



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Fiftieth session

Summary record of the 1008th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 11 October 2011, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Rasekh (Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of Ms. Pimentel, Ms. Rasekh, 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 initial and second to fourth periodic reports of Lesotho (continued)
(CEDAW/C/LSO/1-4; CEDAW/C/LSO/Q/1-4 and CEDAW/C/LSO/Q/1-4/Add.1)*

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

Article 9

2. **Ms. Schulz** said that it was clear from the report (CEDAW/C/LSO/1-4) and the responses to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/LSO/Q/1-4/Add.1) that section 40 of the Constitution of Lesotho discriminated against women with regard to the transmission of nationality to a foreign spouse. She stressed that nationality formed the bond between a State and its citizens. It was therefore of the utmost practical and symbolic importance to eliminate discrimination against women in that area. As Lesotho had not entered a reservation to article 9, it should bring its legislation and Constitution into line with the Convention. She therefore urged the Government to remove such discrimination from the statute book in the course of the Lesotho Law Reform Commission's review process.

3. Lesotho had ratified the South African Development Community (SADC) 2008 Protocol on Gender and Development which called for the review, amendment or repeal of discriminatory laws by 2015. She therefore hoped that, by the time the next constructive dialogue was held with the State party, discrimination against women with regard to the acquisition of nationality by a foreign spouse would have been eliminated. In that connection, she asked when section 40 of the Constitution would be amended.

4. **Ms. Mahase-Moiloa** (Lesotho) said that she could not give a definite date for the amendment of that section of the Constitution. That would be one of the issues covered by the forthcoming referendum.

5. **Ms. Patten** asked when the referendum would take place. She would like to know what policy the Government was following in that respect. The Government did not appear to regard the removal of that form of discrimination as a priority. As it had not entered a reservation to article 9 of the Convention, she wondered why the Government had not already repealed that provision of the Constitution.

6. **Ms. Mahase-Moiloa** (Lesotho) explained that the Constitution had only recently been amended to permit the enactment of a Referendum Act which would make it possible to consult the Basotho nation on a number of issues concerning discrimination against women.

7. In the Basotho culture a woman married into her husband's family. For that reason, when a Basotho man married a foreigner she acquired his nationality, but if a Basotho woman married a foreigner she lost her nationality. The Government recognized the need to change that situation and to give Basotho women married to foreigners the right to retain their nationality and to pass it on to their children. That would, however, require a departure from deeply rooted cultural attitudes.

8. **Ms. Lepono** (Lesotho) said that in the culture of her country a man married and a woman was married; therefore, a woman who was married to a Basotho man automatically acquired his citizenship. Since the transfer of nationality was currently under discussion in Lesotho, she hoped that that issue would be resolved in the near future.

9. **Ms. Acar** said that the notion of a woman marrying into her husband's family was unacceptable, because the entire Convention rested on the idea that women held fundamental human rights as individuals, irrespective of their marital status. Culture could not be used as an excuse for discrimination against women and the violation of their fundamental human rights. She suggested that Lesotho should consider the question of nationality from that perspective.

10. **Ms. Patten** said that she wished to draw attention to some best practices in southern Africa. In Botswana, where the same cultural argument had been employed to justify discriminatory laws on citizenship, the case of *The Attorney General of the Republic of Botswana v. Unity Dow* had culminated in the reform of those laws. A similar case in Mauritius in the 1990s had also led to the amendment of the law.

11. **Ms. Lepono** (Lesotho) said that her delegation had noted the Committee's concerns. She agreed that culture was no excuse for discrimination. The fact that Lesotho had ratified the Convention showed that it was committed to removing all the discriminatory laws that were still in existence. A substantial amount of legislation had already been enacted for that purpose. Her country would ultimately achieve the goal of eliminating all discrimination against women, but that would take time.

Article 10

12. **Ms. Bailey** said that the girls who were not enrolled in primary education probably lived in rural areas. Their access to schooling was limited by early marriage, child labour, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, poverty and their parents' inability to pay for auxiliary items such as uniforms and textbooks. Were those problems exacerbated by a lack of schools? Given that it was particularly dangerous for girls to have to travel long distances to school, she wished to know what strategies were in place to improve the educational infrastructure, provide adequate educational equipment, including teaching materials and textbooks, in all primary schools and to train more teachers. More specifically, how did the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2005–2015 address the obstacles to the provision of basic education for girls in rural and remote areas? Did the plan cover the expansion of infrastructure that was needed in order to ensure that all girls could attend secondary school? She requested data on male and female enrolment in vocational and technical education and the options pursued by boys and girls in that sector. That information would give an indication of the prevalence of traditional norms which influenced women's subsequent participation in paid work. She noted that, at university level, female students were clustered in highly feminized areas and were underrepresented in science and technology. For that reason, she wished to know what temporary special measures, such as scholarships for girls, were being contemplated as incentives to persuade them to opt for science and technology.

13. Lastly, she pointed out that the responses to the list of issues did not provide any information on the situation with regard to sexual harassment and violence against schoolgirls, or on measures to address those issues, concerning which a 2011 study had confirmed that male teachers were the main offenders. Were perpetrators prosecuted?

14. **Mr. Mosisili** (Lesotho) said that the distance children had to travel to attend school affected boys as much as girls. However, it was the Government's policy to make sure that schools were situated no more than 1 kilometre from a village. There was no lack of schools in his country. On average, there were no more than 40 children per class. When free compulsory primary education had been introduced, the Government had decided to build more classrooms and increase the number of teachers throughout the country.

15. While it was not the Government's policy to try to influence what subjects a girl chose to study, there were too many teachers and nurses for the number of posts available

and, for that reason, it was discouraging young women from training for those professions. In 2011, 40 scholarships had been reserved for women to study medicine abroad.

16. Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, anybody engaging in a sexual act with a minor under the age of 16 was regarded as a rapist and would be liable to 15 years' imprisonment. The Education Act 2010 and the Children's Protection and Welfare Act 2011 provided that no child could be expelled or denied any education rights by any educational institution on account of pregnancy. Awareness-raising and educational programmes were being run to discourage schoolgirls from becoming pregnant and to help them build a future for themselves by acquiring life skills.

17. **Ms. Bailey** said that girls faced a greater risk of sexual violence on their way to school than boys. Since not all children were enrolled in primary school, there must be a lack of places for them. She wished to know what incentives existed to encourage girls to go into scientific and technological occupations which were traditionally male-dominated, because they offered girls completely different career paths, job opportunities and wages, all of which would go a long way to reducing the wage gap. She reiterated her questions regarding sexual harassment in schools.

18. **Ms. Mahase-Moiloa** (Lesotho) said that free primary education had been made compulsory one year earlier, because the Government wanted every child to attend school. It had yet to determine whether it had achieved that goal.

19. She was unaware of any instances of sexual harassment in schools. Her delegation would verify the situation and provide the necessary information. The requisite steps would be taken to curb any such behaviour in schools in Lesotho.

20. The question of distance from home to school did not really arise in the primary sector. It was, however, more of a challenge in secondary education. Girls whose parents suffered from HIV/AIDS often had to nurse them as well as take care of their siblings. Combined schools had been opened in order to deal with that situation. Those schools had crèches where girls could leave their little brothers and sisters during the daytime and attend classes in the same establishment.

Article 11

21. **Ms. Patten** noted that, unfortunately, girls' educational proficiency did not translate into well-paid jobs in the State party, since a survey conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2008 had shown that women's average monthly pay amounted to only 45 per cent of that of men in the private sector and 83 per cent in the public sector. She therefore wished to know what efforts were being made to close the wage gap and ensure pay equity in the private sector, and whether there were any specific provisions on equal pay for equal work and equal pay for work of equal value in the Labour Code and other related legislation.

22. Since wage disparities were often due to a patriarchal system and to the belief that wives should earn less than their husbands, she asked what was being done to prevent sexist notions influencing recruitment decisions. Given reports of poor enforcement of the Labour Code and related legislation, she wished to know if the Labour Inspectorate was trained to address such discrimination. Did the Government have in place a pay equity planning process for the private sector? Did Lesotho require technical assistance from the ILO in order to devise a gender-neutral job evaluation method to counter the occupational segregation that still prevailed? Lastly, she was interested to know what measures were being taken to promote the integration into the formal sector of the large number of women working in the informal sector.

23. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega** asked if any measures were being taken to end the employment of girls as domestic workers. She wondered what the reasons were for the differences in the length of maternity leave mentioned in paragraph 159 of the State party's report (CEDAW/C/LSO/1-4) and why no provision had been made in Lesotho for a statutory period of maternity leave. Similarly, she was surprised that employers were under no obligation to allow a parent to take leave of absence to care for a sick child.

24. She would like to know if any courses existed to train women with disabilities for employment in the public sector and if a job quota was reserved for them in that sector. Lastly, she asked whether any measures existed to ensure that customary law did not prevent women from enjoying equal job opportunities and that in traditionally minded families women and girls did not encounter obstacles to employment.

25. **Ms. Mahase-Moiloa** (Lesotho) said that the Labour Code Order 1992 provided for the domestication of the relevant ILO conventions to which Lesotho was a party. It applied mostly to the private sector, but not to the civil service. The Code stipulated that a woman was entitled to two weeks' maternity leave if she had worked for the same employer for one year and to six weeks' maternity leave in the case of a longer period of employment. She wished to know whether the Committee considered that the Lesotho Labour Code was incompatible with ILO standards and, if so, in what respect, in order that the Code could be amended.

26. The issue of domestic employment affected both boys and girls. Adult deaths owing to the HIV/AIDS pandemic meant that orphaned children often became heads of household. For that reason, school-aged boys and girls sometimes had to go out to work to support their younger siblings.

27. There was no discrimination against girls when it came to choosing an occupation. The only criterion was capability. Many girls studied science subjects. The Government was making a deliberate effort to ensure that women were represented at decision-making level, especially when the decisions in question concerned women and the whole of society.

28. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega** said that the lack of statistics on child labour and of measures to resolve the problem was worrying. She drew attention to the fact that the length of maternity leave in the textile, clothing and leather manufacturing industry was inconsistent with that in other industrial sectors.

29. **Ms. Patten** asked again what tools had been developed under the Labour Code in order to close the wage gap in the private sector, thereby ensuring that there was equal pay for work of equal value. Moreover, she had not received an answer to her question regarding policy for the integration into the formal sector of the large number of women working in the informal sector in rural areas.

30. **Ms. Bareiro-Bobadilla** drew attention to the worldwide ILO campaign to eliminate the worst forms of child labour and asked whether Lesotho was considering ratification of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). She explained that, since many poor, uneducated women were employed as domestic workers throughout the world, the Committee was very concerned about the discrimination from which they suffered as a result of that work.

31. **Ms. Bailey** said that the wage gap was linked to occupational segregation. One means of closing the wage gap and eliminating that segregation was therefore to reverse the patterns of enrolment in tertiary education where girls tended to opt for teaching, health sciences and humanities, which were the less well-paid sectors of the labour market.

32. **Ms. Mahase-Moiloa** (Lesotho) said that she had never heard any complaints in her country about any failure to give equal pay for equal work. The Education Act 2010 had introduced compulsory primary education and had made it an offence to employ a school-

aged child. She therefore hoped that the Act would put an end to child labour. The supply of at least one free meal a day at school was one way of lessening the impact of poverty on AIDS orphans.

33. Turning to the issue of women in the informal sector, she explained that the Business Council chaired by the Prime Minister included representatives of women from the informal sector and from small and medium-sized enterprises. The Council offered a forum for direct dialogue with the business world, which supplied the Government with first-hand information indicating what support measures might be necessary. Lesotho would ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) in due course.

34. There were no restrictions on the subjects which girls could study at the tertiary level of education and many girls displayed a keen interest in science subjects. There was never any sexual stereotyping or any suggestion that particular subjects were more suitable for boys than girls. One problem was the lack of a national medical school; many Basotho young people who studied medicine abroad never returned to Lesotho. Recently, 40 women had received government scholarships to train as doctors in other countries and it was hoped that a good number of them would return to Lesotho on completion of their studies.

35. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega** said that she still wished to know whether the Labour Code stipulated that parents must be allowed time off to care for sick children or whether it merely stated that it should be possible to obtain leave of absence in the event of a dependent child's illness. She had not received a reply to her question regarding customary law's influence on a woman's entry into the labour market. She also wished to know whether any specific measures were in place to assist women in the informal sector.

36. **Ms. Patten** said that, since the purpose of the Convention was to guarantee substantive equality, the Committee wished to know what efforts were being made to ensure the proper implementation and enforcement of the Labour Code and related legislation. For example, what was being done to monitor the private sector? She was surprised that the delegation was not shocked by the findings of the ILO survey which had revealed a huge wage gap between men and women. She also drew attention to the fact that the Labour Code contained some discriminatory provisions concerning the employment of women for underground work.

37. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked if there were any data on sexual harassment in the workplace. In addition, she wished to know what laws were in place to protect women from such harassment.

38. **Mr. Masenyetse** (Lesotho) said that there was virtually no wage gap between men and women and there was no institutional arrangement which permitted differentiation in the payment of wages. The principles of equal pay for equal work and equal pay for work of equal value were applied. The labour market was open to men and women. There was no occupational segregation. Advertisements for executive positions in the private sector specified that applications from women were encouraged or that women applicants would be given preference. As for posts in the mining and construction industries, the chief executive officer of one of the biggest mines in the country was a woman. The fact that women occupied top management posts should make it easier for them to negotiate better terms of employment with regard to maternity leave.

Article 12

39. **Ms. Arocha Dominguez**, noting from the State party's report and responses to the list of issues that a considerable number of plans, programmes, strategies and other measures had been adopted in the health field, asked why those measures had done so little to improve women's health status. Given that the chief mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS was through sexual intercourse, she wished to know if a national strategy to promote the

use of condoms to prevent sexually transmissible diseases had been introduced since the State party's report had been written. Lastly, she requested more information about Lesotho's sex education programme. What measures were being taken in schools and health-care centres and through the media to alert the population to the dangers of the sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS?

40. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked whether the maternal mortality rate had changed since 2009. Had the road map mentioned in paragraph 193 of the report been successful? How many Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets had been met in the State party? She was alarmed by the high abortion rate among very young girls and by the fact that 16 per cent of admissions to obstetric and gynaecological wards were due to complications arising from abortion. Were those complications caused by illegal abortions? She wished to know if there were any sex education programmes to prevent teenage girls from becoming pregnant and having abortions.

41. She asked if Lesotho required more technical assistance, capacity-building and financial support in the health management sphere. Lastly, she enquired about the status of women's mental health. What kind of psychosocial counselling was available for women suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and depression caused by abortion, unwanted pregnancy and other health issues?

42. **Mr. Masenyetse** (Lesotho) said that the Government had striven to revolutionize what was probably one of the most highly subsidized health systems in the world. More than 100 health facilities had been built and 50 had been upgraded in partnership with the Millennium Challenge Account, under funding awarded to Lesotho because of its democratic governance. Those measures had improved women's access to health care and had reduced the distance they had to travel to receive such care.

43. He regretted that young people who were trained abroad as doctors and nurses failed to return home because they could earn better salaries elsewhere. That situation was crippling the health systems of the developing world. A concerted effort was therefore needed to address that issue without delay.

44. **Ms. Mahase-Moiloa** (Lesotho) said that many women used family planning to regulate the number of children they had, but the contraceptive measures they used did not protect them from infection with HIV/AIDS. The main problem lay in women's lack of empowerment to negotiate safe sex. The Government had initially attempted to grapple with HIV/AIDS by advocating abstinence, being faithful and using a condom. It had then launched a "Know your status" campaign aimed at offering treatment to persons living with HIV/AIDS as early as possible. The Government was currently trying to engineer behavioural change. Of course, antiretroviral drugs were available free of charge for those who needed them.

45. The Ministry of Local Government was building roads in remote areas in order to facilitate access to health-care centres. It was hoped that infrastructure development and health reforms would bring about a reduction in the admittedly high infant mortality rate in the near future.

46. Lesotho would probably be able to meet MDG targets in the areas of education, gender, water and sanitation, but other targets remained a challenge.

47. **Mr. Mosisili** (Lesotho) explained that statistics on maternal mortality were compiled from biennial health surveys. The next survey would be held at the end of 2011. Abortion could be performed only on certain medical grounds, for example if pregnancy resulted from rape or incest. It was possible to estimate the number of illegal abortions only from the number of foetuses which had been found, but it was unclear if the figure reflected the true situation in the country.

48. Financial support was just as important as technical assistance, because there was no point in building capacity if there was no money to implement projects. Technical and financial support should therefore go hand in hand.

49. Nurses working in health clinics carried out basic health checks and acted as counsellors. The National University of Lesotho had devised a new pastoral care course which offered training in the treatment of HIV/AIDS-related problems and general sexual counselling.

50. Sexual harassment was classified as an offence liable to prosecution under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Article 13

51. **Mr. Bruun** welcomed the adoption of the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 2006 because it had enabled married women to open a bank account in their own name without their spouse's consent. He was, however, concerned by reports that it was difficult for women to obtain travel or identity documents, since the lack of such documents might make it difficult for women to assert their rights under the Act. He asked what action was being taken to remedy that situation.

52. What steps would be taken to expand the Gender Credit Programme and how was it financed? How many loans had been granted under the programme?

53. He wished to know what was being done to promote equality in recreation, sports and cultural life.

54. Lastly, he expressed concern about the fact that in Lesotho two thirds of people over the age of 70 were women who were at risk of poverty, since land was owned by men. What measures had been adopted to ensure that women could lead a dignified life when they grew older?

55. **Ms. Lepono** (Lesotho) said that toilets were installed in every home in areas with mains water supply. As had been explained at the previous meeting, women could acquire land as a result of the amendment of the Land Act 1979. It was impossible, however, to quantify loans obtained by women, since banks would not divulge confidential information of that nature. The Land Act 2010 made it possible for women to obtain loans by using land as collateral. The Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 2006 likewise facilitated women's access to credit. Several programmes were being implemented to improve women's access to finance. The Post Bank offered rural financing facilities to small investors and entrepreneurs. In 2008, the Government had established the Rural Financing Intermediation Programme in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The purpose of the programme was to facilitate rural communities' access to finance by building the capacity of member-based financial institutions, such as credit cooperatives and associations. The Moliko Finance Trust also provided microcredit for 892 members, 85 per cent of whom were women. Since its establishment in 2008, 97 per cent of its loans had gone to women. Street vendors were likewise encouraged to grow their businesses by making use of banks.

Article 14

56. **Ms. Zou** Xiaoqiao commended the State party on its efforts to empower rural women. It was, however, regrettable that its report contained little information on subsistence farming by women, on rural women's access to land, credit and health-care services and on their participation in development planning and decision-making. She therefore wished to know what specific measures had been adopted to implement the Land

Act 2010 in order to ensure that rural women, especially those in disadvantaged groups, had access to land. What percentage of women had land registered in their name?

57. Secondly, she asked whether the Government was running any special programmes to tackle the scourges of poverty and food insecurity among rural women and those living in remote areas.

58. **Ms. Gabr** said that, although most women in Lesotho lived in rural areas, it was difficult for them to purchase and manage land. She therefore requested fuller information about women's land ownership. It was vital that measures should be taken to eliminate the stereotypes and prejudices which lay at the root of discrimination against women in that respect. On her visits to rural areas of Lesotho she had noted a dearth of social services and a lack of water supplies and health-care facilities. Such mobile services as existed had difficulty in reaching mountainous regions. It was therefore vital to find a means of delivering health care to women more effectively. The same was true of education: rural women and girls had to have access to education. It was also essential that rural women should be warned about the problem of human trafficking.

59. **Ms. Lepono** (Lesotho) said that Lesotho had undergone far-reaching changes in recent years. Most villages in rural areas were supplied with electricity. Roads were being constructed throughout the country. Schools abounded in rural areas and the majority of university graduates were girls from the countryside. A campaign was being conducted to raise rural women's awareness of the dangers of human trafficking.

60. **Ms. Mahase-Moiloa** (Lesotho), referring to the question on identity documents, said that the authorities of Lesotho were making every effort to address the problem of the slow issue of passports. The country would soon be moving to an ePassport system.

61. The enactment of the Land Act 2010 had been accompanied by the establishment of a land administration authority which would set up land tribunals. Women had proved to be highly efficient land managers. They had the same land ownership rights as men.

62. **Mr. Masenyetse** (Lesotho) said that Lesotho was in the process of finalizing the national development strategic plan to combat food insecurity. It had been found that the previous approach, which had concentrated on growing traditional crops, had not produced the desired results in terms of food security. The new plan's emphasis was therefore on animal husbandry, because the bulk of the rural population understood that type of farming better and there was a readier market for its products. There had also been a shift towards crops of commercial value instead of traditional crops because the latter did not meet the demands of modern agro-industry.

63. **Ms. Awori** asked whether rural women had access to the courts in order to assert their rights.

64. **Ms. Mahase-Moiloa** (Lesotho) replied that magistrate courts held sessions in villages. Legal aid clinics also visited villages in order to bring legal services closer to the population.

65. As the law on land ownership had only recently been amended, no statistics were as yet available on women's registration of title in their own name.

Article 16

66. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that she suspected that cultural arguments concerning such practices as *bohali*, or bride price, could serve as a pretext for discrimination. After all, what did polygamy, a highly discriminatory practice, have to do with the right to cultural identity? She therefore asked whether the Government intended to enact a law to invalidate polygamous marriages.

67. She wondered if there was any requirement to register customary marriages. If they were not registered, how were women's rights protected? Was it true that, in the case of a customary marriage, a deceased husband's family could grab property by evicting the widow from the family home on the grounds that inheritance passed through the male line?

68. Paragraph 48 of the responses to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/LSO/Q/1-4/Add.1) stated that, upon the dissolution of a marriage, the court would determine the share of community property to be allotted to each party according to their blameworthiness. She was therefore curious to know what was meant by "blame" and whether the definition of fault was the same for men and women.

69. **Ms. Hayashi** asked how the State party was disseminating information on the Children's Protection and Welfare Act 2011 which made marriage below the age of 18 invalid and whether the Act had really stopped child marriage. She further wished to know whether measures were taken under the Sexual Offences Act, or any other law, to investigate, prosecute and punish child marriage.

70. She enquired whether women enjoyed equal rights with regard to the custody of their children during marriage and after the dissolution of marriage. It would appear that, under customary law, the maternal grandfather of a child born out of wedlock assumed parental responsibility for the child. If the mother's family took legal action to recover maintenance from the child's father, his family were bound to give cattle to the girl's family by way of compensation. She therefore wished to know what action the State party had taken to ensure that women had equal custodial rights and whether community and religious leaders had been consulted on the reform of customary law.

71. **Ms. Mahase-Moiloa** (Lesotho) said that the mere fact that a culture was different did not necessarily mean that it was bad. *Bohali* was not regarded as a bride price, but as a token of appreciation for a girl's upbringing. The Basotho did not regard polygamy as a harmful practice. Under customary law a man could not take a second wife without the consent of the first wife. The husband was bound to provide for all wives equally. The number of wives a man could marry therefore depended on his economic status.

72. Several pieces of legislation adequately addressed the issue of property ownership. The custody or guardianship of children was always determined in the light of the best interests of the child. In the event of a divorce, the court could divide matrimonial property in such a way as to take account of the guilt of either spouse, but in practice it was usually divided on a fifty-fifty basis.

73. The Constitution did not per se conflict with the Convention, although it did attempt to reconcile the differences in the country's dual legal system in that it allowed each citizen to opt for the system which he or she preferred.

74. In the past, the courts had applied a test to determine which system should apply in individual cases, but that was no longer the practice. Laws designed to enhance the legal status of women applied to the vast majority of female litigants.

75. **Ms. Lepono** (Lesotho) said that the practice of polygamy was dying out, since Lesotho was a mainly Christian country and women were increasingly well educated.

76. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that she had been informed of at least one case of property grabbing in Lesotho. She asked what action the Government was taking to stamp out that practice and whether it was linked to the problem of unregistered customary marriages.

77. **Ms. Mahase-Moiloa** (Lesotho) said that customary marriages were registered. The case cited by Ms. Halperin-Kaddari was not representative of a common practice, although there had been instances of people taking advantage of the vulnerability of AIDS orphans in

order to grab their property. The authorities of her country were making every effort to protect those children, and it was an offence to dispossess them of their property.

78. **The Chairperson** said that it was not the Committee's intention to undermine any country's culture, but to identify "cultural" practices which were in reality harmful to women.

79. **Ms. Lepono** (Lesotho) thanked the Committee for what had been an enlightening and educative experience. The dialogue with the Committee had helped the delegation to gain a wider understanding of the Convention. The Government of her country was determined to uphold human rights and to protect and advance women's rights.

80. **The Chairperson** thanked the delegation for having participated in a constructive dialogue with the Committee, which had provided new insight into the situation of women in Lesotho. She encouraged the State party to take all necessary measures to address the various concerns expressed by the members of the Committee, whose aim was to ensure the comprehensive implementation of the Convention throughout the State party's territory for the benefit of all women and girls in Lesotho.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.