



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

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

Summary record of the 843rd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 10 July 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Šimonović

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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 and sixth periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (CEDAW/C/UK/5 and Add.1 and 2, CEDAW/C/UK/6 and Add.1 and 2, and CEDAW/C/UK/Q/6 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Follett** (United Kingdom), introducing her country's fifth and sixth periodic reports, said that her Government had adopted a gender mainstreaming approach that cut across all its branches and was shared by the devolved administrations, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories. Because of the wide range of departments concerned, some of their representatives would be participating in the meeting by videolink; that solution might recommend itself as a model for other States.

3. The overarching human rights principles enshrined in the Convention underpinned all the State party's equality legislation, which was common across England, Scotland and Wales, while allowing due flexibility to meet local needs and expectations. The Convention set a critical benchmark for all its signatories and had been a source of inspiration in the ongoing efforts to defend and promote women's rights, reflected in many achievements. It was no longer legal to discriminate against women in either job selection or pay, as it had been in the 1970s, and under new equality legislation just announced by the Government, positive action to strengthen further the position of women could be expected, bringing the State party yet closer to achieving true equality between women and men.

4. Within the country, interministerial committees concerned with key issues like family policy and violence against women ensured that women's perspectives were integrated into policy development and the delivery of public services, while at the international level, the United Kingdom's active involvement in multilateral institutions enabled it to contribute to intergovernmental mechanisms for the advancement of women and gender equality,

particularly within the framework of the United Nations.

5. The gender equality duty, introduced as part of the Equality Act in 2007, required all public bodies to draw up three-year gender equality schemes detailing specific goals as well as gender impact assessments of all new policy and legislation. In Northern Ireland, all government departments had prepared three-year gender-specific plans, which included measures to monitor a gender equality strategy, adopted by the devolved administration for 2006-2016. Parallel action was under way in Scotland and Wales.

6. The Government was committed to a number of Public Service Agreements, the first of which, adopted in 2002, was designed to bring about real improvements in the lives of women through increased departmental resources. Critical areas for action were: increasing women's economic participation; supporting civic and social inclusion; and reducing violence against women. More recently, an Equalities Public Service Agreement built on and extended the original gender targets, in particular by strengthening efforts to narrow the gender pay gap and to address the underrepresentation in public life of women and ethnic minorities. In addition, she and her fellow Minister for Women had recently identified three priority areas for urgent action and would shortly be reporting thereon to Parliament. They had focused on support for families, violence against women and the empowerment of black and minority ethnic women.

7. Despite steady progress, there was still a pay gap between women and men. Every effort was being made to close that gap since it was through economic empowerment that women could take their rightful place in society. The Government had also introduced legislation to enable political parties to take positive measures to improve the representation of women, since, while there were more women than ever before in the British Parliament, they still counted for under 20 per cent of Members.

8. Legislation could not address every issue, however. The Equal Pay Act, for example, did not tackle job segregation, differences in education and qualifications, discrimination and cultural barriers. Following recommendations by the Women and Work Commission set up by the Government in 2005, an action plan had been adopted which included the establishment of a fund to increase the availability of

quality part-time work and the setting of national standards to ensure that all young people received career information and guidance free from gender stereotyping.

9. Since 1999, over 6 million parents of young or disabled children had gained the right to request flexible working conditions, the level of maternity pay had been doubled, paternity and adoption leave and pay had been introduced, and the setting of a national minimum wage had reduced the gender pay gap and even removed it at the lower levels. However, much still needed to be done to tackle such issues as domestic homicide, rape and trafficking for sexual exploitation. The 2004 Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act provided for measures to that end, while the 2003 Sexual Offences Act had modernized the legal framework for dealing with such offences. In addition, a three-year forced marriage and honour-based crime action plan had been launched in 2008, raising awareness of an issue that remained all too often hidden.

10. The United Kingdom was a hub of global trade in the sexual exploitation of women, and it was therefore considered to be a priority to address that crime. The Government was committed to cooperating with all partners to ensure the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention against Human Trafficking, which the United Kingdom would be ratifying shortly. It was also currently working to deliver an action plan on human trafficking that sought to strike the right balance between protection and assistance, prevention and enforcement, particularly through greater cross-border cooperation.

11. A recent focus had been on the empowerment of women in the large black, Asian and ethnic minority communities through opportunities to work and participate in public life. The issue of their underrepresentation was being addressed under the new Equalities Public Service Agreement, and a task force had been set up to find ways of increasing the number of such women serving as local councillors.

12. Society continued to evolve; laws must be updated. A new Equality Bill had accordingly been announced, designed to strengthen protection against discrimination and advance equality, in accordance with the Convention. It would provide for a new equality duty for public bodies that would extend positive action so as to enable underrepresentation of

disadvantaged groups to be taken into account in recruitment. In addition, permission to use women-only shortlists for the selection of parliamentary candidates, due to expire in 2015, would be extended to 2030. The new Equality Bill would also encourage greater transparency among private sector Government contractors and help women to negotiate more equal pay.

13. In concluding, she stressed the important support given to the Government by dedicated women's organizations and the valuable intermediary role played by the Women's National Commission. With their help and with the Committee's guidance, the Government would continue to make every effort to translate the principles of the Convention into reality, both in the United Kingdom and in other countries.

Articles 1 to 3

14. **Mr. Flinterman** reminded the State party of the concern expressed by the Committee in 1999 about the United Kingdom's reservations to the Convention. Some had been subsequently withdrawn, but not all, including a number that had been entered at the time of ratification, as interpretative declarations. He wondered whether the State party had given serious consideration to their withdrawal. The Committee welcomed its ratification of the Optional Protocol but regretted the absence of any related public awareness programme, stressing the Government's obligations in that regard. He asked what measures were planned by the Government to publicize the Convention and its Protocol, including in the Overseas Territories. The Committee would also like to know whether, in view of the exhaustion of domestic remedies rule, it was possible for plaintiffs to refer either directly or indirectly to the Convention in court proceedings.

15. **Ms. Dairiam** commended the State party for its many initiatives for the advancement of women but wished for further information about their results. The Committee would appreciate details of any gender-impact assessments undertaken and of any provisions in law that had been withdrawn or amended on gender grounds. It would likewise be interesting to know whether any evaluation had been made of the results of the Public Service Agreements referred to and whether a strategy was in place to provide officials with guidance and training in equality standards.

16. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** recalled the apparently justified concern expressed by the Committee in 1999 that the devolution process might lead to inequalities. She recognized the need for diversification in accordance with local realities, while wondering whether there was a structural mechanism to ensure consistency in women's rights throughout the territory. She noted that, unlike the European Convention on Human Rights, the Convention had not been incorporated as a whole into national law. Considering that the new Equality Bill offered an opportunity for such incorporation, the Committee would like to know whether that was contemplated and whether the Bill would include temporary special measures, as the most appropriate way of accelerating the achievement of equality. Could the "positive action" mentioned by the delegation be so considered?

Articles 1 and 2

17. **Ms. Simms** said that, as the national machinery was responsible for providing its overseas territories with sufficient resources, she would like information on technical and financial support given to territories such as the Turks and Caicos Islands to ensure compliance with the Convention. The Committee would also welcome information on how women in territories were made aware of their rights under the Optional Protocol.

18. **Ms. Patten** said that it would be interesting to learn more about the situation of women in detention in Northern Ireland, in particular in respect of separate facilities for women and gender-specific strategies, and wondered about government priorities, time frame and resources. It was unclear how women's interests were represented in the Ministry of Justice, and there appeared to be a lack of gender sensitivity in respect of immigrant women seeking asylum. She would welcome information on government steps to implement gender guidelines, and would like to learn whether the Government would consider expanding asylum rights to all women who experienced gender-based violence rather than only to women who had entered the country on a spousal visa.

19. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, said in follow up on the status of the Convention within the national legislative system, that additional awareness-raising, training and legislation were required to incorporate gender-specific Committee recommendations into the national system.

She would like to know how, if the recommendations were still relevant, the Government planned to proceed and what had been done since ratification of the Optional Protocol. More information was needed in respect of ratification of the Protocol on an experimental basis and the findings of the 2008 report on its implementation.

20. **Ms. Follett** (United Kingdom) pointed out that some of the Committee's questions involved the current system which was under review.

21. **Ms. Keeling** (United Kingdom) said that the Government knew that awareness-raising in respect of the Optional Protocol was insufficient and that there were plans to increase awareness-raising efforts both for the Protocol and the Convention. The delegation hoped to discuss the issue with relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs) immediately following the meeting.

22. **Ms. Collins** (United Kingdom) said that the Government had a formal and systematic review process in respect of reservations. While there were a number of reservations remaining, at least one had been withdrawn, although it was not yet indicated. She would review the issue and report to the Committee with more detail; the Ministry of Justice could also offer more information.

23. **Ms. Sung** (United Kingdom) said that gender impact assessments had shown that there had been gains for women under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Designated public authorities were required to promote equality of opportunity and good relations as from 2000. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the report of the policy commission for Northern Ireland illustrated that public authorities were required to have due regard to equality in general and to promote good relations among all people. All policies were assessed annually to ensure that they were in line with equality requirements and were revised if necessary. For example, on the basis of gender impact assessments, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development had introduced amendments to its entrance scheme for young farmers encouraging applications from women; a Health and Social Services group had decided not to contract catering services externally based on an impact assessment finding that it would negatively affect current, predominantly women, employees; and the Belfast City Council had target initiatives to increase

applications of underrepresented groups in the work force, which resulted in more positions for women in non-traditional roles. Finally, according to a 2006-2007 report approved by the Equality Commission, detailed conclusions could not be drawn on the extent of impacts on the various types of discrimination, but no impact had been identified with respect to gender, dependence or marital status, the latter two impacting more women than men.

24. **Ms. Collins** (United Kingdom) said that the 2002-2005 gender equality Public Service Agreements had set groundbreaking targets for government department priorities combating discrimination against women. Its 12 targets were monitored quarterly, and progress was reported to the Government. The 2005-2008 Public Service Agreements contained 19 targets for broader gender mainstreaming and future agreements would focus on issues including narrowing the pay gap and increasing the participation of women in political life.

25. **Ms. Strachan** (United Kingdom) said that the legislative framework for non-discrimination and the promotion of gender equality were consistent throughout England, Wales and Scotland. Devolution enhanced cohesion as, in response to particular needs in each region, it gave autonomy on issues where appropriate, which added to basic legislation provisions. In an effort to ensure consistency, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, established after the Equal Opportunity Commission ceased to exist in 2007 and responsible for enforcing legislation and providing support, had published codes of practice. A number of initiatives ensured the incorporation of the Gender Equality Duty, including gender-ordered data provided to government and public bodies for use in the development of gender equality schemes. There was also a common equality impact assessment tool with specific requirements to meet the Gender Equality Duty, in addition to staff briefings and education on equality experience, requirements, impact assessment and application. The process included ongoing dialogue and training, as well as the development of checks and balances to monitor impacts.

26. **Ms. Shersby** (United Kingdom) said that the relation between the Convention and national legislation was addressed in the new equality bill. The bill also addressed intersectional discrimination and how to register such claims without undue complexity.

27. **Ms. Boyce** (United Kingdom) said that local programmes for gender equality in the Turks and Caicos Islands had been adopted, all funded by the local national Government. Since the passing of the 2006 Constitution, a great deal of work had been done in cooperation with other Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies and the Caribbean, on a number of bills including the family court, domestic violence, protection of children, and custody of children bills. A 2008 human rights law established a commission to ensure funding for gender equality programmes as well.

28. **Ms. Millar** (United Kingdom) said that there was a small population of women prisoners, and a small team of experts had been established to develop new strategies on gender-specific policies, including permission for children to spend the night with their mothers. Six possible sites were being considered for the facilities, the design of which focused on an intimate, therapeutic environment. A definitive plan emphasizing a holistic, comprehensive strategy for a gender-specific approach to policies for women offenders, costing and timeline were to be completed by the end of 2008. The criminal justice unit in Northern Ireland was not represented by but did liaise with a Government-sponsored unit for gender-specific standards and training.

29. **Mr. Dunworth** (United Kingdom) said that there was no plan to amend the law on the indefinite right to remain in the country, but the clause on domestic violence against women on spousal visas had been added as a result of work with NGOs. Such work would be increased to review and improve policies and legislation to ensure fair treatment of immigrant women.

Articles 3 and 4

30. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that she was concerned about the visibility of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights and its priorities on gender issues. Gender-based discrimination was structural and not comparable to other forms of discrimination. The Commission's mandate and tasks did not reference gender, and the diversity targets did not recognize the dual character of discrimination against women, who were part of every group that experienced discrimination. Human rights education did not appear to address gender specifically, and training on gender-specific policies and the interpretation of the Gender

Equality Duty aimed at formal equality. She would like clarification of how the gender equality duty related to true equality.

31. **Ms. Neubauer** said that she was concerned about the capacities, powers and role of the Women and Equality Unit, which was the central Government gender equality structure. It was unclear how the Unit ensured proper coordination of the gender equality plans, approaches and methods that all Government departments had to develop to ensure substantive gender equality. She asked whether the necessary human and financial resources were available so that the Unit could play a leadership role in promoting gender equality and ensuring implementation of the Convention. The delegation had said that, on its return home, it would set up structure to follow up on the Committees' concluding observations and recommendations, but again, she wished to know who would take the leadership in the implementation of the State's commitments.

32. **Ms. Shin** said that the Equality Act 2006 required public authorities to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and to promote equality of opportunities for women and men. However, the Convention required not only equal opportunities, but real equality for women and men. Consequently, it would be useful to know whether the Equality Act and the gender equality duty were contributing to the realization of substantive gender equality in practice. According to the report, the gender equality duty obliged every public authority to draw up a three-year gender equality scheme. The Committee would welcome further information on how the obligation was implemented in specific sectors; for example, in education. The first reports had been submitted earlier in the year, and she wished to know whether all the public authorities had submitted a report and what the preliminary results had been.

33. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said that the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 outlined the need to apply temporary special measures in all areas and asked whether the new Equality Act would cover such measures in both the public and private sectors. Details of measures already in place would be useful, such as whether they included goals and timetables, and also monitoring mechanisms.

34. The Committee was concerned that the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights did not

have a specific mandate on gender equality. It considered that discrimination against women on the basis of sex and gender was of a different nature to gender equality; the difficulty was how to address inter-sexual discrimination without losing sight of specific discrimination against women. The United Kingdom, through the former Equal Opportunities Commission, had been a pioneer in that area, and she hoped that it would once again provide leadership, both conceptually and institutionally, for the new challenge of dealing with multiple grounds for discrimination without losing sight of discrimination against women.

35. Lastly, under article 3 of the Convention, States parties had to ensure that women's equality and women's human rights were not harmed by the State's international obligations and commitments, or by the policies of international bodies, particularly international trade organizations and monetary institutions. As a State that played a leading role in such bodies, the United Kingdom should indicate whether it had put in place any mechanisms in that regard.

36. **Ms. Follett** (United Kingdom) said that she understood the Committee's concern that, by drawing together the different strands under one body, gender issues could be weakened or rendered invisible. However, the Government considered that the changes made in the national machinery had strengthened gender equality. The Government had looked at multiple discrimination and considered that grouping everything together under the Commission for Equality and Human Rights would strengthen protection.

37. **Ms. Keeling** (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom, together with other countries, was moving towards a broader equalities approach, and the challenge was to determine how to retain the focus on gender equality. The national women's machinery was now the Government Equalities Office, which reported to the Ministers for Women and Equality; and had just celebrated its first anniversary. The Office was not a programme delivery unit, but rather a gender-equality policy branch and a catalyst, and its role was very similar to that of the former Women and Equality Unit. It took up particular issues to support the work of the two Ministers. Following extensive consultations within Government, they had chosen three areas for particular focus: supporting families, violence against and by women, and empowering black and minority ethnic women. The Office would take the leadership in

planning actions in response to the Committee's concluding observations. Furthermore, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland mirrored the English structure within their own administrative bodies.

38. **Ms. Strachan** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of Scotland, said that, since devolution, all equality issues had been combined within the Scottish Government Equality Unit. In addition, the Scottish Parliament had an equal opportunities committee that considered all dimensions of equality. One team of the Equality Unit was specifically responsible for gender and mainstreaming issues, and another for the issue of violence against women. Scotland considered that it was very important to maintain the focus on gender, but considered it important to entrust the issue to the Unit, which covered the broader aspects of discrimination, and could examine interrelations between different types of discriminations, since women were often subject to multiple discrimination.

39. **Ms. Sung** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of Northern Ireland, said that the Government was undergoing a learning process with regard to the implementation of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 regarding promotion of equality of opportunity. In 2006, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland had evaluated the effectiveness of section 75 and concluded that it had substantially changed how policy was made and improved consultations leading to an inclusive policymaking process. However, the evaluation had underscored that the legislation had not yet had the intended impacts and outcomes and further work was required on that aspect. The Commission had also reported that equality schemes remained the best way of implementing an action-oriented approach to equality.

40. A gender equality strategy was embedded in the Government programme and the briefing that the representatives of Northern Ireland had provided to the Committee had been approved by all Ministers. Regular training programmes existed on equality and gender; however, the issue of gender-neutral language also needed to be addressed through training. All Government departments had equality coordinators who played an advisory role, and all departments had to prepare a three-year gender equality action plan, which would be subject to midterm review.

41. **Ms. Manson** (United Kingdom) said that the Welsh Assembly Government had a Minister for

Equality and Human Rights and a central unit on those issues, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which included a team responsible for gender issues. The Assembly also had an equal opportunities committee that examined gender issues. Regarding policy development and gender issues, the Government of Wales Act 2006 had a rather unique clause stipulating that there should be equality of opportunity specifically relating to gender, race and disability.

42. **Ms. Shersby** (United Kingdom) said that the Equality and Human Rights Commission had the obligation to enforce compliance with the gender equality duty and would be assessing the three-year schemes prepared by the public sector, including its own scheme. It would take action against those who did not comply. Members of the Commission had considerable expertise on gender issues. Among the first projects that it had developed was one on violence against women; thus, it was clearly already developing its work on gender.

43. The gender equality duty had been introduced in 2007 and required public authorities to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and to promote equality of opportunity between men and women. The duty applied to all public authorities unless they were specifically exempted by legislation; such exemptions related to judicial independence, national security and the constitutional position of Parliament. In education, the gender equality duty extended to the level of schools, and the Equal Opportunities Commission had drafted specific guidelines for educational establishments. The Gender Equality Office would be assessing whether the early three-year schemes were making an impact on gender equality in the course of its work to develop the new equality bill. The first set of reports would be monitored by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Articles 5 and 6

44. **Ms. Gabr**, addressing the issue of stereotyping, said that it had been reported that a review had been made of the curricula, especially for adolescents aged from 16 to 18 years. Also, measures had been taken to incorporate the diversity of cultures and religions into society, but they were insufficient because women were still being stereotyped, especially in advertisements and in the media. It would be useful to learn what the Government's plans were in that regard.

Women in the United Kingdom had occupied high positions for many years, but that did not reflect total equality. Women were second-class citizens in many aspects, particularly as regards wages. It would be useful to know the Government's plans in that regard as well. Lastly, the Committee would like to know how women immigrants were dealt with, especially those from Muslim societies.

45. **Ms. Begum** said that, even though there was a committee to combat violence against women, violence persisted and had taken new forms. The Committee would like to know whether the Government had adopted a national strategy on the prevention and elimination of violence against women, with a definite timeline and budget allocation. It would also be useful to know whether support services and legal aid for victims of violence were available to immigrant women and ethnic minority women. According to the report, the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act had been adopted in 2004. It would be useful to learn how many perpetrators had been prosecuted since then, whether reporting had increased and whether it had had a positive effect on reducing domestic violence.

46. **Ms. Pimental** asked why there was no unified and multifaceted national policy on violence against women, including legal education and support for victims, throughout the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. The 2003 Female Genital Mutilation Act was commendable, but the Committee had heard that female genital mutilation was still practised and that women could rarely find the specialized care that they required, as few medical personnel had received the necessary training. There was a lack of information on the prevalence of the practice, and she wished to know to what extent the Government was aware of the problem, what measures it had taken to eradicate it, whether any research had been conducted and how the Government evaluated the role of NGOs in that area.

47. The Committee had received information that the media portrayed women in a highly stereotyped and sexualized manner that contributed to tolerance of male violence against women. Since all the media in the United Kingdom were self-regulated, she would like to know how the Government ensured that advertising did not stigmatize and stereotype women, how it monitored the way in which women were portrayed in the media, and whether there were any cases relating to the portrayal of women in the media before the courts. Lastly, she asked whether the delegation was aware

that there were different levels of understanding among public bodies about inequalities, which led to difficulties in the implementation of the gender equality duty, and underscored the importance of gender-neutral language.

48. **Ms. Hayashi** welcomed the introduction of the concept of capacity in relation to absence of consent in the Sexual Offences Act and asked whether that reform had contributed to combating the impunity of rapists. The statistics in Annex A of the responses to the list of issues and questions showed a decrease in the numbers of trials and convictions. Despite the efforts made by the Government to improve the investigation and prosecution of such offences, information provided by NGOs and other sources indicated that 80 per cent of rape complaints did not lead to a prosecution and that the rape conviction rate in the United Kingdom was the lowest in Europe.

49. Reports of rape had been increasing for three decades, while the number of convictions had remained virtually constant. The investigative, procedural and legal frameworks were still based on the stranger rape model and gender discriminatory beliefs about gender-appropriate behaviour for women and men. She asked whether the guidance on investigation of sexual offences and training programmes developed by the Association of Chief Police Officers had led to any improvement in police practice in rape cases. Lastly, the Committee wondered why the low conviction rate had not been improved by the appointment of specialist rape prosecutors in December 2002 and whether the Government had a plan to ensure that rape victims had access to a female forensic examiner.

50. **Ms. Chutikul** said that the delegation should include information in the next report on violence suffered by girls and also requested information on the effectiveness of the law against corporal punishment, which was also a form of violence, and on whether it occurred in schools despite the prohibition. The Committee would like to know why the United Kingdom had not yet ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and when it intended to do so. The State party had already adopted legislation to criminalize trafficking, emphasizing prosecution of traffickers. She asked whether it included provisions for the protection and recovery of victims and, if not, whether that legislation would be reviewed. It would also be useful to hear of any special provisions for child protection

and support and to know whether there were women police officers trained to work with child victims.

51. She also enquired whether there had been cases of trafficking for labour exploitation and wondered whether NGOs had been involved in drafting the 2007 action plan to tackle human trafficking and what time frame it covered. It would be useful to know who was responsible for implementing and monitoring the plan and what kind of indicators were used. There had recently been cases of immigrant women trafficked to the United Kingdom for the sex trade. The Committee wondered whether the authorities worked closely with the embassies of the countries of origin of the victims to ensure that repatriation did not lead to revictimization and also to facilitate the prosecution process as the perpetrators often included nationals of both countries.

52. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, asked whether the Committee's concluding observations would be presented to the parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights to give them greater visibility and to involve Parliament in the special action plan on implementation. There was no integrated strategy to combat violence against women throughout the territory of the United Kingdom despite the importance of that issue. The United Kingdom had participated in the task force of the campaign to combat violence against women launched by the Council of Europe. She enquired whether the Government had plans to deal with the issues raised by NGOs and by Committee members concerning a comprehensive strategy on violence against women.

53. **Ms. Keeling** (United Kingdom) said that more emphasis would be given to violence against women in future reports.

54. **Mr. Dunworth** (United Kingdom) said that the Government believed that it had a comprehensive strategy to combat violence against women in all but name. There were key action plans on domestic violence, sexual violence, trafficking and prostitution which covered most of the relevant issues. It was important to start with the criminal justice system and with legislation that sent a clear message to society that certain behaviour would not be tolerated. The Government took such violence very seriously and was involved in discussion with many NGOs, especially with regard to the End Violence Against Women campaign. It was important for the Government to lead

the debate, but efforts were needed to involve society in general, communities and individuals and to address men's attitudes in particular.

55. There had been negotiations and strong lobbying by NGOs with regard to women who were in the United Kingdom on spousal visas and found themselves trapped with an abusive partner, with "no recourse to public funds" and unable to change their status for two years. As a result, a new rule had been introduced which allowed such women to claim indefinite leave to remain and receive some financial support. As the law had not been amended, the burden of proof still lay with the victim. Efforts were being made to find a solution and the Home Affairs Committee had announced a new scheme that would begin in the current year and would resolve some of the pending issues. With regard to funding for NGOs for women's services and services for black and minority ethnic women, there was some lack of clarity in view of the need to set a central policy and direction while allowing local priorities to be decided at the local level. Some issues raised by the NGO sector had slipped through the cracks.

56. The current rape conviction rate of 6 per cent of reported rapes was indefensible, and efforts were under way to improve the situation. There was a public service agreement covering measures to tackle serious violence within communities, including domestic and sexual violence, over the next three years. He believed that the agreement would prove to be a turning point in dealing with such offences. Efforts were being made in close cooperation with the police force and with NGOs to improve prosecution rates, as currently, only 30 per cent of rape complaints reached the courts. A coordinated community response had been set up to ensure that the women involved received protection and support at the time they most needed it. The development of sex assault referral centres would be an important element over the next three years and should result in a better prosecution rate. Once women reached the courts, the conviction rate was over 30 per cent, which was the highest achieved in the past 10 years.

57. The Female Genital Mutilation Act had been passed in 2003. Efforts were being made to raise the awareness of health professionals, particularly in the antenatal area as that was where the problem often first became apparent. There had been few prosecutions as it was very difficult to prosecute people for their

intentions. One person had been prevented from leaving the country when suspected of intending to take a girl abroad for FGM.

58. **Ms. Moore** (United Kingdom) said that the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 would become law by the end of the year. It was a comprehensive reform of the law on sexual offences in Northern Ireland, which currently included many statutes from the nineteenth century, and it harmonized and modernized law in that area. There had been a careful review of current legislation and detailed consultations. The legislation had been introduced by the Northern Ireland Office as criminal justice had not yet been devolved to the Assembly. The Assembly had been fully consulted, however, and an ad hoc committee of all the parties had considered the draft and communicated their support for the legislation. It was key legislation that ensured that all non-consensual sexual activity or sexual activity with children or members of other vulnerable groups was criminalized and appropriately punished.

59. Northern Ireland also had a new regional strategy on tackling sexual violence and abuse. The strategy and the first action plan had been developed jointly by the Northern Ireland Office and the devolved administration. Regular reports would be made to an interdepartmental ministerial group led by the Minister for Health and Public Safety.

60. **Ms. Follett** (United Kingdom) said that efforts were also being made to address the low conviction rate for rape by providing long-term counselling for the victims. The rape crisis centres would be maintained and improved because they provided the long-term support that complemented the shorter period of counselling offered by the sexual assault referral centres. Before the end of 2008 there would be a parliamentary debate on the report currently under consideration by the Committee, together with the Committee's concluding observations.

61. **Ms. Morgan** (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom was a signatory to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and would ratify it by the end of the year. The delay had been due to the requirement of the British legal system for the provisions of the Convention to be fully implemented before it could be ratified. In the previous week, the United Kingdom had announced that it would allow a 45-day recovery and

reflection period for victims of trafficking, which was more than the 30-day minimum period required by the Convention. Victims would also be entitled to a one-year temporary visa, which would be renewable on a case-by-case basis. That also went beyond the minimum requirements of the Convention.

62. The trafficking action plan had a dedicated section with details of prevention and of how to deal with child victims. The trafficking of children into the United Kingdom was recognized as a problem, and the recent Pentameter 2 policing operation had recovered 13 child victims of trafficking and referred them to local authorities for appropriate assistance. There were five police protection officers posted at courts in London, and the London and Manchester airports had "Paladin" teams, which were specialist teams responsible for identifying vulnerable children entering the United Kingdom.

63. The trafficking action plan was monitored by an interministerial group which ensured that the requirements of the plan were met as fully as possible and regularly reviewed. An updated version of the plan had been launched in the previous week to take account of the lessons learned in the first year of implementation. Support systems were also in place to help adult victims of trafficking to be repatriated and reintegrated.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.