



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
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Summary record of the 543rd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 25 January 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Ms. Açar (Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of Ms. Abaka, Ms. Açar, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

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

Fifth periodic report of the Russian Federation (CEDAW/C/USR/5, CEDAW/PSWG/2002/I/CRP.1/Add.3, CEDAW/PSWG/2002/I/CRP.2/Add.4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Karelova and Ms. Sharapova (Russian Federation) took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Karelova** (Russian Federation), introducing the fifth periodic report of the Russian Federation (CEDAW/C/USR/5), said that momentous changes had taken place in her country in recent years, namely the transition from a totalitarian regime and a planned economy to multiparty democracy and a free market. The country's finances were gradually improving and the majority of companies were now privately owned. A new emphasis on social policy, particularly education and health, was helping to raise the standard of living and push forward social development. A new Labour Code had been adopted and a reform of the pension system had been introduced. Measures were being taken to increase life expectancy, reduce maternal and infant mortality, stimulate the birth rate and support families. Unemployment was falling and gross domestic product (GDP) had been rising for some years. The involvement of civil society had contributed greatly to those achievements.

3. The past three years in particular had seen women become increasingly involved in the process of change in the Russian Federation. Women had organized many conferences and other initiatives in areas such as equal rights and opportunities, gender aspects of the economy and reproductive health. Dialogue between women's non-governmental organizations and the authorities had become the norm. Many issues relating to the implementation of the Convention had been discussed at a seminar in November 2001 organized jointly by the Russian Federation, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

4. Following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, five priority areas for action relating to women in the Russian Federation had been identified. The first was the participation of women in decision-making. In recent years, women had become more involved in politics and more women were candidates in both national and regional elections. Moreover, the number of women in ministerial posts was increasing in many areas, including traditionally "male" ones such as defence, energy, finance and the economy. The Federal Act on Political Parties of 2000 enshrined the principle of equal opportunities for women and men in party leadership, candidate lists and any elected office in the State authorities or organs of local self-government. Nonetheless, the number of female members in both the upper and lower chambers of the Federal Assembly remained low. An increasing number of women were reaching senior and executive positions in the civil service and the judiciary. In order to ensure that women continued to advance in politics, gender issues were a major focus of the outline of State personnel policy currently being drafted.

5. The second priority area identified after the Beijing Conference was the situation of women in the labour market. The number of unemployed women had fallen in recent years, although there were still problems in some sectors of the economy with a high ratio of female employees, and the Government was taking measures to prevent future unemployment in those areas. Most of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation had formulated employment programmes, and the regions had the right to introduce quotas for the recruitment of women. A federal programme had also been adopted to help the most vulnerable groups of women find work and to provide them with social protection. The new Labour Code included provisions to give women greater freedom in their choice of job and a requirement to obtain their consent before assigning them to night work or overtime or sending them on business trips. To back up its efforts to improve the situation of women in the labour market, the Government was also taking a number of measures aimed at reducing poverty.

6. The third priority area was women's health. In many respects, the health of the Russian population had deteriorated in recent years. However, women's reproductive health had improved. The number of abortions and the maternal mortality rate had fallen. The Government was taking steps to improve health

care services, in particular to prevent disease during pregnancy and childbirth and to reduce further the incidence of maternal and infant mortality. A system of certification had been set up to prevent potential health risks in the workplace, particularly risks to women's reproductive health. A more recent health concern was HIV/AIDS. Government measures to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS included voluntary HIV tests for pregnant women and the provision of drugs to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the virus. However, as in many other countries whose economies were in transition, the main problem in the fight against HIV/AIDS was a lack of resources. The Russian Government therefore greatly appreciated the assistance it was receiving from a number of international organizations in that regard.

7. The fourth priority area was violence against women, which was widespread in the Russian Federation. Both the Government and the general public were increasingly aware of the need to combat the problem. Work was currently under way on a special law against domestic violence. The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation included penalties for a range of violent crimes, including sexual assault and rape, and the concept of torture now encompassed psychological as well as physical suffering. Inducing a minor to commit a crime or engage in anti-social activities was now considered a criminal offence, as was trafficking in minors.

8. Other measures to combat violence against women included efforts to reduce the amount of violence shown on television and to improve social services for victims of violence. Violence against women was a frequent topic of discussion in the State Duma and at meetings of non-governmental and women's organizations. The Government was considering compiling statistics on the number of victims of violence, particularly domestic and sexual violence, as none were currently available. A network of crisis centres offering assistance to women had been set up, and some of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation were drafting their own laws to combat violence.

9. Prostitution had rapidly become a large-scale problem in the Russian Federation: in 2000, in Moscow alone, 55,000 persons had been arrested on suspicion of engaging in prostitution, including 605 female minors who had been sent to special children's institutions. Recognizing its profitability, organized

criminal groups had taken control of the sex industry. The State had not been prepared for such a development and had been ill equipped to combat it.

10. Under the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, to which the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics had acceded in 1953, the Russian Federation could not legalize prostitution and was required to take all necessary measures to eradicate it. At the same time, prostitution continued to be regarded as an administrative offence in Russian legislation. Accordingly, women engaging in prostitution might incur only a small fine. While organizing or keeping a brothel was a criminal offence, no penalties were provided in the Criminal Code for the exploitation of the prostitution of others, a situation of which criminal structures were taking advantage. However, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was working actively to plug the holes in the existing legislation.

11. Since 1996, the law enforcement agencies of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation had been establishing special subdivisions for the suppression of prostitution-related offences. The practice of involving non-governmental organizations in addressing the problem of prostitution was becoming widespread. In 2000-2001, joint seminars and training had been conducted in order to coordinate the work of law enforcement agencies and the health and education sectors in rehabilitating victims of sexual exploitation. The former were stepping up their efforts to suppress the activities of criminal groups seeking to control the sex industry and were clamping down on the production, distribution and sale of pornographic materials.

12. Trafficking in which Russian women were sent to foreign countries for the purpose of sexual exploitation was a cause for increasing concern. Among the measures taken to address that problem, she highlighted the recent information campaign in the mass media aimed at raising awareness of the legislative norms designed to protect women, children and minors from sexual exploitation; the potential risks of travelling abroad to seek work; and the institutions offering assistance to victims of violence. It was anticipated that, as a result of the signature by the Russian Federation, in December 2000, of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially

Women and Children, the relevant provisions of criminal, administrative and labour law would be toughened.

13. The national machinery for women had recently acquired two new components: the Commission on Women's Affairs in the Office of the Chairman of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly and the Department of Women's and Children's Affairs in the Office of the Commissioner on Human Rights. In addition, the majority of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation had established interdepartmental commissions responsible for the implementation of regional action plans to improve the status of women. A National Action Plan to improve the status of women and enhance their role in society for 2001-2005 had been adopted.

14. The Round Table of women's public associations and non-commercial organizations established in the Ministry of Labour, the activities of which were described more fully in the fifth periodic report of the Russian Federation, was a forum in which women could discuss with representatives of the Government the most urgent problems they faced. The national machinery for women, including the Round Table, made it possible to predict and correct the adverse effects of the economic reform, to take account of the gender factor in State policy and to draw the attention of both the authorities and the wider public to the Convention and the progress made in its implementation.

15. Her Government realized that much remained to be done and that there were still obstacles to the complete elimination of discrimination against women: gender segregation in the labour market persisted, as did disparities in pay between men and women, and the efforts made to address the feminization of poverty, support women's small and medium-sized businesses and enhance the standard of living and quality of life of the population had been insufficient. However, the Russian Federation was gradually emerging from the crisis and was advancing consistently along the path of democracy and freedom. Her Government was deeply committed to both the letter and the spirit of the Convention. It had intensified its cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund. Currently, it was undertaking monitoring to ensure that the authorities of all 89 constituent entities of the Russian Federation had

integrated the gender perspective in their activities. In February 2002, it would convene a special conference to approve a national gender strategy designed to significantly improve the status of women. She was grateful to the Committee for its interest in the report and, in particular, to those members who had visited the Russian Federation and observed at first hand the scale of the changes that had taken place.

16. **The Chairperson** expressed appreciation to the representative of the Russian Federation, whose introduction had shed light on the developments in the country since the submission of its fifth periodic report. She noted with satisfaction that the report had been prepared in accordance with the Committee's guidelines. The Government of the Russian Federation had demonstrated its commitment to the full implementation of the Convention by withdrawing its reservation to article 29 and signing the Optional Protocol. It should now expedite its ratification. The Government had sent a large delegation consisting of senior officials from several ministries, and she looked forward to engaging them in a frank and constructive dialogue.

17. She was encouraged that the Russian Government saw the radical transition the country was undergoing as a time of opportunity for women. There was, however, a need for vigilance in periods of social, economic and political change to ensure that women's human rights were not violated or overlooked; that was particularly important in the case of the Russian Federation because of the ripple effect throughout the region of events that occurred there.

18. **Ms. Goonesekere** said that the Government was to be congratulated on the significant progress it had made in the implementation of the Convention during a very difficult period. She was particularly pleased to note that the new Family Code was in line with the Convention, and she welcomed the initiatives taken in respect of violence against women. The Government had used the legal system as a catalyst for advancing women's equality. It was important, however, to ensure that laws were not only in place but were actually enforced.

19. In that connection, she noted with concern that women were not using the legal remedies available to them in the event that they were discriminated against, notwithstanding the very significant problems they faced in such areas as employment. The Government

should raise awareness of the relevant procedures and consider establishing a system of legal aid. She was also concerned that, while citizens were able, under Russian legislation, to assert their rights against State agencies and public officials, there was no private sector accountability for violations of the rights and freedoms of citizens.

20. While there had been reform of the laws on rape and sexual offences and law enforcement officers were receiving training in assisting women victims of violence, it was not clear whether officers were held accountable when they were the perpetrators of such offences; that was very important because, in some countries, trafficking in women flourished with official complicity.

21. The report stated that, under the new Family Code, the family rights of citizens might be restricted by federal law to the extent necessary for the protection of the moral well-being, health, rights and legitimate interests of other members of the family. She expressed concern that women's rights under the Convention could be infringed if the rights of other family members were deemed to take precedence. Noting that, under article 42 of the Code, spouses were entitled to define in the marriage contract their rights and duties with respect to reciprocal maintenance, she asked whether that meant that there was no fixed concept of maintenance and what the position of the spouses was if maintenance was not covered in the contract. Lastly, she asked what the interface was between the Family Code and the law on violence against women.

22. **Ms. Livingstone Raday** said that, in the light of the economic problems confronting the Russian Federation, the Government's efforts to combat poverty, improve health, protect the rights of children and disabled persons and safeguard pension rights were most admirable. She was concerned, however, that the distinct structural problem of women's disadvantage was not consistently recognized as requiring specific and separate attention and legislation. Thus, there did not appear to be any specific constitutional provision prohibiting discrimination on grounds of sex, as there were in the case of discrimination on grounds of ethnicity and language. Nor, it seemed, was there any specific legislation to prohibit sex discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace or any provision establishing the right to equal pay for work of equal value, not merely equal pay for equal work as such.

The report did not contain sufficient information on those problems or on the remedies available to women, and it failed to address the issue of occupational segregation.

23. The State party seemed to have chosen a legal approach to the problem of domestic violence rather than a social preventive approach, whereas a combination of the two would have been preferable. There was a need for separate legislation on domestic violence, which would bring the need for effective prevention measures more clearly into focus and enable the law to be used as a tool for public education. She asked whether there had been any revision of the rules on evidence in rape cases and whether the State party had considered introducing minimum penalties for that offence, as other countries had done.

24. The Government was addressing women's health issues to the best of its ability. In that connection, she welcomed the efforts it had made to reduce the use of abortion as a means of contraception. One reason for that phenomenon might be that abortion was free of charge, whereas contraceptives were not. Noting that fewer than 25 per cent of women were using effective methods of birth control, she asked whether the Government had considered shifting budgetary resources in order to address that problem.

25. The State party had referred to HIV/AIDS as a social problem associated with alcoholism and drug addiction, which was regrettable since the stigmatization of those infected with HIV/AIDS could deter women from seeking testing and treatment and undermine efforts to educate the public about the prevention of the disease.

26. She noted with satisfaction that the Federal Act on Political Parties provided that men and women should have equal opportunities for representation in lists of candidates for deputies. She asked how that provision was being implemented and whether political parties were actually required to give women parity in such lists.

27. **Ms. Corti** said that she had recently visited the Russian Federation and had seen at first hand the Government's laudable efforts to raise public awareness of the Convention. She noted, in that connection, that she had been present at a seminar at which women's non-governmental organizations had had the opportunity to discuss with the Government its report on the implementation of the Convention.

28. The existence of an effective national machinery for women could speed the attainment of gender equality. With that in mind, the State party should consider adopting legislation that clearly defined the status of its national machinery and accorded it wider powers. She was not convinced that quotas were the best way of increasing women's representation in political bodies, particularly given the risk of a backlash. The State party should instead focus on training in order to better equip women to enter politics. In that connection, she was pleased to note that women's representation in regional bodies had increased; that was sure to lead to similar improvements at the national level. It was vital for women to be adequately represented in decision-making posts so that their interests were taken into account.

29. It was clear from the responses and the oral presentation that a great deal of effort had been made to attempt to move forward, but it also seemed that the Government might be waiting for the problem of patriarchal attitudes to resolve itself. However, women must be recognized as an essential part of any process of democratization.

30. There was a high degree of equality in education at all levels, but the main problem seemed to be the number of school drop-outs. More information was also needed on refugee and internally displaced children, their origins, status, procedures for asylum and any gender differences in their treatment.

31. The death rates for women as a result of domestic violence were alarmingly high, so that the problem could not be considered a private matter. She would like to know more about the reasons for the spread of HIV and tuberculosis, how the Government combated alcoholism, and whether it was satisfied with its measures to combat prostitution and trafficking. She would also like further information on the number of women prisoners, conditions in women's prisons and how the human rights of incarcerated women were protected.

32. **Ms. Gabr** said that mechanisms and legislation to encourage women's participation in political and economic life indeed existed in the Russian Federation, but they needed to be implemented and activated. She would like to know the number of non-governmental organizations currently operating in the Russian Federation and how many of that number were

women's organizations. The country had many ethnic and cultural minorities, and particular attention should be paid to the rights of minority women. Violence against women should be a priority issue for the Government, not least because it affected the country's international image. The effects of drug and alcohol abuse on such violence required more action and closer monitoring.

33. With regard to the conflict in Chechnya, more explanation was needed of efforts to provide shelter and protection to Chechen women and children displaced by the conflict. She would also like to know how complaints of abuse and violence against those women were investigated and what plans were in place for their prevention.

34. **Ms. Karelova** (Russian Federation) noted that the Russian Federation would submit its sixth periodic report later in the year, and that many of the questions just posed by the experts would be addressed in more detail in that report. Concerning mechanisms, legislation and policy to promote equality, the Constitution contained a number of articles prohibiting gender discrimination and ensuring that the legislature, the judiciary and law enforcement agencies afforded protection to the rights of women on an equal basis with men. The Penal Code also contained criminal penalties for violating those rights. Frankly speaking, however, their application was far from perfect. Nevertheless, there had been cases where women had gone to court in defence of their rights. One well-known case had occurred in 1994, when a number of women's organizations had gone to court over a statement openly reported in the media that women with children were not hired in some workplaces.

35. An enormous amount of work lay ahead to change the culture, starting with girls in primary school and the curriculum at that level. Work had begun within the Ministry of Education on introducing gender perspectives into the schools; currently the middle school curriculum included courses for girls on their rights. Activities to raise public awareness of women's rights were part of the National Plan for 2001-2005, as all of society needed to be educated, including employers. The Tripartite Commission mechanism would also be used in that effort.

36. Another problem, to which the President attached great importance, was that of homeless, neglected and abandoned children. Statistics on those children had

been kept since 1993, and a system of agencies and institutions to meet their needs had been developed starting in 1994. A more proactive family policy, including assistance to families in difficult circumstances, was needed.

37. Violence against women was one of the most difficult problems Russia faced and had been a priority in both the first and second National Plans. She agreed that the legal and social approaches to the problem should be coordinated and that a separate law on domestic violence must be adopted. The Government and non-governmental organizations were approaching that issue jointly. The support system of institutions, shelters for battered women and crisis centres was indeed inadequate, and the attention of the political leadership was being drawn to that problem. In addition to social protection, the legal remedies available to women must be publicized. The Government did understand the importance of that issue and would do its utmost to ensure that measures to prevent and punish such violence were implemented. Old mentalities persisted, however, and it was difficult to move beyond the gender role stereotypes which had prevailed for centuries. However, she did not agree that the Government was not taking action against domestic violence. It had become a great deal more proactive at all levels since the report had been issued in 1999.

38. There were 40 places of detention in the Russian Federation where women were held. Of those, 37 were general prisons, two were special security prisons, and one was a mandatory treatment centre for prisoners addicted to drugs. As of January 2002, there were about 42,700 women in the general prisons, about 3,200 in special security prisons, and about 1,200 in the drug addiction centre. Eleven of the general prisons accommodated children, and about 470 children under three years of age were living there with their mothers. Although the situation had been improving, none of the three types of prison adequately provided normal activities for women. In the previous three years, a great deal of progress had been made in enacting legislation to improve the conditions of life for women in prisons, and to protect their rights. The new regime that would soon come into effect under the law should significantly improve the lives of institutionalized women and children. During the previous three years, 19,000 women had been released under four separate amnesty programmes, an unprecedented event in the Russian Federation.

39. **Ms. Sharapova** (Russian Federation) said that, in the early 1990s, the Government, assisted by the ministries and non-governmental organizations, had taken measures to protect the reproductive health of the population, establishing family planning and safe maternity programmes, training staff and creating a health database. Improvements had occurred in basic reproductive health indicators. In 2001, a compulsory national health care system had been created, covering such areas as accidents, tuberculosis, strokes, heart attacks and acute infectious diseases, providing assistance for pregnancies and births, and offering care to invalids, veterans and children.

40. The Government had also assigned a significant part of the responsibility for public health to the regional level, and had allowed private institutions to furnish both services and goods. Working together, the Ministry of Labour and Social Development and the Ministry of Education had established a plan for the protection of reproductive health, with a view to reducing infant and maternal morbidity and mortality. The Government understood that the problem involved many sectors and was striving to create a comprehensive plan that would take all of them into account.

41. The improvement of health was part of the broader national plan of action to improve the status of women in the Russian Federation and to enhance their role in society. A commission had been set up under the auspices of the Ministry of Health to ensure efficient medical assistance to women and children up to the age of one year, to analyse all programmes and activities, and to develop measures to improve reproductive health. Since awareness-raising was of great importance, measures had been taken to disseminate printed materials, and to devote television and radio broadcasts to those issues.

42. In 2001, a brochure had been produced on reproductive health care for adolescents. The family planning system had some 500 centres; through the dissemination of information and the provision of hormonal contraceptives, the Government had succeeded in reducing the number of abortions.

43. In the two-year period from 2000 to 2001, there had been 56,000 new cases of HIV infection, three times as many as in 1999. More than 95 per cent of those cases had occurred in persons between the ages of 17 and 25. Significant progress had been made in

identifying HIV and in developing a standard response to that problem. The Government's anti-AIDS efforts fell within a broader programme to combat social diseases. Resources had been allocated for prophylactics to prevent infection of pregnant women, and to prevent mother to child contagion.

44. In the past five years, there had been noted increases in the sale of hard liquor and beer. The problem of drug addiction was growing faster, however, than that of alcoholism. Drug addiction in young people was almost twice the rate in the population at large. In 2001, official statistics showed there to be about 73,000 women addicted to drugs, and many had been treated in rehabilitation centres. A draft law designed to decrease drug addiction in women and adolescents had been formulated and would soon be submitted to the State Duma for consideration. In addition, the network of emergency assistance centres, and the number of doctors handling drug addiction cases were expanding.

45. **Ms. Karelova** (Russian Federation) said that the situation of women in Chechnya was naturally a matter of concern to the international community. The President of the Russian Federation had stipulated that every effort must be made to ensure that Chechens enjoyed the human rights and freedoms to which they were entitled; that their rights would not be disregarded or slighted; and that any person who violated those rights would be punished. A special unit within the office of the Presidency had been created, and efforts were being taken to ensure that all citizens, regardless of national origin, religion or political affiliation would be protected.

46. That was of course an enormously difficult task; progress was, however, being made in improving human rights in Chechnya. There were twelve regional courts, and over 6,000 cases had been heard. In 2001, the number of crimes against the Russian population had increased, and representatives of the federal Government had been murdered. Troops had been deployed to ensure law and order; and a military prosecutor's office was in operation. In December 2001, the court had found 17 military personnel guilty of crimes against the peaceful population of Chechen; those crimes included ten murders and one rape. A passport monitoring system had been established to review the registration of all passports. Measures had also been taken to increase the effectiveness of the

prosecutor's office and to investigate cases of missing and disappeared persons.

47. With respect to the case of Colonel Yury Budanov, she said that the medical evidence had not supported the claim of rape, and he had therefore been convicted only of murder. All cases brought to the attention of the Russian Government would be carefully considered.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.