



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

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

Summary record of the 974th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 27 January 2011, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Pimentel

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

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

Seventh periodic report of Belarus (continued) (CEDAW/C/BLR/7; CEDAW/C/BLR/Q/7 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Belarus took places at the Committee table.*
2. **The Chairperson** invited the delegation of Belarus to continue its replies to questions raised by the Committee members at the previous meeting.
3. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said that, in Belarus, new legislation could be adopted either in the form of a presidential decree or on the basis of a request signed by 50,000 citizens. Citizens also had the right to address complaints to any State body or minister and receive a reply. Such contributions were often taken into account in the drafting of new laws and helped the Government to keep abreast of matters of concern to the general public. Thus, the country's more than 5 million women and girls could influence its laws.
4. Data on domestic violence concerned situations not only within lawful marriages but also where couples were living together and when caused by adult children. Fifty-seven women had been killed in such circumstances in 2010 and 71 in 2009; the problem was taken very seriously.
5. **Mr. Lazarev** (Belarus) said that the Government had taken many measures, both in legislation and in practice, to deal with physical and sexual violence against women, and did not consider the adoption of any further laws to be a matter of urgency, as had been suggested. Belarus would proceed at a pace appropriate to its conditions and taking full account of international experience.
6. Many women were employed in the police force, with more than 50 per cent of the staff in some departments being female. Women currently made up 20 per cent of students graduating from the Police Academy, and the number was continually increasing; there were therefore adequate numbers of trained women police officers to help women who were victims of violence. Such women received free legal aid both during the investigation and in court.
7. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega**, commending the State party's efforts to comply with existing legislation, said that she wished to emphasize the importance of legislative precision. The more specific the laws in place and the more precise their provisions, the easier it was to ensure effective law enforcement, especially in complex areas such as domestic violence.
8. Recalling that inequality occurred when men dominated public life and women's lives were largely confined to the home, she observed that initiatives promoting awareness, engagement and a sense of co-responsibility among men were as important as measures promoting women and their position in society. If not balanced by initiatives of the former kind, some State party initiatives in the latter category, including, for example, its Museum of Motherhood, could reinforce perceptions of women as homemakers and carers, especially in a country without paternity leave provisions, even though they were not bad ideas per se. Such perceptions would continue to limit opportunities for more active female participation in public life.
9. Alternative sources referred to measures that curtailed the independence of the judiciary. For example, the President's power to appoint and remove judges at his discretion could undermine impartiality, besides impeding women's appointment to high-

level positions. She would therefore like to know what the Government was doing to guarantee judicial independence and women's advancement within the judiciary.

10. The same sources reported that lawyers were prevented from forming independent bar associations, despite the State party's protestations of guaranteed freedom of association. That being the case, it was surprising that women should be guaranteed the freedom to form associations promoting their professional, social or political position, as was claimed. Reports that opposition supporters had been detained in the period preceding the 2010 election also pointed to restrictions on freedom of association and expression.

11. Information about measures in place to guarantee those freedoms would therefore be appreciated, as well as an assurance that active opposition supporters who spoke out against the authorities did not suffer adverse treatment. Information about measures to guarantee women's right to participate fully and freely in public life would also be welcome, especially since the opposition leader's continued detention was unlikely to be conducive to increased confidence and more active political engagement.

12. Reminding the delegation that discrimination could be indirect as well as direct and that a legal provision could be neutral in principle but detrimental to certain groups in practice, she expressed concern that the requirement for new associations to have substantial funds to secure their registration might be a form of indirect discrimination.

13. Lastly, she asked why Belarus had not ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and emphasized the need to ensure that domestic legislation was in conformity with international human rights law.

14. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** said that Belarus' twenty-second position in the 2010 world index for women in politics published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, ahead of more developed countries with long-established democracies, including Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, was very positive. The impressive female presence on elected bodies, which had been achieved without quotas, was complemented by commendable numbers of women in the judiciary. That situation should guarantee female input to policy development.

15. Assuming a continued reluctance to use quotas, she suggested that elected women might use their success to bring other women with political interests and ambitions into non-elected roles. That strategy may help them achieve the ultimate goal of parity. Furthermore, the large number of women in local government, where they accounted for 45.7 per cent of elected representatives, provided a pool of qualified, experienced women with a grass-roots understanding of how their country functioned, who might subsequently seek election to parliament.

16. She invited the State party to update the core document (HRI/CORE/1/Add.70) submitted in 1996, which had become outdated and inadequate, to incorporate information about the different branches of Belarusian Government, the content of the Constitution and its legal rank relative to international treaties. She also urged it to continue its efforts to appoint women to the higher ranks of the judiciary, where they would be in a position to influence legislative development and ensure that domestic laws were fully harmonized with the Convention.

17. **Ms. Bareiro-Bobadilla** asked the State party to endeavour to give statistics as percentages rather than absolute values in future. It was difficult to assess progress if figures for the number of women in particular roles and positions could not be compared against the equivalent figures for men.

18. In view of the State party's assurances that elections were free and fair, voter turnout figures disaggregated by gender, age and other criteria would be appreciated, given their

importance as an indicator of the relationship between citizens and the Government and the legitimacy enjoyed by the latter.

19. Percentage figures for female participation in individual political parties similar to those provided for participation in Government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) would also be useful, with a breakdown by political party of the more than 32 per cent of parliamentarians that were female. Since it was unusual for women to account for more than 30 per cent of parliamentarians unless affirmative action was taken, she wondered whether individual parties used quota systems to boost female candidacy. A gender breakdown for each level of Government, including the diplomatic service, would also be appreciated, along with information about forms of positive discrimination used to accelerate women's appointment to high-level posts, and the effectiveness of any temporary affirmative measures.

20. Looking to the future, she suggested that the State party might turn its focus to achieving gender parity rather than just increased female representation and, to that end, that positive discrimination measures to achieve parity might be made a permanent rather than temporary feature of the political system, provided that they remained compatible with democratic principles. However, measures of that kind could work properly only in a State based on the rule of law. For citizens to be actively engaged and fully involved in public life, ideological and political freedom was essential.

21. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said that she wished to dispel a number of stereotyped impressions that seemed to be conveyed by some of the questions. There were no restrictions on the formation of associations, as long as they conformed with the provisions of the Voluntary Associations Act, and many women's associations, professional and other, existed.

22. In line with articles 109 and 110 of the Constitution, the courts were independent and answerable only to the law of the land.

23. There was no gender-based discrimination in recruitment to high-level positions. Such appointments were of great importance to society as a whole and the emphasis in making them was put on educational qualifications and professional skills. Although there were still too few women ministers or ambassadors, women at lower levels were being encouraged to make themselves eligible by improving their qualifications through study, and currently more than 50 per cent of the candidates on the reserve list for top official posts were women.

24. The political and electoral system did not use quotas, and was open to all citizens of 18 years and over, except prisoners or those declared not to have legal capacity. Although the Central Commission for Elections and National Referendums would no doubt have the information, the delegation was not able to give gender-disaggregated figures for participation in the recent presidential election, in which the overall level of voting had been more than 80 per cent. Anyone who wished to stand for election could do so; there was no minimum financial requirement, and candidates needed only to show that they were committed and had a manifesto. In general, women tended to be more active than men in society. They now made up more than 30 per cent of elected members of parliament, where they took a particular interest in social and gender issues; that, in turn, encouraged women to vote for them. There were 12 top women representatives among the 15 registered political parties, and that was without the use of any quota system.

25. Belarus was planning to accede to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

26. **Mr. Lazarev** (Belarus) said that, in line with the Constitution and as was the case in most legal systems in the world, the courts worked independently; that was demonstrated

by the citizens' confidence in them, with almost double the number of civil cases brought to court in 2009 (more than 300,000) than in 2005 (180,000).

27. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that, despite the admirable aims of the new article 20¹ of the Marriage and Family Code stipulating that all family-related decisions should be made jointly by mutual consent, she wondered whether the article's provisions were feasible in practice. For example, what happened when spousal conflict made a decision by mutual consent impossible? Were mediation units available to assist, in the absence of dedicated family courts, and, if so, by whom were they staffed?

28. The planned amendments to article 13 of the Code concerning marriage contracts raised some interesting issues. She asked the delegation to clarify whether prenuptial agreements were obligatory or optional, and, assuming the latter, to explain the default rules applied in respect of the property and children of a divorcing couple without a marriage contract. In particular, she would like to know whether the default regime was one of separate property or whether property accumulated during a marriage that was registered in one spouse's name only could be allocated between the divorcing parties irrespective of title. She also sought assurance that sufficient public information was available to alert women to the risks of failing to conclude a marriage contract.

29. Noting the relatively high divorce rate in Belarus, she asked for information about the economic and welfare status of divorced mothers and the rules governing child support. Were enforcement measures imposed upon absent fathers who failed to comply with maintenance orders? Noting also that de facto relationships were not legally recognized and that de facto partners and children consequently had no automatic right to maintenance, she asked the delegation to comment on the frequency of such relationships and the number of women and children who might be denied protection and welfare because of their relationship status.

30. Lastly, she asked about the implications of Presidential Decree No. 18 on measures to protect children from dysfunctional families mentioned in paragraph 493 of the periodic report (CEDAW/C/BLR/7). Expressing concern that mothers might be forced to shoulder the burden of reimbursing the State for child maintenance expenditures incurred for reasons beyond their control, such as a father's alcoholism, she asked for gender-disaggregated data on the application and impact of that Decree.

31. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said that, under Presidential Decree No. 18, the State's primary concern was to protect the interests of the children. The preference was to keep them with their biological parents; if that was not possible, they would be placed either with relatives or in a foster family, and only failing that would they be moved to a State institution. The parents would be monitored, helped to cope better and to find a job, and thus be able to contribute to the children's upkeep. Such opportunities had been given to 2,500 individuals; in 80 per cent of the cases, the children concerned had been able to return to their families, but unfortunately there were some individuals who simply did not want to fulfil their parental responsibilities.

32. Under the law, spouses were equal after the break-up of a marriage. Property was held jointly, and the children also had some rights, in particular to the home. Where the spouses could not agree, the matter would be decided by the court. Under the proposed amendments to the Marriage and Family Code, it would be possible to include all such issues in a marriage contract, which was voluntary and could be signed at any stage of the relationship. Aspects such as custody of the children and access to them for the non-custodial parent were monitored by the agencies of tutorship or guardianship to ensure that their situation did not get worse. The parent caring for the children received child support from the non-custodial parent, amounting to 25 per cent of that parent's salary for one child, 33 per cent for two, and 50 per cent for three or more children until they reached the

age of 18. In such circumstances, if the main wage-earning parent died or disappeared, the State would pay an allowance for each child up to the age of 18, or 23 if the child was still in full-time education.

33. **Ms. Labkovich** (Belarus) said that if the father did not pay the child support, the agency of tutorship or guardianship would try to find him; if that was not possible, for instance because he was abroad, the State would pay a basic allowance for the child.

34. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said that the arrangements mentioned applied only to registered marriages, not de facto relationships. Currently 19.8 per cent of children were living in one-parent families, 90 per cent of them with their mother, either because of divorce or because the mother had taken the decision not to marry. Women should be encouraged to make their own choices, and so the State provided support for such families, with higher allowances and benefits for the mother during her maternity leave and while looking after the child.

35. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega** said that her observations concerning the lack of judicial independence were based on information drawn from the summary of stakeholders' submissions to the universal periodic review issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/WG.6/8/BLR/3). That document cited stakeholder concerns about the President's powers to intervene directly in the judicial process and the authority of the interdepartmental commission on high-profile cases.

36. Paragraph 42 of the same document referred to the undue complexity of registration standards for NGOs, political parties and trade unions and the seemingly arbitrary manner in which registration applications could be granted or refused. Her particular concern in that regard was that the activities of an organization not entered in the official State register might be considered criminal activities liable to criminal sanctions, given that, under the Criminal Code, supporting the work of an unregistered organization was an offence that could carry a custodial sentence.

37. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that she would welcome clarification regarding the division of marital property upon divorce. Specifically, she wished to know how the accumulated assets, including home, car, bank accounts and pension rights, of a married couple without a prenuptial agreement who had followed the traditional pattern whereby the husband worked full time but the wife worked part time, if at all, were allocated between the divorcing parties in those cases where the assets were registered in the husband's name only.

38. She also requested more information about the monitoring body responsible for ensuring that children were not deprived of their rights, including its precise name.

39. **Ms. Bareiro-Bobadilla**, emphasizing the importance of access to official statistics prepared by the Central Commission for Elections and National Referendums, said that the Commission was a State body and periodic reports were intended to provide an overview of progress in the State party as a whole, not just in the executive branch of Government. For that reason, such reports should include information from a variety of sources, including the judicial and legislative branches, Government agencies and NGOs. The figures sought from the Commission were of particular relevance as they were possibly the most direct indicator of political engagement and interest.

40. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said that, under a marriage contract, all property within a registered marriage was considered as being jointly owned, regardless of the name under which it was registered. The length of the marriage, rather than the period during which a woman had worked, was the important factor. If the spouses could not come to agreement, the matter would be decided by the courts and the property divided on an equal basis.

Where necessary, the children's rights could be protected by the State tutorship or guardianship agencies.

41. She had not heard of any case of the President intervening in court cases or legislation, as the three branches of Government in Belarus were separate. For instance, parliament had the right to send back or make substantive changes to any bills presented by the Government, if it so wished. Moreover, if any citizen submitted a complaint, the authorities were obliged to respond. Like all other countries, Belarus had an established procedure for the registration of voluntary associations, and it was followed.

42. **Ms. Schulz** drew attention to the paradoxical situation whereby women earned significantly less than men despite being better educated. Since that situation was indicative of gender-bound study choices, she asked whether the Government had any plans to introduce temporary special measures to attract girls and boys into atypical fields. She also asked about plans to improve wage structures in health care, social services, education and other sectors typified by high concentrations of female workers, in order to ensure that women were fairly and properly rewarded for their educational achievements.

43. The Government's efforts to introduce gender equality training throughout the educational system were commendable, but she had been concerned to learn from a shadow report prepared by the Women's Independent Democratic Movement about two measures apparently contradictory to those endeavours – the closure of the European Humanities University in 2004 and the State party's refusal to allow international funding for NGOs. She asked what the State party was doing to ensure that contradictions of that kind did not recur.

44. The inadequate statistical information provided in the periodic report, and more importantly, the lack of gender-disaggregated data, had hampered the Committee's assessment of women's situation in Belarus. For example, the report referred to a comprehensive system of scholarships and grants but gave no figures. To address that shortcoming, she would like to know how many students received grants, the gender breakdown of recipients, the value of grants distributed and whether they were sufficient to cover living costs. Reports of female students engaging in prostitution suggested that meeting those costs could be a problem. She also wished to know whether students had to repay grants after completing their studies. If so, given their overrepresentation in lower paid work women were likely to encounter greater difficulties than men.

45. **Ms. Jahan** said that she was concerned about women's underrepresentation at decision-making levels in Belarus and would like to know what steps were being taken to remedy the situation. She asked the delegation to specify what special measures the Government had adopted to ensure the equal participation of men and women in the labour market, prevent women's exploitation in employment, narrow the gender pay gap and eliminate the occupational segregation of women. She asked whether the job quota system applied to both the public and private sectors and what percentage of jobs was reserved for women. She enquired whether there were any temporary special measures to promote skills development for women and improve their access to credit for productive purposes.

46. She welcomed the ratification by Belarus of the eight core conventions of the International Labour Organization and would like to hear about measures taken to raise awareness of those conventions among employers and employees. She sought information on employment legislation, in particular with respect to fixed-term contracts and the right to freedom of association. She also requested information on the legal remedies available to women facing discrimination in the labour market and their awareness of, and recourse to, such remedies. She enquired whether there was any legislation that prohibited sexual harassment in the workplace. Lastly, she asked for further details concerning the social partnership mentioned in paragraph 328 of the report.

47. **Ms. Patten**, referring to reports concerning the poor implementation of the Labour Code, requested details of how the labour inspectorate monitored its implementation in the private sector, the number of violations detected and the sanctions and remedies available. She asked whether the impact of the State employment policy had been evaluated for the period 2002–2007. She would welcome information on the health and safety conditions of the large number of women engaged in hazardous work. She asked which body was responsible for job evaluation and how often such evaluations were carried out. She asked about progress made in reducing the wage gap in the public sector through the application of appropriate job evaluation methods.

48. Bearing in mind the precarious working conditions in the informal sector, she asked what efforts were being envisaged to foster a more supportive environment for women, in particular with regard to facilitating access to training, credits and markets. Given that article 170 of the Criminal Code did not provide adequate protection from sexual harassment in the workplace, she asked whether the Government intended to review its legislation and to introduce new measures to define, prohibit and prevent the problem.

49. She asked whether there were any plans to review article 263 of the Labour Code, which contained restrictions on the employment of women with children under the age of 3, and to revise article 184 of the Code in order to bring its provisions on maternity leave into line with the State party's obligations under international law. Lastly, given the high unemployment rate among women, she wished to know whether any affirmative action was envisaged as a way of addressing the situation.

50. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** asked whether there were specific screening programmes for breast and cervical-uterine cancers. She also requested details of treatment programmes for those cancers, in particular for women in rural areas. In view of reports from alternative sources indicating an increasing incidence of thyroid cancer linked to high levels of radiation, she asked for information on the prevalence of the disease and on measures taken to mitigate the impact of the Chernobyl disaster. She enquired how the gender perspective had been incorporated into measures aimed at reducing morbidity and mortality rates adopted under the national demographic security programme.

51. Given that there were no reliable data on the contraceptive prevalence rate, she wondered what was done to monitor the effectiveness of family planning programmes. Noting that abortions could be carried out up to the twenty-second week of pregnancy for social reasons, she asked what steps were taken to ensure that those reasons were objectively defined.

52. **Ms. Rasekh**, while welcoming the progress made by the Government in the area of women's health, said that she was concerned about the use of abortion as a method of birth control. She asked whether the Government was planning to conduct a study into the causes of that phenomenon with a view to eliminating it, and whether advocacy and awareness campaigns had been organized to promote the use of contraceptives. She enquired what the Government was doing to prevent cancers linked to radiation exposure following the Chernobyl accident and to treat those persons diagnosed with such cancers. Lastly, she wished to know what mental health services were available for women affected by trauma, in particular as a result of that accident.

53. **Ms. Schulz** said that, while the State party had reported that 46 per cent of financial assistance for business initiatives had been provided to women, a shadow report indicated that only 2 per cent of women employees were currently interested in setting up in business, compared to 33 per cent in the 1990s. She requested an explanation of that discrepancy and asked whether the Government was contemplating temporary special measures aimed at encouraging women's entrepreneurship. She requested gender-disaggregated data concerning women's participation in sports and cultural activities, and urged the State party

to include more detail on that subject in its next periodic report. She expressed concern that beauty contests and ceremonies to honour mothers of large families seemed to be inconsistent with the Government's efforts to combat gender stereotypes. Lastly, she asked the delegation to confirm reports that fewer women than men registered as unemployed because of the low level of benefits, and that in order to support themselves and their children they were prepared to accept work that was less well paid than their previous employment.

54. **Ms. Zou Xiaoqiao** asked whether the Government had assessed the impact of the State Programme for Rural Revival and Development for 2005–2010 and whether it intended to develop a new plan incorporating gender equality issues. She noted that women in rural areas had a life expectancy that was 3.2 years lower than that of urban women and asked what measures were being taken to narrow that gap. She asked whether the Government had considered the impact of the restricted nature of the work available to women in rural areas on their self-esteem and their development more generally. She enquired whether the early retirement age for women employed in agricultural occupations affected the level of their pensions.

55. **Ms. Popescu**, expressing concern about the increasing number of HIV-positive women, asked what measures were being taken to tackle that issue. In view of the feminization of poverty highlighted in the report and alternative sources, she would like to know what steps were being taken to improve the situation, in particular in respect of women who had to work beyond retirement age because of low pension levels. Noting the lack of information in the report on minority women, she requested details concerning the economic, employment and health situation of such groups as Roma women, ethnic minorities and lesbian women.

56. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) thanked the Committee members for their positive contributions and many questions, not all of which could be answered in the time available. She said that, in 2009, there had been almost 9,000 migrant women and 11,000 migrant men in the country, who had enjoyed their full rights, including the right to work; and more than 7,000 Roma, who had also enjoyed the same rights as other citizens, including in employment. There was no separate category for lesbian women, who had the same rights as all women.

57. Women were not being prevented from entering certain categories of jobs. Moreover, it should be noted that, while there were some 34,000 unemployed in the country, of whom more than half were women, there were also around 52,000 vacant jobs. The Constitution gave citizens the right to work, but not the obligation to do so. People could also earn a living from their own business, investments or other sources. There were employment programmes for each town and village in the country, with maps showing where people were unemployed. If there were high concentrations of unemployed women in particular areas, efforts would be made to attract businesses with appropriate jobs there. The programmes focused on creating more employment in rural areas so as to encourage people to move there from urban areas; they included provision of all the necessary infrastructure, and free housing and other allowances for appropriately qualified workers in areas where specific skills were needed.

58. Government programmes that affected women, ranging from employment to education and health programmes, were initially planned for a certain period, and were then extended on the basis of their outcome, in order to maintain their flexibility and the capacity to respond to prevailing conditions.

59. The State party's report was based solely on official statistics and could not take any approximate information into account. No comment could therefore be made on figures that were quoted in a shadow report. The fact that women earned less despite having higher

levels of education was indeed a problem. One reason was that they tended to opt for jobs in the care or service sectors rather than in production and private industry, where salaries were usually higher. Collective agreements governed minimum wages, set in January of each year, and their dates of payment for all sectors of the economy. Employers were subject to fines for any contraventions. Salaries in education and culture tended to be lower than in the productive sectors of the economy: while average wages in the country as a whole currently stood at approximately \$500 per month, they were approximately \$470 in the State sector, but considerably higher for doctors. The Government considered that all workers should be able to work reasonable hours and earn a reasonable wage, and had raised State sector wages three times in 2010 to bring them closer to those in the private sector. Unqualified workers generally earned low wages, and their situation was carefully monitored. If a family's average monthly income was less than about \$100 per family member, frequently because a person was unable to work for health or other reasons, they would qualify for social assistance from the State.

60. The State welcomed and supported entrepreneurs, and facilities were made available for businesswomen to access credit through the employment programme.

61. Anybody, including rural women who worked in difficult or hazardous conditions, had the right to retire five years earlier than other workers and receive an early retirement pension. They could also opt to continue to work and then receive a full age-related pension. Pensions in rural areas were almost the same as in other parts of the country. There was also targeted social assistance for persons whose pension was insufficient because they had not worked enough years.

62. **Ms. Melnikovich** (Belarus) said that breast cancer and cervical cancer were taken very seriously. More than 50 per cent of cases of breast cancer were detected at an early stage, which meant that treatment could reduce pain and avoid fatal outcomes. A new State programme on the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of oncological diseases for 2010–2014 was to be introduced to improve early-stage detection and diagnosis, as well as prevention.

63. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) added that almost 60 per cent of women diagnosed with breast cancer in 2009 had had early stages of the disease. It was particularly important to have screening programmes in Belarus because radiation from the Chernobyl accident continued to affect the population. Women of all ages were automatically checked for cancer when they went to the doctor and were invited for checks at least once each year to ensure early detection. Oncology groups and centres existed throughout the country, and there were specific programmes for women in areas of high risk.

64. **Ms. Melnikovich** (Belarus) said that family planning programmes had reduced fourfold the number of abortions in the country. Studies had been carried out to identify the methods of contraception used, and young women in particular were being offered free contraception. Youth health centres and family planning centres gave advice on contraception to women and men, girls and boys. Abortion was always voluntary, except in extremely rare cases where there was a threat to the life of the mother or the child.

65. Since the Chernobyl accident, more than \$20 million had been spent on health projects and social services in the areas affected. Women and children there underwent systematic health checks and the hospitals were equipped with the best technology.

66. The HIV/AIDS situation in the country had stabilized somewhat, with new infections no longer at catastrophic levels. Tests were voluntary, free and anonymous, and antiretrovirals were available to all who needed them. There was a new State-funded HIV/AIDS prevention programme for 2011–2015, and parliament was bringing in a new act covering the rights of people living with the disease.

67. **Ms. Shchotkina** (Belarus) said that, as of 1 January 2011, there were almost 12,000 people with HIV/AIDS in the country, of whom 4,500 were women and around 170 were children. Self-help groups had been set up in towns throughout the country. Work with churches, NGOs and international organizations, including the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, had contributed greatly to the control campaign, using the media to spread knowledge about the disease among young people; coverage now stood at 98 per cent.

68. External causes of mortality, such as road traffic accidents, were the second cause of death in men after cardiovascular disease. People had to be taught to take care of their health and so lessons had been introduced throughout the education system, from nursery-school level onwards, as it had been realized that administrative measures alone would not work.

69. The average duration of unemployment for women was currently four and a half months. If they could not find an appropriate job in their area of specialization, near to their home, and at a salary of no less than 90 per cent of their previous pay, they would receive State funding to retrain in their area of choice. Many women recently had chosen to retrain in information technology.

70. There were employment quotas for disabled women, who were not able to compete on the job market. To encourage the private sector to employ them, their salary and benefits would be paid by the State for an initial adaptation period of one year; other costs, such as of adapting the workplace, would also be fully covered by the State.

71. In conclusion, she thanked the experts for the interest they had shown and expert knowledge they had shared. Her delegation had gained much from the day's work and looked forward to the complete elimination of discrimination against women.

72. **The Chairperson** thanked the delegation for the constructive dialogue, which had provided further insights into the situation of women in Belarus. The Committee commended the State party on its efforts and encouraged it to take the necessary measures to address the Committee's concerns with a view to full implementation of the Convention.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.