



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

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

**Summary record of the 390th meeting**

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 29 June 1998, at 3 p.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Khan

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.*

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

*Initial report of South Africa (continued)*  
(CEDAW/C/ZAF/1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Fraser-Moleketi (South Africa) took a place at the Committee table.

2. **Ms. Fraser-Moleketi** (South Africa), replying to questions posed by Committee members, said that the national machinery for the advancement of women had been established at a time of heightened institutional reform and societal transformation. It was intended to change the national mentality and create an enabling environment so that women were not neglected, as they had been in the past. The national machinery was crafted to avoid duplication. For example, the Office of the Status of Women, the Commission on Gender Equality and the departmental gender structures performed complementary functions in mainstreaming and other areas in addition to their focus on women's rights.

3. Provincial branches of the Office on the Status of Women had been opened in seven of South Africa's nine provinces from 1994 to 1996. The women's movement and the Commission on Gender Equality were taking action to ensure that offices were established in the remaining two provinces.

4. One of the central functions of the gender focal points was to ensure that the various government departments provided and used gender-disaggregated data in their work. To that end, they relied on the skills of the staff of the Central Statistical Services. In addition, the statistical units of the national government ministries were responsible for the collection of gender-sensitive data. One of their principal tasks was to design indicators to measure the implementation and impact of the National Gender Programme, specifically on key national and international instruments, particularly the national policy issues of equity and sectoral development. The Commission on Gender Equality was conducting a baseline gender study in partnership with the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE), a non-governmental organization, with the aim of enhancing

programme development and identifying monitoring and evaluation indicators.

5. Addressing the Committee's concern at the apparent lack of coordination at the national level, she said that the national machinery, once it was fully operational, would monitor compliance with the Convention on a sectoral basis. In the meantime, the Department of Welfare had been responsible for the preparation of South Africa's initial report.

6. It was agreed in 1997, after lengthy consultations, that the National Office on the Status of Women would be responsible for, *inter alia*, policy, norms and standards and that the provincial offices would be responsible for implementation. An upcoming gender audit was expected to produce guidelines for coordination between the national ministries and the national Office of the Status of Women. It was hoped that a common understanding of the national Office's coordinating role would emerge from that exercise.

7. A professional skills audit conducted by the Office on the Status of Women had resulted in the development of a capacity-building strategy that involved supervision of the staff's daily work by a gender specialist. As part of the gender mainstreaming process, the gender focal points of the government departments would be trained to implement and manage audits. Programmes and projects of the Commission on Gender Equality were being carried out in the areas of gender policy and institutional framework, public education and information, law and justice, safety and security, economic empowerment and political empowerment. Specific activities of the Commission included gender and media symposia, an audit of discriminatory legislation, the investigation of complaints, research and publications on gender and development, consultative meetings with non-governmental organizations on women farm workers and the issue of a CEDAW newsletter in collaboration with the National Institute for Public Interest, Law and Research.

8. The structure of the Office on the Status of Women did not allow for direct participation by non-governmental organizations. However, as part of its capacity-building programme, the office consulted a group composed of both government and non-government representatives while at the departmental level, it cooperated with non-governmental organizations through the gender focal points. For its

part the Commission on Gender Equality, in partnership with non-governmental organizations, had established inter alia a women's electronic network for the prevention of violence against women and continued its work in education and advocacy to cope with allegations of witchcraft.

9. In recognition of the need for a highly skilled staff to implement the mainstreaming programmes of the Office on the Status of Women and the Commission on Gender Equality, both the Office and the Commission had formulated capacity-building strategies, notably the formation of a technical team of gender specialists to work in programme development and provide on-site supervision for provincial staff.

10. The Office on the Status of Women was a unit within the Presidency composed of a Chief Executive Officer and a secretary; two more professionals would be recruited in July. The full complement would ultimately include two gender specialists, one policy specialist, one research specialist and an administrator.

11. The Commission on Gender Equality consisted of a Chairperson and no fewer than 7, but no more than 11 full-time or part-time members appointed by the President for a fixed-term not to exceed five years. The administrative staff of the Commission included a Chief Executive Officer and the professional heads of its Policy, Legal, Education and Finance and Administration Divisions.

12. The national Office on the Status of Women had the power to formulate policy and coordinate its implementation by all government departments. The Commission on Gender Equality had the authority to investigate gender-related issues of its own accord or on receipt of a complaint. It could refer such matters at any stage to the Human Rights Commission, the Public Protector or any other appropriate authority. It could also determine the procedure for the investigation of complaints. For purposes of such investigations, it could require persons to provide information or to testify before it under oath. On authority of a warrant, it could enter and search premises and attach and remove certain articles or authorize a police officer to do so. At the Commission's discretion, expenses incurred in connection with the investigation of complaints, including damages for a forced entry and search, were paid from State funds.

13. The current yearly budget for the Office on the Status of Women (OSW) represented 12 per cent of the

total budget allocated to the Office of the Deputy President and was financed from both private and Government funds. Pending the conclusions of a task force established by the Cabinet to make recommendations for funding commissions, the budget for the Commission on Gender Equality, (CGE) had been tentatively set at 10 million rand, or 70 per cent of the total projected budget. The Commission had also participated in meetings with international bilateral partners, which had pledged a contribution of 18 per cent of the projected budget.

14. The Commission had held extensive discussions with local traditional leaders, concerning both the positive and negative aspects of customary laws and practice as they affected men and women. The lessons learned from those discussions were being incorporated into the Commission's education and information strategy. The Central Statistical Service had established a gender unit whose task included integrating a gender focus into questionnaires and reports, conducting a gender re-analysis of all data and undertaking a gender-oriented survey of the labour market which would assess occupation, gender and race. The Commission had held a symposium to discuss the role of the mass media in gender relations in South Africa. It intended to establish a media award for progressive gender coverage by the press and to elicit detailed studies concerning the portrayal of women in the media.

15. With the exception of the Central Bank, South African banks were private institutions. The Women's Development Bank offered credit to rural women, and a number of microcredit institutions provided loans to women in urban areas. In addition, the Government had established agencies whose role was to extend credit to micro and small enterprises.

16. South Africa had launched the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) Programme with a view to reducing the growing national debt, and countering its potential impact on social programmes. New budget priorities had been established with larger sums allocated for social development and poverty relief, programmes which naturally benefited women. For the current year, 300 million rand would be allocated to community-based poverty relief programmes, with special attention to rural areas and to women. That figure would nearly double in 1999, with Government spending on health, education and welfare rising to 60 per cent.

17. The educational system was the single largest institution in South Africa, and textbooks could have great impact on gender relations by perpetuating sexual stereotypes. A recent policy paper on education and training recognized that girls and women were subject to discrimination and ill-treatment, and that girls and young women benefited from narrower subject and career choices. It also found that although most teachers were women, they were poorly represented in education management positions and in education departments.

18. The Government of South Africa had entered into an agreement with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the aim of which was to promote the participation of women in the media industry, to address gender stereotypes portrayed in the media, and to enhance women's access to information. That programme would focus on such key areas as public service broadcasting, community media development, the print media, research, publishing and monitoring and human resource development.

19. South Africa had made a sizeable investment in the creation of effective gender-based educational programmes, and in developing a cadre of workers capable of managing the transformation process. As educational mediators, teachers were expected to reflect on the ways in which race, class, gender, language, and geographical differences affected learning, and to adapt those realities to their teaching strategies; to teach in a manner which acknowledged and respected sociocultural and linguistic differences, as well as varying levels of learning ability; and to demonstrate a professional and caring commitment to children as whole persons.

20. The Government was profoundly concerned about the exploitation of girl children, and in particular about the exploitation of their vulnerability for purposes of prostitution. It had worked out a set of programmes designed to improve the social and economic status of marginalized groups such as the Flagship Programme for Women and Children under Five. For its part, the Department of Health had been striving to develop a comprehensive and integrated national health system which would provide accessible health care services to all South Africans. It sought to develop a district health system and primary health care packages, to build clinics in underserved areas, to rehabilitate neglected hospitals, to train midwives and primary health care

nurses and to ensure universal access to safe drinking water. In order to resolve the problem of the scarcity of medical doctors in rural and informal urban settlements, the Department had instituted a programme requiring new doctors to work for one year in public service before going into private practice. Foreign doctor programmes, established by intergovernmental agreement, were another means of providing doctor care to needy areas. The Northern Province, for instance, had received the services of 47 Cuban doctors, 10 European Union doctors, and 3 doctors from the United Nations Volunteer Programme.

21. The Maternal, Child and Women's Health Directorate, which was responsible for reproductive health, had a large budget, and free health services were provided for pregnant and lactating women, as well as for children under the age of six. A separate directorate had been established for the treatment of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STD).

22. In his address to Parliament in February 1998, President Mandela had reported that 90 per cent of women who were entitled to free health care were in fact receiving it; that the number of persons to whom water was supplied had increased from 700,000 to 1.3 million; that electrification had increased to 58 per cent; that the goal of building and upgrading 500 clinics in the previous year had been surpassed; that the national feeding programme was reaching 4.9 million children; and that the number of telephone connections would almost double in the current year. He had also pointed out that South Africa was the only developing country in the world that provided social security to poor and vulnerable people, and had noted that the Employment Equity Bill required employers of over 50 persons to increase the number of black employees.

23. Malnutrition was widespread. Breastfeeding was encouraged, except where it was contraindicated, as in the care of women with HIV/AIDS, for whom supplementary feeds were provided. Parasites were among the major causes of malnutrition and pilot parasite control programmes had been launched in the provinces of Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal.

24. Young children and pregnant and lactating mothers tended to suffer from a deficiency of micronutrients, in particular, iron, iodine and Vitamin A. Iron deficiency anaemia was thought to affect as many as 25 per cent of South African women.

Iron and folate supplements were supplied to pregnant women for the prevention and treatment of anaemia; efforts were under way to fortify staple foods with iron and folic acid. In 1995, legislation had been enacted to require the iodization of salt, which was a cost-effective means of preventing and controlling iodine deficiency.

25. The Protein Energy and Malnutrition Scheme (PEM), instituted by the previous Government, was being reviewed in order to bring it into line with the principles of current nutritional and primary health care policies. The National Nutrition Surveillance System would begin to monitor the nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women and pre-school children in the course of 1998. In addition, the Primary School Nutrition Programme, which sought to combat hunger in primary schools, focused on feeding school children, controlling parasites, and providing nutrition education.

26. The Department of Health provided contraception services free of charge in the public sector and encouraged the private sector to make available high-quality contraceptives. The dangers of frequent pregnancies were highlighted by consciousness-raising activities of non-governmental organizations. When hospital staff refused to perform abortions, they were encouraged to refer women to centres where abortions were available. While health workers were not forced to participate in performing abortions they were barred from obstructing access to services for terminating a pregnancy. Nurses, in general, were more supportive of the law on abortion, and by retraining registered midwives it was hoped to improve access, particularly in rural areas, where attitudes were conservative.

27. There was a special programme to improve the recovery rate from tuberculosis, which would make it possible to deal with the health threat posed by the link between that disease and HIV. Various strategies had been adopted to combat HIV/AIDS and an interministerial committee had been established to make it an issue of national concern.

28. All infants born in health institutions were registered. New registration forms had been developed for babies born outside the health services. Gender-disaggregated statistics on the number of childhood deaths were not available.

29. The Government was very concerned about the high levels of alcohol consumption among youths and

adults. Drinking during pregnancy had led to an incidence of foetal alcohol syndrome, which rose to 15 per cent in some areas. Education campaigns and programmes to assist problem drinkers were being designed. The recently completed Drug Master Plan included a strategy to prioritize drug management: it covered smoking, the abuse of alcohol and the use and abuse of all illicit and legal drugs.

30. Although there were no documented cases of female genital mutilation, research was being conducted to determine whether the practice existed. Self-examination for breast and uterine cancer was promoted through public and private institutions and the media. Cancer of the cervix was addressed as part of the broader women's health programme; and pilot projects were considering the feasibility of nationwide screening for its early detection and treatment. Cervical cancer control was one of the main areas covered by the National Cancer-Control Programme.

31. With regard to land ownership, she pointed out that women who were not partners in a customary marriage could hold freehold title to land and lease land in the same way that men could. The Government was conducting a major review of land ownership to determine whether there should be freehold title to communal land. Women who were partners in customary marriages could not hold title to land: only their male partners enjoyed that right. Women were identified as one of the disadvantaged groups in matters relating to land. However, the Communal Property Association Act, which had been introduced to ensure that women participated in the Land Reform Programme, provided for non-discrimination between women and men.

32. The Land Reform Programme presumably did not discriminate against married, divorced or widowed women. Nevertheless, while anyone could gain access to land through grants, in practice the male partners/spouses were often the ones who received such grants on behalf of their families. The Communal Property Association Act was also intended to protect women and children in the event of the dissolution of a marriage through divorce or death.

33. An action plan had been drawn up to correct inequalities in the housing sector and ensure equal access for women to housing, finance, job opportunities and community involvement. The plan sought to eliminate obstacles blocking women's access

to housing, include gender-sensitive women in decision-making bodies on housing, promote gender equality in the housing industry and enhance women's awareness of their rights and responsibilities in that field. Since 1997, progress had been made in increasing the number of women contractors, promoting women's participation in housing projects and facilitating financing and savings for housing. The Government had also developed a disaster management strategy to deal with the impact of natural disasters; and a disaster relief fund provided assistance to individuals and communities that were affected.

34. With regard to the status of rural women, she said that a report on improving rural women's agricultural productivity proposed, inter alia, the amendment of legislation in order to enable women to enter into agreements, assume managerial positions in cooperatives and participate more actively in land management and the marketing of agricultural products. The Land Bank Act had been amended to give women access to financial assistance. A programme to integrate all women engaged in agriculture into the national economy was currently being drawn up and sought to ensure that women participated in resource management, obtained access to land, finance and water, and were involved at all levels of development planning. A number of programmes had been initiated to advance the economic empowerment of women in rural areas.

35. The Government's affirmative action was backed up by a skills-development programme. Accelerated training programmes were being initiated in the public sector and in many larger corporations to promote the employment of women in areas from which they had been excluded. The Government was proposing targets for women's employment in the public sector and sought to ensure that compliance with affirmative action targets did not result in tokenism or compromise efficiency standards.

36. Between 16 per cent to 25 per cent of the workforce was engaged in the informal sector. There were no special measures to support women who were heads of households, had small children or wanted to re-enter the job market. The average salaries of nurses were just below those of teachers and about equal to those of administrators. The lowest salaries were in agriculture and domestic services, where women were in greatest numbers. Unemployment insurance roughly amounted to 45 per cent of one's average monthly

salary during the last six months of employment. However, self-employment workers were not covered by insurance unless they could afford private coverage. The employment of minors under the age of 15 was prohibited.

37. South Africa was in the process of ratifying the ILO conventions on the equality of women. The Government was taking steps to regulate atypical forms of employment and reduce weekly working hours and overtime. Employers were not allowed to avoid their responsibility to provide basic benefits to employees, especially maternity benefits. The Constitution also prohibited discrimination based on pregnancy. The labour laws provided for a minimum 40-hour and a maximum 45-hour workweek. The Government was aware of the dangers involved in women working longer hours and would continue to monitor the impact on women of those legislative provisions.

38. South Africa's macroeconomic strategy set targets for job creation and the reduction of unemployment and provided for a range of programmes and support services to meet that contingency. The Community-based Public Works Programme was aimed at ensuring community involvement throughout project implementation. There were approximately 1.2 million domestic workers in South Africa, the second largest sector of the workforce. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the Labour Relations Act protected their rights. However, they did not have social security coverage and were not protected against hazards in the workplace. Research was being conducted to identify measures for remedying that situation.

39. Under the Constitution all persons were protected from slavery, sexual and forced labour, and all forms of violence. The Sexual Offences Act contained provisions relating to trafficking in human beings and the operation of brothels. Efforts were being made to overhaul the regulatory framework concerning such trafficking and to discourage voluntary participation in commercial sex work motivated by poverty. The high incidence of rape in South Africa could not be viewed in isolation; it owed much to the violent apartheid system from which the country was emerging. In the past, South African society had not condemned violence against women as unacceptable. A new culture of human rights calling for equality, respect for human dignity and security of the individual still needed to be

inculcated, and existing laws and the justice system had to be adapted accordingly. Recent measures to recognize customary marriages included the abolition of minority status for women under customary law, full recognition of customary and Muslim marriages and equal rights and responsibilities with regard to child custody and maintenance.

40. Since the Constitution prohibited both direct and indirect gender discrimination, and the Supreme Court of Appeal and the Constitutional Court had recognized the need to adopt positive measures as a means to achieve equality, women could access the public prosecutor's office to file complaints against discrimination by public institutions. The Government was also committed to using affirmative measures to accelerate the recruitment and advancement of women in the judiciary.

41. The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act provided for formal equality between men and women in owning and administering property. Spouses would henceforth own and administer property jointly; and in the event of the dissolution of marriage by divorce, property would be divided. Legal aid was primarily confined to criminal law, focusing on indigent accused persons. It did not cover rape or any other crimes of which women were victims. Legal aid was being extended to rural areas throughout the country. University-based legal clinics and community-based advice centres functioned as agents of the Legal Aid Board. The Maintenance Law Amendment Act closed crucial gaps in the maintenance system following divorce and facilitated collection of arrears. Women's organizations and non-governmental organizations had been extensively consulted before its enactment.

42. To address the variety of marital regimes and the problems they entailed in terms of violence against women and management of family patrimony, efforts were being made to develop a policy of bringing the various aspects of family law into harmony. Accordingly, the differences in matrimonial patrimony arrangements between the various marital regimes would be removed by the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act, while differences in widows' property rights would be addressed by the Succession (Customary Law) Act. All marriages must now be registered, and only a court could dissolve them.

43. The new legislation was purposely silent on the custom of paying a bride price, known as lobola, on the

assumption that legislation against deeply entrenched practices might be counterproductive; however, the Department of Justice and various non-governmental organizations were working to transform attitudes in conjunction with the Commission on Gender Equality as part of a broader consciousness-raising campaign.

44. It was hoped that the new legislation on polygamy would help to eliminate the practice by making it more difficult to spouses to enter into subsequent marriages. Children of such unions would be protected under the Maintenance Amendment Act and the Succession (Customary Law) Act.

45. Traditional cultural and religious practices were permitted only insofar as they did not violate the constitutional principles of human dignity, equality, liberty and non-discrimination and special units were established to deal with the problem.

46. To combat violence against women, a number of subprogrammes were being implemented as part of the national crime prevention strategy. In that context the Victim Empowerment Programme had high priority; the provision of services to victims was being considered as well as a victims' charter to empower victims and survivors and protect their rights.

47. With regard to law enforcement aimed at the protection of women, she noted that the training programmes for law enforcement officers recognized the importance of an integrated national approach to violence against women. Consequently, the National Network on Violence against Women included a number of Government departments and a range of non-governmental organizations. A national summit would take place in September 1998 to consolidate the national programme of action which was based on the recommendations of the Conference of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the SADC Declaration on Violence against Women.

48. She believed that it was impossible to tell whether violence against women was actually increasing or decreasing because of a lack of research and a lack of comparable statistics. The reported increase in cases should not give rise to alarm because it should be viewed in the context of the new human rights culture in which women felt freer to report violence against them. However, the Government would be doing targeted research to quantify its belief that there was still a significant degree of under-reporting and would take innovative measures to

change attitudes in society and practice in law enforcement. It should be noted, in that connection, that in cases of mild domestic violence victims were free to use the normal criminal justice process. Serious violence, such as murder and assault with intent to inflict grievous bodily harm, was treated in the same way whether it could be called domestic or not.

49. Rape in marriage had been criminalized under the Family Violence Act of 1998. In fact, rape in all circumstances had been treated as a priority crime and the courts had relaxed rules governing witness safety and testimony.

50. The Press Ombudsman's Office in its current form had been established in July 1997 to receive complaints from women, although they were not identified as such because the Office did not keep gender-disaggregated data. It was a private voluntary association set up and supported by the print media. The Government would recommend that it keep gender-disaggregated data.

51. The practice of witch-hunting was a source of concern for the Government. The Government of Northern Province had established a commission of enquiry into the practice, and legislative measures and a programme of action were planned.

52. The low percentage of women in the Department of Foreign Affairs, particularly in the higher and management echelons, required attention: a Gender Unit had been established in October 1997 and had been operating since then, although without a Gender Officer at its head. The Gender Officer would soon be appointed, and the Department of Foreign Affairs had already included a module on gender-sensitizing in its annual diplomatic training programme.

53. With regard to the representation of women in parliament, it was often argued that they must number at least 30 per cent of the membership. In South Africa, some 25 per cent of the members of the national Parliament were women, 23 per cent in the provincial legislatures and 19 per cent in local government. Of the 80 members who had left Parliament since 1994, only 1 in 10 had been women and none of those had gone back to traditional women's professions; instead, they had joined the civil service, gone into Foreign Affairs or business or moved into a provincial legislature. One woman had relocated abroad to join a husband who was a foreign national. She warned, however, that institutional changes muddled the picture: there had

been a drop in permanent female representation between the Senate and the Council of Provinces which had replaced it.

54. The women in parliament had ensured that those women who left were replaced by women in order to maintain the 30 per cent affirmative action target agreed by the African National Congress (ANC). Women had taken leading positions as presiding officers, and had also played a leading role in transforming legislatures' unfriendly working hours and improving facilities such as childcare for members and their staff. Women had made a difference, and had had a positive impact by prioritizing changes in areas affecting women.

55. Her Government was keen to take on the challenges raised in the questioning by the Committee; they had shown not only how far South Africa had come in improving gender equality and women's quality of life, but also how far it still had to go before full equality was achieved.

56. **Ms. Abaka** said that it was regrettable that the problem of debt servicing to which the representative had alluded, a problem that affected many developing countries, had restricted improvements in areas such as access to clean water.

57. She commended the South African Government on its policy of instructing health care workers not to obstruct access to pregnancy termination services, noting that in many countries where terminations were legal, in practice some health workers for reasons of conscience refused to perform them or obstructed access by refusing to refer women to people who would. In her view, the Committee should recommend the South African Government's policy to all Governments.

58. She expressed some confusion on the subject of male genital mutilation as referred to by the representative of South Africa: there was nothing wrong with male circumcision per se, provided of course that it was carried out in a safe manner, as it was completely different in motive and impact from female genital mutilation and did not infringe men's human rights. She applauded the South African Government's decision to conduct research into female genital mutilation: in her own country, Ghana, the problem had been thought to be insignificant before similar research had sounded the alarm and led to a law being passed to make the practice illegal.



59. She recommended that the South African Government should seek the assistance of the many indigenous women's non-governmental organizations working to combat female genital mutilation in Africa, and that it should seek also the advice of the Special Rapporteur on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children.

60. She expressed concern that the problem of violence against women, about which more needed to be done, would be submerged in the unfortunate general violence and lawlessness afflicting South Africa. She wondered therefore if strategies to combat it would have more emphasis separate from rather than subsumed into the national crime prevention strategy.

61. **Ms. Aouij** called on South African women to take advantage of the historic circumstance that South Africa had a great, reforming leader in President Mandela, who truly understood the importance of women's rights. Women must push for their rights hard enough to ensure that they could never be taken away again. The reform bills in the making in the areas of education and health and the efforts to reduce poverty, particularly in rural areas, were encouraging and women in positions of power and in civil society must organize to build on them and also to change attitudes to the extent possible given the political, economic and social environment.

62. All remaining traces of discriminatory legislation should be exposed and rooted out: in that context, inegalitarian traditional customs and practices were always the last to go and she warned that some changes, if they were not made during South Africa's time of euphoria, would never be made at all.

63. A family code that reflected the laws and customs that were most positive for women should be brought into line with the Convention and promulgated: in that way, South African women would have a status reflecting their true role and place in the development of their country.

64. **Ms. Ferrer** said that eliminating sex stereotypes was vital in eliminating traditional cultural practices that discriminated against women. Education was the key to success in that area, together with use of the mass media in changing people's attitudes towards gender equality. It was fortunate that the powerful challenges and obstacles to change were matched by an equally powerful political will to apply the provisions of the Convention.

65. **Ms. Gonzalez** supported Ms. Ferrer's conclusions concerning the elimination of sex stereotypes, and stressed that those stereotypes lay behind much violence against women. Women must be educated in ways that made them aware that violence against them was not "natural" and was a violation of their human rights. It was actually a powerful means of maintaining sex stereotypes, which were cultural cancers not only in South Africa but in all countries. Violence could be physical, psychological or social, the ultimate effect being to deny women their rightful place in society. If education did not attack those cultural cancers at the root, young people would grow up perpetuating their false perceptions.

66. **Ms. Fraser-Moleketi** (South Africa), in response to Ms. Abaka's point that violence against women might be subsumed by the overall national Crime Prevention Strategy, said that the Government and South African women had identified violence against women as a major problem area, and that was why it was a focus both within the Strategy and whenever gender questions were examined. Crimes against women and children were priority crimes, thus, the Government had embarked on initiatives to stamp them out on its own and together with non-governmental organizations. She described the "Men's March": men had marched to focus on the issue of violence against women and to expand and strengthen an issue that the Government had raised. Government departments and non-governmental agencies were working together to hammer home the message that violence against women was not "natural", was a violation of human rights and was unacceptable in the new South Africa.

67. **The Chairperson** commended the South African Government on its report, on producing it within two years of ratifying the Convention and on ratifying the Convention without reservations.

68. Despite the legacy of discrimination and underdevelopment spawned by the apartheid regime, South Africa's achievements in establishing respect for human rights and equality had been significant: the speed and goodwill with which the transformation had been effected had created an enabling environment for transforming gender relationships. Law reform had made great strides, and almost all law that discriminated against women had been repealed and replaced by a redesigned legislative framework that met women's needs.

69. The South African Government was attempting to address the country's social and economic maladies; however, the implementation of its programmes did not match the country's needs, as in all developing countries. She stressed that the skewed and stark disparities in income distribution and standards of living in South Africa was partly responsible for perpetuating violence against women in an environment afflicted by joblessness and poverty. In that connection, on the basis of reports from non-governmental organizations and other sources, she believed that the priority attached to women's issues by the South African Government was not always reflected in its budgetary allocations; also, though much had been done in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, more such cooperation was needed. In that context, the training manual on the Convention produced by a South African non-governmental organization even before South Africa had ratified it was being used as an example in South Asia and elsewhere.

70. She requested the South African Government to look further into the Committee's General Recommendation 19 for direction in addressing women's issues more effectively.

71. The clash between the Constitution and customary law was cause for concern; although she was relieved that the Constitution took precedence, that area deserved more attention in practice.

72. She commended the Government's application of article 4 of the Convention: the increase in participation by women in politics and government had been particularly striking.

73. South Africa had a great leader in President Mandela, who understood and had said in his first speech in Parliament that freedom could not be achieved unless South African women were emancipated from all forms of oppression, and she called on South African women to match his dynamism, zeal and optimism.

*The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.*