



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

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

Twenty-seventh session

Summary record of the 558th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 7 June 2002, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Abaka

Contents

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

Combined initial and second periodic reports of Suriname (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)
(CEDAW/C/SUR/1-2)

Combined initial and second periodic reports of Suriname (continued) (CEDAW/C/SUR/1-2)

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

2. **The Chairperson** invited Committee members to continue posing questions to the delegation of Suriname.

Article 9

3. **Ms. Hazelle** asked whether children born in wedlock could be placed on their mother's, rather than their father's passport, and whether the mother's, as well as the father's, permission was required for children to travel. It would be useful to know what mechanisms were in place to guarantee the safety of the children in the event of a custody battle which prompted one of the parents to leave the country.

4. **The Chairperson** supported Ms. Hazelle's remarks and said that the practice in Suriname was discriminatory. An explanation would be appreciated.

Article 10

5. **Ms. Hazelle**, noting, from page 35 of the report, that adolescent mothers were sometimes barred from returning to junior secondary schools whereas the young men who impregnated them were not, asked what measures had been taken to address that clear case of discrimination. The State party seemed to fear that teenage mothers would have a "negative influence on other girls", but how did it feel about the influence of teenage fathers or the exposure of other girls to those young men? She expressed the hope that the State party would consider the long-term effects of barring teenage mothers from school, including poverty, exploitation and vulnerability.

6. **Ms. González** requested information on behalf of Ms. Regazzoli, who was ill, about continuing education programmes for women and the extent to which women and ethnic groups participated in such

programmes. She shared Ms. Hazelle's concern about prohibiting teenage mothers from returning to school.

Article 11

7. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** enquired whether any steps were being taken to deal with omissions from the Collective Labour Agreements for example, the absence of protection of motherhood or prohibitions on heavy and dangerous work for pregnant and lactating women, which were not consistent with the provisions of the Constitution, requiring special protection for women during and after pregnancy. The lack of legislation regarding childcare facilities, flexible working hours or permission to leave work to attend to children's needs and the lack of after school facilities must also be addressed. Were sanctions imposed on those who violated article 35 of the Constitution, which recognized the exceptional importance of motherhood and the right to paid maternity leave?

8. **Ms. Livingstone Raday** noted that women in Suriname had been active in complaining about sexual harassment, and asked whether the Government was considering the introduction of legislation to encourage women to take action, including legal action, to claim their rights and fight the various forms of discrimination in the workplace, including sexual harassment.

Article 12

9. **Ms. Shin** enquired about the penalizing provisions in the Criminal Code for the kinds of family planning and sex education activities carried out by the Lobi Foundation. It was encouraging to see that women were not afraid to report incidents of violence to police, as evidenced by the fact that, in 1993, 94 per cent of police reports had concerned abuse of women by their husbands or partners. She welcomed the elaboration of a plan of action and legislation to curb violence against women, which she hoped would be implemented soon. Coordination of the activities of all ministries would be important in providing support to victims of violence. She hoped that the State party would also set up a national hotline and organize teams of police, hospitals, shelters, counselling centres and social workers to combat the problem in each district. The long-term effects of violence against women should be addressed by carrying out public information campaigns to convince Surinamese society that violence against women was a criminal offence.

10. **The Chairperson** asked why the law criminalizing abortion was retained if a blind eye was turned towards it (CEDAW/C/SUR/1-2, p. 65). Reproductive health went beyond childbearing and family planning, yet, the report made no mention of such issues as breast, uterine or cervical cancer or menopause and announced cuts in health services. Stressing the importance of accessibility she enquired about infrastructure, such as transportation, in the rural area, particularly where there had been tension with ethnic groups, such as the Maroons, whose health situation was appalling. Nor did the report discuss the problem of drug or substance abuse, including tobacco, or the mental and psychological health of women, which could be a factor in substance abuse.

11. Referring to the statement that civil servants enjoyed free medical treatment, including obstetric care, she requested details on conditions for co-insuring family members (CEDAW/C/SUR/1-2, p. 64). The delegation should also provide information on insurance schemes for employees in the private sector. Noting that, according to the report, contraceptives were used mostly by women she asked whether action was being taken to build awareness and increase condom use among men. It would also be interesting to know whether women felt empowered to use female condoms.

12. **Ms. Hazelle** asked whether the State party planned to abolish the law penalizing persons who displayed contraceptives for the prevention of pregnancy (CEDAW/C/SUR/1-2, p. 65). Noting that the age group between 15 and 29 years accounted for the majority of HIV/AIDS victims (CEDAW/C/SUR/1-2, p. 67), she enquired about efforts to step up education on family planning and safer sex among youth.

13. Turning to violence against women, she asked about the status of the Government Commission on Public Decency. Had it submitted a report and, if so, what recommendations did that report contain? She wondered whether there was any overlap between the Commission and the newly established committee to review gender legislation, referred to in the delegation's oral introduction at the previous meeting. How did the two entities differ? An examination of the compatibility of national legislation with treaty provisions would provide an excellent opportunity to incorporate provisions of, inter alia, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against

Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Beijing Platform for Action into Surinamese law. It would also provide an opportunity for the adoption of legislation assigning specific tasks to, for example, the police, health and education services and the national women's machinery, for the purpose of combating violence against women.

14. She wondered whether specific legislation had been adopted to address the problem of sexual harassment at the workplace. Other possible measures included coordinating action by the National Gender Bureau, the Ministry of Labour and the trade unions in order to develop a handbook on the matter, or consulting the International Labour Organization. Lastly, she commended the fine work of Surinamese non-governmental organizations in combating violence against women.

15. **Ms. González** noted that Suriname had the highest incidence of AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean and that the problem was particularly serious among youth and rural ethnic groups, such as the Maroons. She wondered whether action was being taken to educate young men about the importance of using condoms and whether the State party might consider seeking assistance from the Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in awareness-building, prevention and treatment.

Article 13

16. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** requested a breakdown by age of the 60 per cent of women who received medical assistance from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Public Housing and asked whether any poverty surveys had been taken from a gender perspective. She wished to know whether men and women had de facto equal access to the medical benefits and financial support described in the report, and whether they were subject to the same eligibility criteria. She asked whether a women's marital status and income, including from the informal sector, were taken into account in determining the amount of such assistance.

Article 14

17. **The Chairperson**, noting that the report showed that indigenous women in Suriname experienced tremendous difficulties in almost all aspects of their

lives, asked whether the Government planned to implement special temporary measures to help them.

18. **Ms. Feng Cui** said that the report, although very detailed in respect of article 14 of the Convention, failed to state clearly what were the Government's principal areas of focus in respect of the situation of rural women. The delegation should tell the Committee what steps were being taken to eradicate poverty and improve infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Given that women's work in the agricultural sector was "not described in terms of productive labour" (CEDAW/C/SUR/1-2, p. 75), she wondered how women's labour in rural areas was assessed, since they were the main productive force.

19. She expressed the hope that the numerous negative statements in the report, such as the fact that the Government had no specific policy on family planning in rural areas or on agriculture, could soon be replaced by positive ones; and that the reporting State would in future submit its reports on schedule so that the various language versions could be prepared in time for the Committee's consideration.

20. **Ms. González** noted that the report distinguished between two categories of rural women. She requested additional information relating to the differences between the two, particularly in respect of collective cultural differences and the ways in which such factors prevented women from achieving a reasonable standard of living. It was alarming that health care in the interior was deteriorating rapidly, as was stated on page 77 of the report, and she was particularly concerned at the situation regarding family planning and the lack of measures to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. She suggested that the Government should consider adopting policies to promote change in ideas and customs in those areas.

Article 15

21. **Ms. González** noted that the report referred to measures relating to the legal capacity of married women but failed to mention that of single, widowed or divorced women; and she asked whether any cases where spouses disagreed on the choice of the marital home had been brought before the courts, and what decisions had been handed down.

Article 16

22. **Ms. Kwaku** asked what percentage of girls in Suriname married before the age of 18, and what were the consequences for their health, and for their education. The reporting State should explain how it reconciled its policy in that regard with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

23. **Ms. González** asked the delegation of Suriname to provide details concerning the "specific marriage systems" of the indigenous peoples and the tribal Maroons, and wondered whether the application of those systems might be detrimental to the situation of the women concerned and to the enjoyment of their rights. She also requested clarification of the paragraph in the report which appeared to state that parental consent was required for the marriage of any person under 30 years of age.

24. The report described a number of legal provisions and de facto situations which seemed to contravene the Convention, such as the continued existence of polygamous unions among the Maroon population. While recognizing that it was often difficult to bring about the desired changes when dealing with indigenous peoples, she asked whether the Government expected that some progress could be made in the near future. It seemed from the report that in respect of family law, women were seriously disadvantaged and, as in many other countries, they suffered considerable discrimination overall. The Government should seriously consider penalizing marital rape; also, it was very disappointing that children born out of wedlock were still treated as illegitimate.

25. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** expressed concern at the continued coexistence of different marriage codes; in particular, it was unacceptable that under the Asian Marriage Codes the marriageable age for girls was only 13. She asked whether the Government considered that discussions could be held with the Asian community with a view to the ultimate elimination of such provisions, which violated women's human rights. She asked whether there was anything in the Constitution which guaranteed the long-term existence of the Asian Marriage Codes, and requested additional details relating to matters such as inheritance and the dissolution of marriages under those Codes.

26. **The Chairperson**, noting that a 1973 legislative measure intended to abolish the Asian Marriage Codes had never come into force "owing to administrative

reasons” (CEDAW/C/SUR/1-2, p. 86), asked what those administrative reasons had been.

27. **Ms. Livingstone Raday** said that the age of consent for sexual relations in Suriname appeared to be 12 years, which was unacceptable. She also expressed support for the remarks of Ms. González and Ms. Schöpp-Schilling regarding the discriminatory provisions of the Asian Marriage Codes. The Government’s obligations under the Convention required that it make every possible effort to put an end to such discrimination; it should also take measures to ensure that the fathers of “natural children” could not refuse to acknowledge or support them.

28. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that the Government should address the issue of arranged marriages and child marriages, which were harmful to the health and status of the women concerned, as well as to their educational and professional prospects.

29. The statement on page 85 of the report that “article 79 of the Civil Code stipulates that the wife shall follow the status of her husband during marriage” should be clarified. A number of legal provisions should be repealed, either because they were discriminatory or because they were not applied.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.