



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

Distr.: General
1 April 2010

Original: English

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

Summary record of the 922nd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 1 February 2010, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gabr

later: Ms. Zou Xiaoqiao

later: Ms. Gabr

Contents

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

Combined fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh periodic report of Panama

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.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

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

Combined fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh periodic report of Panama (CEDAW/C/PAN/7; CEDAW/C/PAN/Q/7 and Add.1)

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

2. **Ms. González Ruiz de Varela** (Panama) said that the combined fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh periodic report of Panama (CEDAW/C/PAN/7) described the development of State policy on women's issues over the period from 1998 to 2008. Despite the substantial progress made in eliminating discrimination against women, many challenges remained. In 2009, Panama had assigned 49.56 per cent of the State's overall budget to social services.

3. Act No. 71 of 23 December 2008 had established the National Institute for Women, the new national machinery for the advancement of women, which coordinated and implemented national policy on equal opportunity and the elimination of discrimination against women. The Institute had printed 2,000 information leaflets on the Convention, on Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 on equal opportunity for women and on Act No. 38 of 10 July 2001 on amendments and additions to the Criminal and Judicial Codes concerning domestic violence and child abuse. The leaflets had been distributed throughout the country through gender networks and offices. In 2003, training had been provided to health-care personnel, parents and primary-school teachers on the State's obligations under the Convention and in relation to human rights. In the first such initiative, 60 teachers had been trained as facilitators.

4. Turning to economic affairs and employment, she said that, according to data for 2004, 5 per cent of the women in the Panamanian labour market worked in the primary sector and 11.3 per cent in the secondary sector, while 83.6 per cent worked in the tertiary, or services, sector. Data for 2006 showed that informal employment accounted for 46.3 per cent of all employment, while 47.1 per cent of employed women worked in the informal sector and a larger proportion were self-employed; that situation put women at a disadvantage in terms of access to social security and

pension benefits. International instruments and Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 provided the framework for efforts to improve the situation of Panamanian women. The Strategic Vision for Economic Development and Employment covered five main areas: poverty reduction and improvement of income distribution, economic growth for job creation, public finance reform, human capital development and State reform. Improvements to gender-disaggregated statistics would provide greater clarity on trends in women's integration into the labour market.

5. In education, most women continued to opt for traditional fields of study owing to the persistence of differentiated socialization for men and women. According to a 2005 study on gender equity, just under 24,000 men and about 49,000 women were enrolled at the University of Panama. Two out of three students studying public administration, education sciences, economics, pharmacy and humanities were women. Men outnumbered women as lecturers in all faculties except education sciences, nursing, pharmacy and humanities. Statistics showed that women tended to stay longer in the educational system but that that did not bring them higher income levels. Areas such as school coverage and enrolment, literacy rates and funding of educational administration had all improved significantly.

6. Indigenous women and girls were still the most vulnerable groups and new measures were planned to address the lack of educational opportunities appropriate to their cultural and socio-economic circumstances. The national literacy rate was 92.4 per cent, but was lower among the indigenous population and presumably lowest among indigenous women. Panama had one of the highest rates of education spending as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) in Latin America, and also one of the highest per-student spending rates.

7. Women's political and social participation had increased significantly since the implementation of reforms to the Electoral Code. Between the electoral periods 1999-2004 and 2004-2009, the percentage of women parliamentarians had almost doubled (with 13 deputies and 34 alternates out of a total of 71 seats), although the 30-per-cent quota for women's political participation established by Act No. 22 of 1997 had not yet been achieved. Women were, however, being included in more areas of decision-making. The Electoral Code provided for a State subsidy for

political parties, 25 per cent of which had to be spent on training. Since 2002, at least 10 per cent of that amount had to be allocated to training for women. Perhaps further amendments to the Electoral Code would be needed. Women politicians had proposed new measures, such as penalties for political parties that did not comply with the quotas.

8. The number of women elected to public office in general elections had increased by 1 since 1999 and by 14 since 1994. Other women in decision-making posts in the Government included the first woman Comptroller-General of the Republic, a number of ministers and deputy ministers and two governors. The Director of the National Institute for Women was also the President of the Council of Women Ministers of Central America. Women held senior management posts in a number of autonomous institutions, and the Deputy Director of the National Institute for Women was an indigenous woman from the *comarca* of Ngöbe Buglé. In 1999, Panama had elected its first woman President.

9. Significant legal achievements, in addition to Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 and Act No. 38 of 10 July 2001, included Act No. 11 of 22 April 2005, which prohibited labour discrimination on the grounds of race, birth, disability, social status, sex, religion or political convictions. Despite the progress made in adopting legislation to protect women's rights, the number of gender-based killings of women continued to increase. The Supreme Court should adopt measures to ensure access to justice, inclusion, equal opportunity and gender equality.

10. Life expectancy had risen in Panama, but varied between provinces, reflecting socio-economic and health inequalities. In indigenous areas, it was from five to nine years lower than the national average, although targeted health programmes had contributed to a more rapid rate of improvement in the *comarcas* of Ngöbe Buglé and Emberá Wounaan.

11. Women accounted for 53 per cent of the population over the age of 60, one quarter of which was poor. Working women received maternity leave of 14 weeks with full pay; from 2002 to 2006, the number of pregnant women receiving maternity benefits had increased from 9,198 to 9,248. In 2005, health expenditure had amounted to 5 per cent of GDP. The cost of transport or of health-care services was the

main obstacle to women's access to such services, especially in rural areas.

12. In Panama, which had the third highest prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in Central America, about one quarter of the almost 8,000 Panamanians living with the disease were women, including approximately 1,000 of the 71,000 women giving birth each year. Act No. 3 of 5 January 2000 on HIV/AIDS recognized that HIV/AIDS was a State problem and emphasized human rights, non-discrimination, and adequate services and treatment. Prevention programmes had been carried out with the National Police, the Maritime Service, the Aeronaval Service and the Institutional Protection Service.

13. Starting in 1998, Panama had introduced laws and action programmes to promote gender equity in health, including early cancer detection campaigns and nutrition and physical activity programmes. The draft law on sexual and reproductive health, which certain sectors of society strongly opposed, would be amended to adapt it to national circumstances. Act No. 14 of 18 May 2007 on the Criminal Code retained the penalties for abortion except in cases where the mother's life was at risk or the pregnancy was the result of rape. Executive Decree No. 664 of 2008 authorized the collection of data on cases of suspected domestic violence or child abuse.

14. The Ministry of Health had established the Indigenous Health Section in order to improve the conditions and quality of life of indigenous women and men. Fertility rates were higher in rural areas owing to the lower level of formal education, lack of quality sexual and reproductive health services and beliefs and behaviours that reflected gender inequalities.

15. In 2000, Panama had ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. In 2006, the Government had identified the worst forms of child labour and had adopted a national plan to eradicate child labour and protect adolescent workers.

16. With regard to rural women and the environment, strategic programmes for the period 2004-2009 had been designed to make progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Food aid and poverty eradication programmes targeted indigenous and extremely poor communities. Ministerial initiatives

had included the establishment of environmental consultative commissions and networks.

17. Panama had conducted a national review of the situation of older persons and had launched a National Policy for Older Persons. Panama was committed to the Regional Strategy for the Implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. Older women should be empowered to be active citizens and leaders through their participation in political bodies and decision-making processes.

18. Women were entering the media workforce and taking up positions previously occupied by men, particularly in television. However, most Panamanian women, especially in rural areas, had been isolated from the information revolution.

19. The Government sought to promote a united effort to bring about social, political, economic and cultural changes that would help eradicate poverty, violence and discrimination against women. The legal system should be updated and training provided to its officials. Panamanian women had always been an integral part of national development, and the new Government, committed to reaching the goal of gender equality, was renewing its efforts to promote the protection of women's rights.

Articles 1 to 6

20. **Mr. Flinterman** said that Panama's impressive legislative achievements were commendable. He wondered whether Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 included a definition of discrimination that was in line with article 1 of the Convention and whether the fact that the Convention had been incorporated into Panama's domestic legal order by Act No. 4 of 22 May 1981 meant that a subsequent law could set it aside. He drew attention to Panama's continuous obligation under article 13 of the Optional Protocol to make the Convention and its Protocol widely known, and asked for more information about training programmes for legal officials and law enforcement agents. He wondered whether the Convention was included in the curricula of faculties of law at Panamanian universities.

21. **Ms. Ameline** said it would be interesting to hear whether the implementation of the Convention to date was considered sufficient and what mechanisms and indicators were used for implementation and evaluation. She also wished to receive information on

the mechanisms set up to inform the population, including illiterate women, of their rights under the Optional Protocol. It would also be useful to hear more about the crime of femicide, which was not included in the Criminal Code.

22. **Ms. Zou Xiaoqiao** said that she would like to know whether the National Institute for Women was a coordinating body or a functional Government department. It would be interesting to hear how the Institute operated and what kind of action it had taken to influence Government policies. She wondered whether the Institute was responsible for implementing the Convention and for organizing training.

23. Secondly, she asked about the current status of the National Directorate for Women and the National Council for Women and their relationship to the Institute. Thirdly, it would be interesting to hear about the main thematic areas and goals of the First and Second Plans for Equal Opportunities for Women and whether the plans addressed the challenges and problems of indigenous and Afro-descendent women. As the Second Plan had already been concluded, she asked whether there would be a follow-up plan.

24. **Ms. Neubauer** said that she would like to know whether institutional structures for the advancement of women had been established at the local level and whether public institutions had established specialized bodies to promote gender equality, as required by Executive Decree No. 53 of 25 June 2002. In its responses to the list of issues and questions, the State party referred to 423 public institutions, but also indicated that there were currently only 22 women's mechanisms. She wondered why the number was so low and what human, financial and technical resources were available to such mechanisms.

25. **Ms. Awori** suggested that, in view of the failure to meet the 30-per-cent quota, perhaps temporary special measures in the form of nominations could be applied for the next elections. She asked whether information was available on action taken in other areas of potential inequality, such as employment, health, education and agriculture.

26. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, said that the State party should consider special measures to help give high-risk groups of women, including indigenous and Afro-descendent women, greater access to social, health and employment

services. Attention should also be paid to their political participation.

27. **Ms. Hayashi** said that she would like to know how the State party was identifying obstacles to the full implementation of the National Plan to Combat Domestic Violence and Promote Civil Harmony and what measures it had taken to overcome them. She understood that a recent amendment to the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure had incorporated new protective measures against domestic violence. She requested information about the new protection order, including penalties for violation, and the sentences imposed on perpetrators. She asked when the new law would come into force and whether judges and lawyers had received appropriate training.

28. She commended the State party for its efforts to take account of the gender perspective in all national statistics. In view of the limited information available on femicide cases, she asked whether the Government intended to collect more accurate statistics on women's deaths caused by all forms of gender-based violence. It would be interesting to hear the Government's view as to why the number of such cases was increasing.

29. With regard to women detainees, according to information from alternative sources, Panama's three rehabilitation centres for women were overcrowded and women detainees had no access to full-time gynaecological services. The Human Rights Committee, in the concluding observations it had adopted on Panama in 2008, had expressed concern at overcrowding and poor prison conditions, especially unsanitary conditions, a lack of safe drinking water and scarce medical care. She asked what steps the State party had taken since the adoption of those observations, especially in relation to women detainees. She also wished to know of any specific measures taken to ensure the rights of minority women, including indigenous women, in prison.

30. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said that she wished to know what media and advertising strategies were used in efforts to combat sexist stereotypes, as Panama was an important destination and transit country for tourism, commerce and entertainment. She asked whether all public officials were involved in implementing the various laws, programmes and actions for women's equality, and wondered what specific training activities existed.

31. **Ms. Ara Begum** said that the Government's measures to empower older women were commendable and that more information on the impact of those measures should be included in the next periodic report. It appeared from statistics that the various actions taken to combat violence against women had been slow to produce effects. It would be useful to hear whether the National Plan to Combat Domestic Violence and Promote Civil Harmony, adopted in 2004, covered all gender-based violence, including in rural areas and within ethnic groups, and how it had helped to reduce violence against women. She also wished to know whether that programme had been assessed and, if so, what the findings had been. In view of the overcrowding at existing shelters for women victims of domestic violence in Panama, she asked whether the Government was considering establishing additional shelters, including in rural areas.

32. She wondered how the Government was tackling the heinous crime of sexual exploitation and violence against trafficked minors, which was a growing phenomenon in Panama. According to alternative sources, such crimes were linked to poverty, with victims' parents sometimes accepting monetary compensation for their daughters' sexual slavery. Information on the relevant laws and penalties and on how many traffickers had been prosecuted and punished so far would be useful. She also asked how many prosecutions and convictions there had been for the crime of femicide.

33. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** said that she would like to know what budgetary resources had been allocated for the implementation of the National Plan to Combat Domestic Violence and Promote Civil Harmony. She wondered whether local networks for domestic violence prevention existed throughout Panama, including in indigenous communities. Information from alternative sources indicated that the legislation to prevent discrimination and violence against women did not protect persons of different sexual orientation or transgender women, who were denied job opportunities, discriminated against in various fields and sometimes had to resort to prostitution in order to survive. They were apparently also subjected to police harassment, including rape, and forced to pay bribes in order to escape prosecution on trumped-up charges. She asked what was being done to address those problems.

34. **Ms. Pimentel** said that the Government should carry out in-depth studies to clarify the reasons for the resistance to the implementation of laws and plans, including draft law No. 442 on sexual and reproductive health. Stigmatization and discrimination were factors in that resistance.

35. *The meeting was suspended at 11.30 a.m. and resumed at 11.40 a.m.*

36. **Ms. Montenegro de Herrera** (Panama) said that any international convention ratified by Panama could be invoked in the courts pursuant to article 4 of the Political Constitution. Panama had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention through Act No. 17 of 2001 and had been one of the first countries to ratify the Convention, which for 30 years had served as a framework for progress.

37. Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 had been one of the most important pieces of legislation, although further implementation was still required. The network of Government mechanisms to ensure equal opportunity for women had been established through that Act and through Executive Decree No. 53, which provided that women's offices should be created in all institutions, that funding should be provided and that the highest levels of State decision-making should include women. The number 423 given in the responses to the list of issues and questions (CEDAW/C/PAN/Q/7/Add.1) was an error, as the number of mechanisms had been 42 when the network had been established. At the time of the report's submission in 2008, there had been 22, and there were currently 25.

38. The National Institute for Women had replaced the National Directorate for Women as the national machinery for the advancement of women. It had a coordinating function and ensured compliance with international instruments ratified by Panama and the implementation of Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999. The Ministry of Labour and Labour Development had a Gender and Work Office that ensured high-level tripartite participation in formulating national labour policies.

39. With regard to the conclusion of the Second Plan for Equal Opportunities for Women, the National Institute for Women was undertaking broad consultations in 2010 on a national policy to cover the main areas of the Convention, such as education, health, culture, vulnerable groups, sexual and reproductive health, women's political participation

and emerging issues. Panama's participation in the current meeting had drawn attention to discrimination against minorities and other issues such as immigrants, trafficking and non-discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation. On 8 March the first workshop with indigenous women would be held to receive input on their expectations of public policy on equal opportunity.

40. As for indicators, the National Institute for Women was responsible for technical coordination of the efforts of Government and civil society entities that were producers and users of statistical information with a gender perspective. The Institute had reactivated Panama's system of gender-based indicators and would institute time-use surveys in 2011. In the current year, the focus was on the population and housing survey. The goal was to mainstream gender statistics throughout the statistical system.

41. The National Plan to Combat Domestic Violence and Promote Civil Harmony for the period 2004-2014 included actions for both public and private entities and civil society. The United Nations system, other organizations and civil society were making coordinated efforts to help achieve progress in both urban and rural areas. A number of bilateral projects in the border area were being implemented jointly with Costa Rica. A 2006 study of femicide in Panama had noted the increase in such crimes, and efforts were being made at both the State and civil society levels to raise awareness of the phenomenon. Femicide was increasing (from 51 cases in 2007 and 46 in 2008 to 71 in 2009) as the overall level of crime increased, and many cases were the result of women's links to drug traffickers or gang members.

42. There had been 3,371 cases of domestic violence in 2005 and 3,964 in 2006. Over two thirds of those cases had resulted in acquittals. A total of 287 sentences had been imposed in 2005 and 184 in 2006. The National Observatory of Gender Violence reported to the Office of the Ombudsman and the data provided would facilitate progress in the adoption of special measures.

43. **Ms. Horzelda Williams** (Panama) said that Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 addressed stereotypes very clearly and that the Ministry of the Interior and Justice was mainstreaming training on human rights issues in the navy, fire service and police force.

44. **Mr. Falcón Moreno** (Panama) said that in November 2010 Panama would be reviewed under the universal periodic review mechanism. The new President had issued an executive decree directing all State institutions to provide input for Panama's report and was willing to consider a draft law on compliance with the requirements of the human rights treaty bodies.

45. **Ms. González Ruiz de Varela** (Panama) said that the new Government's strategic social plan for 2009-2014 included an integral development plan for the indigenous population. The political will to help those groups had been demonstrated by the workshop held by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Panama office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for all officials of ministries with competence in indigenous affairs. The goal had been to review all the agreements and conventions ratified by Panama concerning the indigenous population to ensure that they were being duly implemented.

46. The Government was taking a multisectoral approach to the training plan for ministry outreach workers in the indigenous *comarcas* so that problems could be addressed on a community basis. Outreach workers from the Ministries of Health, Education and Social Development could identify problems in those areas and refer them to the Government. Training kits were at an advanced stage of development and would cover 18 topics relating to violence against women, child abuse, preventive health care and treatment of diarrhoea and respiratory illnesses. The outreach workers would pass on the information to families and communities. A radio campaign, with broadcasts in local languages, reinforced those efforts. It was the first step in a long-term strategy for protecting vulnerable population groups, including women, indigenous communities and the poor.

47. The Early Childhood Advisory Council had recently launched a public policy to provide services for pregnant women and for children up to the age of 6. The Advisory Council was chaired by Panama's First Lady and its other members were heads of ministries concerned with women's and children's issues. The goal was to provide stimulation programmes and nutrition and health services for young children, as well as childcare facilities for working mothers.

48. Three new health centres were to be constructed in indigenous areas. The centres would include

facilities to accommodate pregnant women and their families prior to the birth. There were also plans to build a hospital in the *comarca* of Emberá Wounaán.

49. There were also social development, health and education plans for the *comarcas*, including preschool services provided by the Multicultural Bilingual Advisory Council and by the Ministry of Social Development. The comprehensive plan would be prepared in consultation with organized indigenous groups.

50. **Ms. Montenegro de Herrera** (Panama) said that political parties had established women's secretariats responsible for overseeing the quotas for women candidates. The National Institute for Women and the Forum for Women in Political Parties, which was represented on the National Council for Women, were requesting that a larger share of the training resources provided to political parties should be allocated to women. The Commission on Electoral Reform was debating those matters, and the Institute was monitoring compliance with the Convention. Special measures, including training for women and community leaders, were being taken to ensure that the quota was achieved by 2014. Executive Decree No. 53 of 25 June 2002 had provided for the establishment of municipal gender offices but they had not yet been set up in all municipalities.

51. **Ms. Luque** (Panama) said that every possible effort was being made to change outdated attitudes and to implement the existing regulations, which she believed were sufficient. Coordination between ministries was an important factor for progress.

52. A number of policies were being implemented to improve the situation of juvenile offenders, including rehabilitation and crime prevention efforts. Young people were taken advantage of by gangs and organized crime because they were subject to milder penalties. Every effort was being made to reach out to young gang members through their families, through labour policies, and through improved education and sports facilities.

53. **Ms. Horzelda Williams** (Panama) said that a substantial investment had been made to provide comprehensive medical care for detainees. Plans were under way for a prison "city" that would reflect a new vision of the penitentiary system. Efforts were also being made to ensure that the rights of Afro-descendent and indigenous women were observed.

54. **Ms. Montenegro de Herrera** (Panama) said that Panama, in addition to being a transit and destination country for tourism, had a multi-ethnic and multicultural population. Ongoing efforts were needed to combat existing stereotypes in society, and a number of campaigns had drawn attention to that issue. Training had already been provided to some journalists, and a media self-regulation policy was being considered. The National Institute for Women was trying to educate the population in sexual and reproductive health and to promote tolerance and respect for decisions that women and men might take in relation to their sexual orientation. It would be a priority issue in the consultation process for the public policy on equal opportunity.

55. **Ms. Vergara** (Panama) said that Act No. 71 of 23 December 2008 had established the organizational structure of the National Institute for Women. The National Council for Women was an advisory entity within the National Institute for Women and facilitated consultations on policies, programmes and projects and on agreements to which Panama wished to subscribe. The Council, which included representatives of civil society and the legislative branch, met every month and was consulted on all periodic reports. The Institute also had technical and administrative staff and in 2010 it would have its first autonomous budget.

56. **Ms. Horzelda Williams** (Panama) said that the National Institute for Women was supporting efforts to prevent violence against women. Two million balboas had been earmarked for the implementation of the National Plan to Combat Domestic Violence and Promote Civil Harmony over a three-year period and work had begun on the organization of local networks that could guarantee women a life with rights and without violence. Indigenous women were participating in local prevention networks. A media strategy had been designed for 2010, which was also the Inter-American Year of Women, and a number of campaigns were being carried out, especially with young people. One campaign would help to increase media professionals' awareness of stereotypes.

57. **Ms. Chutikul** said that indigenous women suffered from multiple forms of discrimination. They were excluded from important decisions and were expected to be submissive. The Government should carry out a study as a basis for measures to eradicate such discrimination. The results could be included in Panama's next periodic report.

58. She wondered whether Panama's legislation included the definition of trafficking used in the Palermo Protocol, which covered trafficking for both exploitative labour and prostitution. She asked what results the legislation had yielded, as she understood that there had been very few prosecutions. It would be useful to hear about international cooperation on human trafficking, particularly with the sending countries, and how those efforts could be stepped up. She asked what was being done about prostitution, including prostitution of minors, and how effective the national plan of action was in combating it.

59. *Ms. Zou Xiaoqiao, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.*

60. **Ms. Luque** (Panama) said that Panama had adopted the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols, including the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and that those instruments therefore had constitutional status. Panama was taking a proactive approach to that issue and had adopted an amendment to the Criminal Code that criminalized trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation of children and all actions related to trafficking. According to studies carried out by the Ministry of Justice, it was drug trafficking and the associated organized crime that had brought trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation to Panama.

61. Trafficking victims, especially women, sometimes refused to cooperate with the police for fear of being returned to their home countries. As that made it difficult to bring traffickers to justice, it was now recommended that victims should not be penalized if they helped with the investigation.

62. Efforts were being made to raise the awareness of security agencies, including both the National Police and the national border, naval and migration services, to enable them to identify those responsible for trafficking and understand that women's human rights were being violated. Seminars and training were being provided and the National Migration Service had created a unit to help trafficking victims. Panama was aware of its status as a transit country and had bilateral agreements on trafficking with a number of countries. The crime was often linked to the smuggling of illegal migrants, who entered from South America with the intention of going northward to the United States or Canada. The bilateral agreements provided for the

investigation and prosecution of traffickers and the exchange of information. Certain kinds of visas were issued to women only after the immigration authorities had verified where they were going to be employed.

63. *Ms. Gabr resumed the Chair.*

64. **Ms. González Ruiz de Varela** (Panama) said that the National Commission for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, which had been established by Act No. 16 of 31 March 2004, had designed a national plan for the prevention and elimination of commercial sexual exploitation of children, a protocol for the repatriation of minors who were victims of sexual exploitation and a programme to provide services and protection for victims. The National Commission submitted periodic reports to the Government.

65. Efforts were being made to help indigenous women in the *comarcas* to combat discrimination and to organize themselves with the aim of identifying and resolving the problems of their communities. The training plan was designed to help them to become more involved in decision-making. Some significant progress had been made, but further efforts were needed to expand the capacities of indigenous women.

66. **Ms. Luque** (Panama) said that the new penitentiary policy would comply with international human rights guidelines and that the new prison city would be built accordingly. Prisoners would be able to serve their sentences with dignity and with proper security, health and education services and labour training. They would be housed in different areas depending on the seriousness of their crimes. Most detainees would have opportunities to learn skills that would enable them to earn a living in the future. There would be facilities for conjugal visits and areas where inmates of any faith could perform religious observances. The new system would be ready in about 36 months.

67. Most of the rehabilitation efforts and resources had been focused on women and a new women's penitentiary had just been built. Prisons should not be used simply for warehousing inmates; they should be places of rehabilitation, not schools of crime.

68. **Ms. Ameline** asked whether the State party planned to introduce the specific crime of femicide into the Criminal Code in the near future.

69. **Mr. Flinterman** said that he would like to know whether the definition of discrimination against women

contained in article 3 of Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 was identical to the definition in article 1 of the Convention. He asked for more details on the obstacles women faced in gaining access to justice. It would also be useful to receive information on the Ombudsman's role in relation to cases involving alleged violations of women's rights under the Convention, the number of cases submitted to the Ombudsman and the remedies provided.

70. **Ms. Pimentel** asked whether police officers and judges received in-depth training on stereotypes and patriarchal bias and ideology. She also asked where the greatest resistance to progress on women's rights had been encountered.

71. **Ms. Montenegro de Herrera** (Panama) said that femicide was a matter of great concern and that the National Institute for Women was currently working on an amendment to the legislation against domestic violence. Additional protection measures had been established, but some, including electronic bracelets for aggressors, had not yet been implemented. The Criminal Code did not yet include femicide as a crime. Femicide should be addressed as a crime distinct from homicide, and Panama was committed to reviewing the relevant legislation.

72. As for training for judges, the network of Government mechanisms included the Gender and Justice Unit, which had prepared the national policy on gender and justice adopted in 2009. Awareness-raising and training were provided for all judges and representatives of Government ministries. Ongoing training was also needed for municipal police officials, as they did not always know how to address issues concerning women's rights. The national policy on gender and justice represented qualitative progress in implementing the Convention and the Optional Protocol in the justice system. It would help to ensure that the perpetrators of femicide were brought to justice.

73. **Mr. Falcón Moreno** (Panama) said that the training of Supreme Court judges and officials had begun six years previously. Seminars had been held with the National Bar Association of Panama and there had been talks with civil society to explain Panama's obligations under the Convention. Awareness of the Convention was growing and it had been invoked in a number of Supreme Court cases.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.