



**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 564th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 13 June 2002, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Abaka

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

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

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

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Joella-Sewnundun, Ms. Loemban Tobing-Klein, Ms. Naarden-Refos, Mr. Mac-Donald and Ms. Staphorst (Suriname) took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Joella-Sewnundun** (Suriname) said that the constructive and critical approach of the Committee had deepened her delegation's understanding of the important issues. The members of the delegation had managed to prepare answers to most of the Committee's questions and would endeavour to address all its concerns in the next report.

3. The Government of Suriname, despite the many economic and financial difficulties it was facing, was making serious efforts to improve the situation of women in the country. It was far from satisfied with the current position of women and took its responsibilities under the Convention seriously. Its Multi-Annual Development Plan 2001-2005 included a strategy for sustainable production and a strategy for poverty reduction and involved the creation of opportunities, especially for women, youth and older persons, encouragement of participation and improvement of social care. Specific target groups under the Plan were youth, especially the unemployed; underprivileged women, especially pregnant and nursing women; women trying to establish their own businesses; older persons; persons with disabilities; workers with income below the official poverty level; inhabitants of the interior; and migrants. The Government had also developed an Integral Gender Action Plan 2000-2005, to be described in more detail later.

4. The current Cabinet was very concerned with ensuring respect for fundamental human rights, including women's rights, and stood ready to work with the Committee and all relevant actors, locally and internationally, to achieve the goals enshrined in the Convention.

5. **Ms. Loemban Tobing-Klein** (Suriname) said that her delegation was convinced that no equality would be achieved unless human rights, including the human

rights of women, became a way of life and were seen as a birthright, and it concurred in the importance of a human-rights based approach to development, with human rights education as the key. Suriname was a party to the most important human rights instruments, listed in the report, and their principles were enshrined in its Constitution. In particular, the Constitution provided that self-executing provisions of international human rights instruments to which Suriname was a party had precedence over national legislation. The Government of Suriname had heeded the advice of the Committee with regard to the Optional Protocol to the Convention and International Labour Conventions Nos. 100, 111 and 156 and would take action to complete accession to or ratification of those instruments as soon as possible.

6. Because of the serious human rights abuses in Suriname in the 1980s, a number of United Nations and Organization of American States investigative commissions had since visited Suriname. They had received full cooperation and had been accompanied by the national human rights commission. The period of the 1980s had also seen the creation of some important non-governmental human rights organizations, such as *Moiwana '86*, the Organization for Justice and Peace, and the Foundation "Juridical Cooperation Suriname/the Netherlands", in all of which women had leading roles.

7. The United Nations Association of Suriname had undertaken an ambitious human rights education project in collaboration with People's Decade of Human Rights Education (PDHRE). The project sought to raise awareness about human rights instruments and the rights they enshrined, including not only political rights, but also access to such basic rights as the right to education, health, food and housing. The project included an initial survey, awareness-raising programmes, informational materials for schools and other institutions, and training for teachers and leaders of both governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations. The Government strongly supported the project and was an advocate within the United Nations of human rights education.

8. With regard in particular to the human rights of older women, Suriname had been the main sponsor of General Assembly resolution 56/126 on the situation of older women in society, which stressed the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and planning and the need to eliminate discrimination on

the basis of gender and age. It urged Governments to enable older women to be engaged actively in all aspects of life and assume a variety of roles in communities, public life and decision-making, and to consider, in their development planning, the increasing responsibilities of older women in providing care and assistance to victims of HIV/AIDS.

9. **Ms. Naarden-Refos** (Suriname) said that the National Gender Bureau, a department within the Ministry of Home Affairs, had been formed in 1998 after an evaluation of the former Women's Bureau had concluded that the Government needed to take the lead in initiating and coordinating a national gender policy. With the National Gender Bureau as coordinator, a network had been created consisting of gender focal points within the various ministries, organizations in civil society devoted to gender equality and a Commission on Gender Legislation made up of juridical experts from within and outside the Government. When necessary, the National Gender Bureau could call on experts in fields such as violence against women, women in business, reproductive health and women's rights.

10. The Ministry of Home Affairs had developed an Integral Gender Action Plan 2000-2005 under which an evaluation of the National Gender Bureau had been undertaken, a gender management system had been set up to coordinate implementation of the Plan, and gender legislation was being reviewed. A budget of approximately 900,000 euros had been submitted to the Ministry of Planning and Development. Gender focal points and high-level government officials were being trained in effective personal leadership, general gender training and gender-disaggregated data analysis.

11. In June 2001, the Ministry of Home Affairs had appointed a programme manager on gender policy who was charged with setting up and coordinating the gender management system. The Council of Ministers had given the Minister of Home Affairs full authority to deal with gender issues. The Ministry of Home Affairs was preparing proposals on implementation of gender mainstreaming within the individual ministries. Gender focal points within the government ministries were responsible for coordinating priorities of the Integral Gender Action Plan.

12. From 1997 onward, a special effort had been made to change legislation regarding gender equality. In November 2000, an evaluation had been made of the

progress made by the commission concerned with legislation on violence against women. The commission's recommendations would be taken into account in harmonizing national legislation and policy with the international conventions. The Governmental Declaration 2000-2005 stressed the high priority given to gender equality and gender equity. In August 2001, the Minister of Home Affairs had established the Commission on Gender Legislation, which was made up of two representatives of the Ministry of Home Affairs, a representative of the Ministry of Justice and Police, a representative of the Ministry of Labour, a representative of the Ministry of Social Affairs (concerned with children's rights), a representative of the University of Suriname and a representative of the Forum of NGOs. The Commission was due to finalize all priorities within a one-year period. Since the Commission was made up of governmental experts and received voluntary support from the non-governmental sector, there was no need for a separate budget.

13. Referring to a question regarding data on cultural factors, she said that in the diverse ethnic groups that made up the population of Suriname the traditional roles of women were reproductive, although some women worked outside the home. A process was under way, however, in which the traditional reproductive role of women was being substituted by a more productive one. With regard to women in decision-making, there had been an increase in the participation of women in the legal system, in university management, in private-sector employers' associations, in advisory bodies, in local government and in diplomatic posts.

14. As a result of gender training programmes, the media were showing greater interest in women's issues and children's rights. In May 2000, the STAS Caribe Foundation, with support from the Inter-American Development Bank, had organized the Pro Leadership of Women project in Suriname to train women for leadership positions and to encourage women to join in the electoral process with a view to producing legislation on gender equity. There was no quota for women in decision making, but all strata of society supported the 50/50 agreement promoted by the Women's Parliament Forum.

15. Among other measures to reduce violence against women, the Government had facilitated the National Network on Violence against Women, which was coordinated by the Women's Rights Center, a non-

governmental women's organization; it had assisted in setting up victim rooms at police stations. Since 1994, the Government had provided a paid worker to the Foundation Stop Violence Against Women. A number of training courses and conferences on domestic violence had been organized in the context of the CAFRA Suriname initiative, and with support from the Inter-American Development Bank.

16. Turning to the issue of health, she said that financial support had been provided for HIV/AIDS and cancer programmes by donors such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Lobi Foundation and the Medical Mission were cooperating with the Ministry of Health in screening women for cancer; the Government and several NGOs provided information to prevent and reduce teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Teenage mothers were able to return to school after giving birth.

17. The non-governmental Maxi Linder Foundation was working, with support from the Government, to get prostitutes off the street. The Maxi Linder Foundation made it possible for prostitutes to have free access to medical services from the Government. The Foundation sought employment for prostitutes, provided them with training and helped young girls return to school.

18. **Ms. Mac-Donald** (Suriname) said that the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had been discussed and approved in Parliament in 1993. According to the Constitution of Suriname, international agreements became effective upon promulgation. Local regulations did not apply if they were incompatible with international agreements.

19. With regard to marital status, she said that under a 1981 decree married women were able to take legal action without the permission of their husbands. Under the Constitution, it was unlawful to draft, prepare, approve or enact legislation in which the rights of women were limited compared to the rights of men and vice versa.

20. With regard to parental authority, she said that the treatment of children born in wedlock in the passport was not specifically dealt with in the law. Both parents had parental control over their children. Children were normally included in the passport of the father, but there was no legal impediment to including them in the passport of the mother. The mother did not need the

father's permission to travel with her child, if the child had not been born in wedlock or was not legally acknowledged by the father. If the child had been born in wedlock or was legally acknowledged by the father, the mother needed his permission to travel with the child. In practice, parents requested a passport in the name of the child. If the child had its own passport, it was allowed to travel with the mother or the father without explicit permission from the other parent. In case of divorce, one parent could apply for a judicial provision in order to prevent the other from travelling with the child. No enforcement mechanism was yet in place, and in practice family members or the other parent controlled the situation by requesting the assistance of the Ministry of Justice and Police.

21. All persons under the age of 30 needed the consent of both parents to be married. If the parents refused, a judge could be approached for permission. The judge consulted the parents and after three weeks, if he did not deny permission, the couple was allowed to marry. A bill had already been submitted to abolish the parental consent requirement. In the case of the Marriage Act for Asians, parental consent was not required for marriage, but under-age partners must be accompanied by their parents in order to obtain the documents required for the marriage. Polygamy and bigamy were outlawed in Suriname, even in the case of Muslims, whose religion allowed men to have more than one spouse. Although the marriage of young girls was not common, it still existed, and the Government was preparing legislation to abolish the practice.

22. There was no legislation on the issue of sexual molestation within marriage. Sexual harassment within marriage and in the workplace was a matter of great concern to the Government, which had established a network to combat violence against women. The trafficking of women was punishable under the Penal Code with a maximum jail sentence of five years.

23. **Ms. Staphorst** (Suriname) said that there were two categories of rural women in Suriname: tribal rural women, who lived in the coastal plain and in the interior, and non-tribal rural women, who lived in the coastal plain. The differences between the two categories had to do mainly with culture, governance and land rights. The culture of tribal women focused on collective activities; with regard to governance, they observed specific forms and rules of traditional authority in their living areas, and land rights were based on collective use of the land.

24. Women worked on family farms which were managed, in most cases, by their fathers or husbands. Their contribution was considered part of their work in the extended family and was not economically rewarded. Female farmers in the coastal areas produced for the local market, while in the interior subsistence farming prevailed. In the coastal areas, there was both large-scale and small-scale agriculture. Large-scale agriculture was generally run by companies, using paid employees to produce for industry or export, and was dominated by men. Small-scale agriculture, which produced most fruit and vegetables for the local market, consisted of medium-sized, small and micro farms and was managed by families, with women playing a central role. Subsistence agriculture in the interior was dominated by women.

25. Although rural women played a dominant role in small-scale agriculture both in the coastal plain and in the interior, the existing data did not portray their real share in agriculture because they were inconsistent, and women's production was not described in terms of productive labour. Sixty per cent of rural women, especially in the tribal communities, lived below the poverty line. That situation would be changed through policies designed to improve their income-generation capacity, provide education for children and adults, and ensure access to health programmes and basic services such as drinking water and electricity.

26. The Government Declaration 2000-2005 assigned high priority to the development of the interior, with special emphasis on rural women. The Government had set up three major funds to promote sustainable development in the interior, namely, the Community Development Fund Suriname, with support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); the Micro-projects Fund, with support from the European Union; and the Fund for the Interior, with support from the Government of the Netherlands. In addition, non-governmental organizations played a major role both in setting policy and implementing activities carried out by the special funds. They also played an important role in the fields of economic strengthening, education, health, land rights and community development. The NGOs had formed networks to strengthen their capacity, including the Network of Indigenous Women (Sanomaro Esa), the Network of Maroon Women and the National Women's Movement.

27. The Government was aware of the important role of civil society in the country's development and was

exploring ways to enhance its participation. Women's NGOs had extensive networks and inter-institutional linkages with other women's organizations and with professional and commercial institutions and were working to improve the position of their members and the level of services provided. The Government had invited the women's NGOs to participate in the formulation and implementation of its gender policy action plan and in the drafting of Suriname's reports to the Committee.

28. **Ms. Gonzalez** welcomed the supplementary information provided by Suriname. She hoped the third report would provide answers to the additional issues raised by the Committee. She welcomed the information about the role of NGOs such as *Moiwana '86* in activities for the protection and promotion of human rights, and about the human rights education project launched by the United Nations Association of Suriname. There was little detail about the results of those activities, and more data should be supplied in the next report. It was gratifying to learn that Suriname was contemplating ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, and of some ILO conventions. It was not clear whether the human rights instruments ratified by Suriname had been enacted into domestic law. More information was needed about the situation of rural women and about cultural and traditional roles. She had the impression that gender stereotyping persisted in that area, even if the traditional reproductive role of women was being gradually replaced by a more productive one. It was very important to make progress on women's health, special programmes for women, and the eradication of violence against women. She hoped the next report would provide information on those matters. The prevention of HIV/AIDS was an issue for the whole of the population, not only for prostitutes, and she suggested that the risks and the means of prevention should be more widely made known to the public. Lastly, she was anxious to know whether marital rape was treated as an offence in Suriname.

29. **Ms. Kapalata** welcomed the efforts being made by the Government of Suriname to achieve gender equality. She noted the contribution made by the delegation of Suriname to the adoption, at the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, of the resolution on older women (A/RES/56/126). In its next report, she hoped the Government would provide more

information on prostitution, in the context of its implementation of article 6 of the Convention.

30. **Ms. Kwaku** asked what age limit, if any, would be imposed by the impending legislation on abolition of the requirement for parental consent for marriage of persons under the age of 30.

31. **Ms. Achmad** welcomed the increasing attention paid by the media to women's and children's issues, and the provision of training for the media in covering those issues. Did the training materials include both the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child? It was important to insist on the complementarity of those two instruments in promoting gender equality. She hoped the next report of Suriname would show what percentage of media coverage was positive in its treatment of gender issues. On what basis was the coverage assessed for that purpose, and was there a committee responsible for assessing it? She noted that women in leading positions were now more frequently consulted on government policies. Who was consulting them — journalists, parliament, the political parties or the community at large?

32. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said she had the impression that the preparation of the report had created a momentum within the country for increased attention to women's issues. She hoped the concluding comments of the Committee would help to maintain that momentum. She emphasized that women's rights were human rights, and that gender mainstreaming should not take the place of specific targeted interventions to address women's problems. The process of legal reform in Suriname must be continued. She urged the Government to engage in dialogue with the religious communities, with a view to reforming the marriage laws in those communities.

33. **Ms. Joella-Sewnundun** (Suriname) said the presentation of the report had been a valuable experience. Governments like hers were facing a pressing economic crisis and the challenge of finding the most appropriate strategies for eliminating poverty and achieving sustainable development. In that light, it was valuable that civil society, and international organizations such as the United Nations, continuously underlined the commitment of Governments to achieving gender equality as part of sustainable human development. The obligation of States Parties to report

periodically was also useful. The process of compiling the report had given her Government the opportunity to evaluate its gender policy. The Committee had added a new dimension to the process of evaluation. It was the intention of her delegation to follow up carefully all the suggestions and comments it had made. Her Government would pay attention to incorporating issues of gender equality, as part of human rights, in school curricula. The additional information requested by the Committee would be presented in its next report.

34. **The Chairperson**, thanking the delegation of Suriname for its replies to the issues raised by the Committee, took note of its undertaking to provide the remaining replies in its next report. She acknowledged the commitment shown by the Government of Suriname to implementing the Convention, and the high priority given to achieving gender equality within its strategic plans and its Development Plan 2001-2005. In its next report, she hoped for an effective evaluation of the progress made. The Committee had expressed its concern about the situation of some ethnic groups in Suriname, and especially the Maroon people. She hoped that, before presenting its next report, the Government would put in place programmes to alleviate the hardships of rural people, especially with regard to the right to health care, safe drinking water and housing. Much housing had been destroyed during the recent internal conflict. Even before the next report, the Committee would welcome a briefing on the work done to secure those rights. She also hoped that the concluding comments of the Committee would be widely disseminated among all stakeholders, including the Parliament and all non-governmental organizations. She welcomed the Government's declaration of intent to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.