



**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 554th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 5 June 2002, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Abaka

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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)*

Combined initial, second, third and fourth periodic reports of Saint Kitts and Nevis (continued) (CEDAW/C/KNA/1-4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Saint Kitts and Nevis took places at the Committee table.*
2. **The Chairperson** invited Committee members to resume posing questions to the delegation.

Article 12

3. **Ms. Livingstone Raday** welcomed the decline in the State party's maternal mortality rate, and the delegation's frank discussion of the problem of illegal abortion. She wondered what the Government was doing to address a situation in which poor women were at the mercy of back-street abortionists and 50 per cent of gynaecological beds were occupied by victims of illegal abortions. Were family planning services and contraceptives available free of charge, particularly for adolescents? Were family planning programmes offered in the schools and was contraceptive use promoted in the media? She also wished to know whether the Government would consider legalizing abortion, at least in cases of adolescent pregnancy or where the pregnancy was the result of rape or involved danger to the mother's health.

4. **Ms. da Silva**, referring to paragraph 138, asked whether men were involved in family planning and whether sex education was included in school curricula, as only family life and health education courses were mentioned in the report.

5. **The Chairperson**, after commending the State party on the impressive decline in its infant/maternal mortality rates, noted that the report gave no information on drug and substance abuse, including tobacco and alcohol use, which could affect women's health in many ways, nor did it provide information on women's mental health or say much about the situation of disabled and elderly women. She knew that Saint Kitts and Nevis had many fine programmes which would have been of great interest to Committee members and which could serve as a model of best

practices for other States parties to emulate. She asked whether a woman still needed her husband's consent before undergoing sterilization and if so, whether a man needed his wife's consent to have a vasectomy. Lastly, she hoped that the next periodic report of Saint Kitts and Nevis would show a decrease in adolescent pregnancies, which had many health implications.

Article 13

6. **Ms. Regazzoli** asked whether widowed women and men received social benefits owed to their deceased spouses. She wondered whether women had access to credit on an equal footing with men and whether the Government was informing women, particularly rural women, of their opportunities in that regard.

7. **Ms. Livingstone Raday** asked whether the Government was considering legislation or administrative measures to prevent banks from requiring a husband's consent in order to extend loans to women, particularly in view of the number of female-headed households in the current economic situation.

Article 15

8. **Ms. González** said that legislation on property ownership was not always implemented in practice. Referring to paragraphs 148 to 151 of the report, she requested details on the extent to which women resorted to the courts on matters of property ownership, child abuse, commercial or civil matters. Further information on legal advisory services, including pro bono advice provided by female lawyers (CEDAW/SKN/1-4, para. 150) would also be appreciated. She wished to know whether women were free to choose their domicile, irrespective of their marital status.

9. **Ms. Regazzoli** drew attention to paragraph 61 of the report, which, she believed, answered in large part the question posed by Ms. González.

Article 16

10. **Ms. Saiga**, noting that the percentage of female-headed households in Saint Kitts and Nevis was exceedingly high and that such households tended to be multi-generational and headed by younger women (CEDAW/KNA/1-4, paras. 152 and 154), asked

whether they received government assistance and child subsidies.

11. **Ms. González** requested clarification of the property rights of persons who lived as husband and wife without being married and, more specifically, of the term “joint property possession” used in the second sentence of paragraph 157. She commended the State party for removing the discrimination against children of unmarried parents (para. 161). Lastly, she would appreciate information on any counselling, education, or administrative measures taken to discourage “relationships” between minor females and adult males, which were really not relationships at all.

12. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** noted the disparity between principle and reality with regard to women’s property rights (para. 156) and the right of women to decide on the number and spacing of their children (para. 160). Similar disparities existed with regard to loans (article 13), equality before the law (article 15) and employment (article 11). She commended the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis for recognizing those disparities and urged it to take action to eliminate stereotypes and change mentalities.

13. **Ms. Livingstone Raday**, noting that non-payment of maintenance was a major problem in Saint Kitts and Nevis, agreed with Ms. Schöpp-Schilling that it would be wise to introduce a national system whereby court proceedings would be instituted against former spouses who reneged on their maintenance payments. Attaching the earnings of men who defaulted would be another means of obtaining the payments. Imprisoning the defaulters was no solution, for not only did it do nothing to help the women but it left society with the burden of providing for the defaulters.

14. She shared the Chairperson’s concern about the difficulty of obtaining testimony in cases of domestic violence. The State party should consider ways of dealing with it, either by means of pretrial evidence that could be taken into account where a woman was reluctant to testify, or by imposing reporting duties on health personnel and social workers. As for finding safe houses or “safe rooms” for women on a small island, where anonymity was virtually impossible, she wondered whether the State party had considered initiating exchanges with other islands so that women would be less fearful of their husbands’ revenge and more willing to testify.

15. **Ms. Feng Cui** requested additional information on the fathers’ support groups organized by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, including their aims, purposes and effectiveness. She also wondered whether the State party was attempting to disseminate the content of the Convention, including through the fathers’ support groups, with a view to establishing true gender equality and a true partnership between men and women.

16. **Ms. Achmad**, referring to paragraphs 166 and 82 of the report, asked how women challenged traditional notions that impeded their participation in political and public life and what other initiatives the Ministry was taking in that area. Eliminating discrimination required a multidimensional approach: empowering women both professionally, by increasing their knowledge of what political participation involved, and psychologically, by encouraging them to enter public and political life not only as advisers but as genuine leaders. Men must also be empowered intellectually and psychologically to accept women as equal partners. It was vital to ensure that women who did attain decision-making positions were provided with all the support and information they needed in order to be able to defend and promote substantive issues in government. She wondered whether the State party was planning to take action in that regard.

17. **Ms. Acar** said that it would be interesting to know whether the specific needs of women were taken into account in disaster preparedness, mitigation and assistance planning, including budgeting, personnel training and awareness-building about the gender dimension of natural disasters. She suggested that the State party should make efforts along those lines and include information on the results in its next periodic report.

18. **Mr. Herbert** (Saint Kitts and Nevis) thanked Committee members for their constructive comments and said that her Government would make every effort to take the necessary measures to implement their recommendations.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.