



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Forty-fourth session

Summary record of the 893rd meeting (Chamber A)

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 24 July 2009, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gabr

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

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

Combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (CEDAW/C/LAO/7) (continued)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 10 to 14

2. **The Chairperson** invited members of the Committee to continue posing questions on articles 10 to 14.

3. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** said that she would like to know the impact of the international financial crisis on the economy, in particular on the garment and textile sectors. She wondered how the compliance of foreign companies with national and international labour laws and standards was ensured. She would appreciate information on Government programmes to strengthen the skills of women so that they could access higher paying jobs. The Government should take note of General Recommendation No. 26 on Women Migrant Workers. Information on access to all available treatment and therapy for migrant women who had contracted HIV/AIDS outside of the Lao People's Democratic Republic would also be welcome.

4. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** asked for information about financial initiatives that the Government had implemented or hoped to implement to ensure that health services were geographically and financially accessible. She was also interested to know how traditional medicine could be incorporated into specialized, professional health services to provide comprehensive, sensitive care to ethnic and rural women. She wondered how the Government coordinated with the Lao Women's Union and other women's organizations to raise awareness of individual responsibility for health. She would like information about Government programmes for HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns, in particular for migrant women, and how family planning education was used to raise awareness of the risks involved in early maternity, lack of birth spacing and poor nutrition. She would like to know the main causes of death in women, in particular the rate of death owing to

breast and cervical-uterine cancer. It would be helpful to know more about any prevention and treatment programmes for those cancers as well. She would also like details on how many illegal abortions were performed and how abortion affected death rates.

5. **Ms. Hayashi** said that she would like to know the percentage of the health-care budget in relation to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and what plans the Government had to increase the budget. She asked for more information on programmes to discourage early marriage and to include men in reproductive health programmes.

6. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked how deficiencies in agricultural production affected women's nutrition and how the Government ensured that foreign investment did not negatively impact the agricultural sector and, by extension, the environment and women in rural areas. She would like to know how unexploded ordnance in rural areas was addressed. Detailed information about microcredit extended to women and measures to discourage the cultivation of opium and how they affected women would also be helpful. Finally, she would like to know how schools had been made more accessible.

7. **Ms. Ara Begum** said that she would like to know whether the socio-economic development plan targeted ethnic minority groups, whether rural and ethnic women had access to credit and other Government facilities, and how access to land for ethnic groups was addressed. She would like to know whether there were temporary special measures to encourage rural women to take leadership positions. The Government must take action to reduce illiteracy among ethnic and rural women. She asked about access to medical and financial assistance for victims of domestic violence in rural areas. Finally, she asked for information on measures taken to protect the rights of elderly and disabled women.

8. **Ms. Chutikul** said that she would like more information on programmes to aid women who went from rural to urban areas to work in prostitution. She wondered how the National Steering Committee for Combating Human Trafficking was connected to provincial operations and whether multidisciplinary teams had been established in that regard. She would welcome information on Asian Development Bank projects linked to the National Growth and Poverty

Eradication Strategy, including objectives, targets for rural women's development, results and impacts on rural women. The Government could require a gender impact analysis in all feasibility studies before development projects were implemented, including foreign investment projects. It could also request technical assistance from the international community and agencies including the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank.

9. She asked for figures on the number of incomplete school buildings and whether there were plans to improve them. She would appreciate more information on the school curriculum, in particular at the primary level, and wondered whether it was adjusted for relevance according to school location. More information about the persistence of harmful traditional practices among some ethnic groups was needed, as some sources indicated that non-ethnic men often referenced harmful traditional practices to justify their rape of ethnic women. She wondered whether groups at risk could be studied to identify harmful practices and design strategies to combat them.

10. **Ms. Lachanthaboune** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the Ministry of Education had begun education reform the better to serve socio-economic development. Along with its development partners, it had implemented initiatives including the Draft Education Sector Development Framework, the Education Law and the National Education System Reform Strategy 2006-2015. Initiatives targeted remote, isolated and underserved populations, in particular women and ethnic groups. Scholarships and other incentives were available to enhance student recruitment and retention and to strengthen teacher training in the poorest districts. The Framework incorporated development strategies to strengthen and accelerate national and local expenditures for reform. All stakeholders were committed to meeting the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The Framework had set short, medium and long term policies and targets, including the 2002 Basic Education (Girls) Project. School feeding programmes reduced family food shortages and encouraged parents to allow their children, in particular girls, to study. Such programmes, along with multigrade teaching techniques, were particularly important in establishing complete schools in small

villages and remote areas where parents did not want their children to travel far from home.

11. Targets for girls' attendance at vocational schools and in higher education had been set at 50 per cent. Forty per cent of scholarships to vocational schools were reserved for women, ethnic groups and poor families, while 20 per cent of scholarships for higher education were reserved for girls, ethnic groups and poor families and 40 per cent for teacher education. The new curriculum included an additional year following secondary school and addressed gender and technical themes. Schools had to follow the required curriculum for 80 per cent of their instructional material, while they could concentrate the remaining 20 per cent on areas relevant to their cultures. Primary and secondary education was free.

12. The Government intended to improve financial strategies, budget management, monitoring and review systems. A national policy on inclusive education was being drafted which focused on creating an education centre to research equality in education and to establish regular monitoring and reporting systems. Alternative education methods had been approved by the Government. The education budget was not yet at the level recommended by the Millennium Development Goals, but the Government hoped to achieve it by 2015.

13. Turning to education for ethnic groups, there were mini-boarding schools at the district, provincial, regional and national levels. A school near the National University of Laos was dedicated to gifted ethnic children who were given scholarships for higher education. Less gifted students were given additional preparation for higher education. Literacy and bilingual education were addressed using the Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) approach in an effort to serve all ethnic groups. Students from ethnic groups often entered into teacher training and returned to teach both Lao and their ethnic languages in their villages. The national policy on inclusive education would pay greater attention to ethnic groups, women and the disabled.

14. **Mr. Heuangvongsy** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that access to health care in remote areas was difficult owing to the mountainous terrain, the dispersion of the population and the lack of infrastructure. The Government intended to implement measures to reduce maternal mortality, including

extending the health village model to rural areas, implementing a child survival campaign, encouraging breast feeding, increasing immunization campaigns and raising awareness on nutrition and the prevention of contagious diseases. In addition to other measures and comprehensive legislation on health care, the Government had adopted the National Nutrition Policy and an action plan was being drawn up to establish training programmes for health officials. Health-care facilities and networks had been expanded nationwide, medical kits had been provided to all villages and dispensaries had been established and improved in the provinces.

15. National development was closely linked to factors including the legacy of war. Such factors also affected high maternal and infant mortality rates, a result of poor nutrition, reluctance to breastfeed and contagious diseases, among other health issues. The Ministry of Public Health had formulated reproductive health policies and implemented measures to improve health care services and reduce maternal and infant mortality rates. Current data on breast cancer would be included in the next report.

16. Turning to the evaluation of the situation of HIV/AIDS, the Ministry of Public Health had adopted a number of measures, including the creation of a steering committee in conjunction with the National Assembly, UNDP and other relevant agencies. There was also the national HIV/AIDS prevention centre. The Government did its best to provide equal and adequate treatment to all victims of HIV/AIDS, with approximately 60 per cent of those infected receiving treatment. In terms of prevention, it encouraged the use of condoms through distribution campaigns. There were four provincial treatment centres for women and two for men, advocacy campaigns to educate youth on risks and prevention and prevention and treatment awareness-raising campaigns targeting prostitutes. Development project contractors were informed of HIV/AIDS risk and prevention measures. Prevention centres involved all stakeholders, including those infected with HIV/AIDS, to disseminate information. Infected migrant workers did not face discrimination.

17. The health budget allocation had increased from approximately 0.52 per cent of GDP in 2005-2006 to approximately 14 per cent in 2007-2008. While there were health insurance regulations for the private and public sectors and incentive policies for rural areas, life insurance funds were needed. The Government had

mobilized participation through fund-raising activities, and had received assistance from international organizations and foundations and friendly countries.

18. **Mr. Faiphengyao** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the global financial crisis had impacted women workers and export companies in particular. While there was a high demand for Government products, some Government workers had been let go. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare provided women workers with skills development training programmes. The law stipulated that men and women must receive equal pay for equal work. There were public and private welfare systems and institutions.

19. The Ministry had collaborated with the Kingdom of Thailand to address migrant workers. It screened them to verify their nationality, to protect their legitimate interests and to ensure that they received appropriate remuneration for their work. When they returned, the Ministry helped them find alternative occupations and provided skill development programmes. The movement of seasonal migrant workers was monitored.

20. There was a clear strategy to remove all unexploded ordinance from agricultural, hospital and school areas by 2020. Ethnic groups enjoyed the same access to low interest microcredit facilities as other groups, with equal access among ethnic groups. Great efforts had been made to encourage alternative crops for opium growers, in particular for rural women and children. As a result, many cultivated maize or rice, or bred livestock. A pilot microcredit programme had been implemented in 95 villages to create permanent job opportunities for rural women and to prevent trafficking in women and children, with satisfactory results.

21. **Ms. Leudedmounsone** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that agricultural development was a key priority in national development and in the advancement of women. The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy emphasized increasing the number of women trained to breed livestock and cultivate cash crops, and the amount of agricultural land allocated to women. Land allocation was equal for men and women. The Asian Development Bank provided microcredit facilities for ethnic and rural women, though the impact of the global financial crisis had caused income in general to decline. The

Government had adopted a number of measures to prevent the negative environmental impact of foreign direct investments and to ensure women's participation in income generation in the poorest regions. The Lao Women's Union protected the legitimate interests of women and children and had established programmes to increase their roles in all areas and to eradicate stereotypes. People were encouraged to respect women's rights and gender equality.

22. **Mr. Phommachanh** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that prostitution was clearly illegal, though hidden prostitution existed. The Government was trying to create work and educational opportunities for everyone as a first step in combating the problem. It had also organized awareness-raising campaigns. The National Steering Committee for Combating Human Trafficking worked closely with satellite offices in every province.

Articles 15 and 16

23. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that she would like to know the divorce rate, whether grounds for divorce were equal for men and women, what the process was and how long it could take. She would like to hear more about the provisions of the law that sought to establish fault for divorce and if there were any plans to change it. She wondered whether the definition of joint property included intangible property. While the practice of taking a minor wife was prohibited, there was information that it still existed in some ethnic groups.

24. **Mr. Kiattisak** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the Family Law had set the age for marriage at 18 for men and women. The amended Family Law stated that divorce could take place in front of a village chief if there were no serious issues such as child custody. If there were serious concerns, then the couple had to appear before the court, which would require them to reflect for a period of three months before it decided the case. The process could be appealed and an annulment could be granted. The definition of joint property included tangible and intangible assets acquired during the marriage. The delegation had already begun to discuss the removal of the clause governing unequal division of property when one party was considered at fault. Taking a minor wife was illegal and anyone engaging in the practice was considered guilty of adultery. While a number of

ethnic groups still engaged in the practice, it was on the decline.

25. **The Chairperson** expressed the hope that, at the consideration of the next periodic report, there would be greater participation by NGOs and civil society. Although resources were limited, she urged the Government to pay special attention to the needs of rural women, who represented the largest segment of the female population.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.