council of Ministers and, finally, the President of the Republic and Parliament for approval. The document included a sector-by-sector gender analysis, covering access to decision-making, participation in economic life and access to income-generating activities, literacy, education and training, health and access to drinking water and also examined institutional mechanisms to support the work of the Ministry.

35. **Ms. Librada** (Equatorial Guinea) said that the National Policy for the Advancement of Women was the basic document for all actions aimed at promoting equality. The National Committee for the Integration of Women in Development had indeed been ineffective and required restructuring, because it had been established before the National Policy had been introduced, and because it had not benefited from the present culture of gender awareness. The National Policy would be implemented through a Plan of Action and benefit from the Ministry's increased resources.

36. **Ms. Obono Engono** (Equatorial Guinea) said that the Constitution guaranteed equal opportunities for men and women, while her country's Commission on

Human Rights was responsible for ensuring respect for human rights — not just those set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also those laid down in all international instruments ratified by the Government. The Commission had the task of receiving, investigating and resolving reported violations of human rights. There was no discrimination in that regard, and all citizens were thus equal before the law. In accordance with the provisions of the Convention, Equatorial Guinea was in the process of formulating a specific law on violence against women.

37. **Ms. Librada** (Equatorial Guinea) said that her country's Commission on Human Rights was independent of the Ministry of Justice and had its own regulations. It reported annually to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on the situation of women in Equatorial Guinea. There was no absolute separation between the various State bodies, as they all tried to coordinate their activities. With respect to mediation by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women (MINASCOM), she said that often complaints involved questions of marital discord and sometimes reconciliation was impossible. Women were able to appeal for separation from their husbands and were certainly not forced to drop their appeals. They were referred to the competent authorities and given the appropriate support.

38. There were not many non-governmental organizations, in the generally understood sense, but there were many women's associations which, since most women worked in agriculture, tended to focus on production-related issues. The women's associations functioned independently, but in accordance with the National Policy. The Ministry actively supported women's activities, through seminars, conferences and awareness-raising activities aimed at educating girls in equity and gender. Those outreach activities were carried out in the most remote villages of the country and in local languages. Since traditional attitudes were very strong, it was important to take a measured approach and give communities time to assimilate the information.

39. **Ms. Obono Engono** (Equatorial Guinea) said that the issue of customary marriages was very difficult, and was tied up with the question of stereotyped attitudes. Marriages were traditionally arranged by the parents without the consent of the two future spouses. However, whereas in the past, the new wife could

indeed be jailed if her father failed to pay the agreed dowry, the Government had taken steps to ensure that the woman could legally divorce her husband and thereby avoid a prison sentence. Similarly, although wives did not yet enjoy the right to inherit their husbands' possessions, the Government was formulating draft legislation to ensure that women could assert their inheritance rights. There were many problems with traditional marriages, but it was hard to change chauvinistic attitudes because there were so few women in positions of power. Within the context of the 2004 Plan of Action, efforts were under way to formulate an act regulating customary marriages.

40. Turning to the Committee's question concerning the elderly, she noted that there was a non-governmental organization for the protection of the elderly, which received funds from the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women. With respect to women's access to the legal system, there were courts to which women could appeal, throughout the country, and in all municipalities and communities. The Ministry was fighting to construct a true judicial basis for handling women's complaints and to ensure that women enjoyed their rights under the Constitution. Lastly, she noted that MINASCOM, like all other Ministries, was funded through an independent budgetary allocation, and that the State did not practice discrimination in that regard.

41. **Ms. Librada** (Equatorial Guinea) said that the Convention had the same status as domestic laws. Considerable efforts were being made to make the general population and the judiciary more aware of the Convention's content, and there had been cases in which the Convention had been invoked and had prevailed over domestic laws. The Family Code was still at the drafting stage, but would not conflict with the draft act regulating customary marriages currently being considered by the legislature. Indeed, the two pieces of legislation would together strengthen the protection of women. Non-governmental organizations had not been involved in preparing the country's periodic reports, as Equatorial Guinea had not been aware of that requirement. Most such reports were prepared and funded by the State, and there was no real tradition of bilateral or multilateral coordination. The State did sometimes intervene together with certain agencies but, again, those interventions were almost always State funded.

42. **Ms. Obono Engono** (Equatorial Guinea) said that certain construction projects were being carried out in local communities on behalf of women and were financed out of the State's public investment budget. There was no discrimination involved in the allocation of those funds. The projects involved the construction of shelters which would offer women in precarious situations a chance to become literate and enter the labour market.

43. **Mr. Mbengono** (Equatorial Guinea), referring to Part III of Equatorial Guinea's combined fourth and fifth periodic report (CEDAW/C/GNQ/4-5), said that efforts were being made to raise girls' awareness of the importance of education and to ensure that girls who became pregnant while at school did not abandon their secondary-school studies.

44. **Ms. Obono Engono** (Equatorial Guinea) said that prostitution was strictly prohibited in Equatorial Guinea and punishable by imprisonment. However, the oil boom had brought many foreign nationals to the country, and some were using their superior purchasing power to lure innocent, economically disadvantaged young girls into prostitution. The Government had made strenuous efforts to end prostitution, by enacting laws and increasing the police presence in the areas concerned, but thus far without success.

45. **Ms. Librada** (Equatorial Guinea) stressed that her delegation was not attempting to justify the reasons for prostitution, which was a matter of supply and demand. The efforts under way to persuade young prostitutes to abandon their profession in favour of completing their school education or pursuing technical training had already achieved positive results.

Articles 7 to 9

46. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** said that it was 20 years since Equatorial Guinea had unreservedly ratified the Convention, which had become an integral part of its domestic law. Coupled with the political reforms embodied in the Constitution adopted in 1992, it provided the legal framework necessary for the wider involvement of women in political and public life that was well overdue. If the electoral laws of Equatorial Guinea did not provide for the system most conducive to the success of women candidates, namely proportional representation, it would perhaps be advisable to establish a quota system or reserve a certain number of electoral seats for women, as in

Rwanda. Political parties should also be encouraged to put forward female candidates, and penalties could be imposed for any failure to do so. Furthermore, there was no reason why the President of Equatorial Guinea should not appoint more female ministers. Exercise of the will which clearly existed to implement such changes was the key to ensuring that the women of Equatorial Guinea enjoyed equality with its men.

47. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** asked whether the foreign spouses of citizens of Equatorial Guinea were entitled to retain citizenship of their countries of origin and whether divorce or the death of their spouse affected their citizenship of Equatorial Guinea. She also enquired whether women were entitled to acquire a passport and travel without the consent of their husband or, in the case of single women, of a male relative.

48. **Ms. Gaspard** commented that the statistic cited in connection with the female composition of the elected national parliament, namely 14 per cent, had been omitted from the report, as had statistics relating to the number of women elected to local assemblies. She requested information about the role of women in the latter and asked whether Equatorial Guinea had a committee dedicated to women's affairs. She also asked whether the Convention was cited in debates on such issues as the reform or drafting of laws relevant to women and further wished to know whether foreign nationals married to citizens of Equatorial Guinea were entitled to transmit their own nationality to their children.

49. **Ms. Obono Engono** (Equatorial Guinea) said that she had taken note of the excellent recommendations made by Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani and confirmed that foreign nationals married to citizens of Equatorial Guinea were entitled to retain their own nationality. She also reiterated that, whether born in or out of wedlock, any child of a mother or father who was a national of Equatorial Guinea was entitled to that same nationality. The citizenship of a foreign spouse was unaffected by divorce, separation or death, while on account of prevailing traditions, rural women were less likely than their urban counterparts to be able to travel without the consent of their spouse.

50. Concerning the low percentage of female members of parliament, she affirmed that there was no discrimination against female electoral candidates; in that regard, women enjoyed equal rights and

opportunities with men but were either unaware of that fact or were too reticent to stand for election. Information campaigns were necessary to promote the further involvement of women in politics, particularly since those who did run for public office stood a good chance of election. The statistics had nonetheless improved; only 6 per cent of the deputies in the previous parliament had been women. Women elected to local assemblies would serve as delegates for their own areas. However, the only woman to have recently held such a position had died, and there was currently only one female provincial deputy.

Articles 10 to 14

51. **Ms. Patten** said that, in its reports and oral presentation, Equatorial Guinea had stressed the impact of social and cultural patterns, including stereotyped roles and customary marriages. At the same time, however, it had emphasized the absence of discrimination and failed to indicate that the customs and traditions in question posed an obstacle to implementation of the Convention. She therefore wished to know what effective measures were in place to guarantee that girls had the same educational, vocational and career opportunities as boys. In addition, was there any system in place for compiling data on girls in education, such as the number of rural and urban girls at university, subjects studied, scholarships available and so on? Lastly, she wondered whether the re-education programmes run by religious congregations would perpetrate stereotyped roles and asked whether the Government had any input into the curricula for students who had dropped out.

52. **Ms. Khan** said that the assertions made in the report concerning the absence of discrimination in areas such as health demonstrated a lack of understanding of the Convention, articles 1 and 2 of which formed the terms of reference for all subsequent articles. With reference to article 12, and given the critical health situation of women in Equatorial Guinea, the State party should consult general recommendation 24. She asked whether female genital mutilation was practised by any of the country's ethnic groups and, if not legally prohibited, what other measures had been taken to eradicate it. In addition, was any national AIDS policy in place, was screening for AIDS voluntary or compulsory and what treatment measures were available to women and children with AIDS? She also wished to know how Act No. 2 of

1990 and the Labour Act applied to the rural labour force, which was largely female, as well as how the Social Welfare Act applied to rural women and what benefit they derived from it. Lastly, in view of the awareness-raising activities of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women (MINASCOM) among rural women, had the Convention been translated into local languages and how were women involved in the national policy for female advancement?

53. **Ms. Shin** said that, whereas the report repeatedly asserted the absence of discrimination, any failure to address the drop in the percentage of girls in secondary education and the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy would be tantamount to discrimination against women in education and consequently employment. Temporary special measures to improve the literacy rate and increase the percentage of girls in higher education were imperative. The majority of scholarships, for example, should be given to girls. Lastly, did rural women retain control of money earned from their productive activities?

54. **Ms. Saiga** asked how many years of education were compulsory and requested a gender-disaggregated breakdown of the statistics on enrolment and drop-out rates. The reform of school curricula and textbooks included those used in the fourth year of secondary school, for instance, but was that year of schooling compulsory? She doubted, however, that the extension of compulsory education was the most effective way of reducing the number of dropouts from primary school. What other measures were therefore being employed to tackle that problem?

55. **Ms. Achmad** expressed concern about the apparent conflict between the inferior educational, health and employment status of women in Equatorial Guinea and the assertions made in the report that women suffered no discrimination in that connection. In article 1 of the Convention, the definition of the term "discrimination against women" meant that not only should women enjoy equal opportunities but also equal results. With reference to the elimination of stereotyped roles, she asked whether the revised school curricula and textbooks would incorporate the same domestic life skills for both girls and boys alike. Moreover, was any gender-perspective training in place for teachers?

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.