



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

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Forty-fourth session

20 July – 7 August 2009

### Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

#### Liberia

1. The Committee considered the combined initial, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth periodic reports of Liberia (CEDAW/C/LBR/6) at its 901<sup>st</sup> and 902<sup>nd</sup> meetings, on 31 July 2009. The Committee's list of issues and questions is contained in CEDAW/C/LBR/Q/6 and the responses of Liberia are contained in CEDAW/C/LBR/Q/6/Add.1.

#### Introduction

2. The Committee commends the State party for ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women without reservations, and its acceptance of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, concerning the meeting time of the Committee. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the State party for its combined initial, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth periodic reports, which followed the Committee's guidelines for the preparation of reports and which provided a candid picture of the situation of women in Liberia, while regretting that the reports were long overdue, and did not refer to the General Recommendations of the Committee. The Committee also expresses its appreciation for the written replies to the list of issues and questions raised by the pre-session working group and for the oral presentation and responses to the questions posed by the Committee.

3. The Committee commends the State party for its high-level delegation headed by the Minister of Gender and Development, which included the Minister of Education, the Deputy Ministers of Health, Justice, and Gender, and other representatives from these Government ministries and civil society, with expertise in a broad range of areas covered by the Convention. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the frank and constructive dialogue held between the delegation and the members of the Committee.

4. The Committee commends the State party for signing the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2004, and looks forward to its ratification.

5. The Committee recognizes the State party's recent emergence from conflict, and takes note of the economic, social and political obstacles related to the war which have had a negative impact on the entire population, and in particular on women and girls, and which constitute obstacles to the full implementation of the Convention.

#### **Positive aspects**

6. The Committee notes with appreciation that the combined initial to sixth periodic report was prepared in a participatory process which involved Government bodies and non-governmental organizations, with technical assistance from the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women.

7. The Committee commends the State party for its demonstrated political will and commitment, expressed during the constructive dialogue, to eliminate discrimination against women and achieve gender equality.

8. The Committee notes with appreciation the State party's recent efforts to revise existing legislation that discriminates against women and enact new laws, including the 2006 Rape Law which amends Chapter 14, Sections 14.70 and 14.71 of the New Penal Code, the 2003 Inheritance Law, and the Fairness Bill/Bill for the Equal Participation and Representation of Women in the Political Process, which is pending in Parliament. It also appreciates the State party's efforts to put in place plans, policies and programmes aimed at promoting gender equality, including, the National Gender-Based Violence Plan of Action (2006), the National Health Policy (2007), the National Policy on Girls' Education (2006), the HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan of Action (2006), the Poverty Reduction Strategy (2008-2011), the National Rural Women's Program (2008), and the National Action

Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2009), some of which remain at the initial stages.

9. The Committee appreciates the State party's regular cooperation and partnership with non-governmental organizations and community-based women's organizations in the country, which assist the State party in its efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

### **Principal areas of concern and recommendations**

**10. While recalling the State party's obligation to systematically and continuously to implement all the provisions of the Convention, the Committee views the concerns and recommendations identified in the present concluding observations as requiring the priority attention of the State party between now and the submission of the next periodic report. Consequently, the Committee calls upon the State party to focus on those areas in its implementation activities and to report on action taken and results achieved in its next periodic report. It also calls upon the State party to submit the present concluding observations to all relevant ministries, other Government structures at all levels, to Parliament and the judiciary in order to ensure their effective implementation.**

#### **Parliament**

**11. While reaffirming that the Government has the primary responsibility and is particularly accountable for the full implementation of the State party's obligations under the Convention, the Committee stresses that the Convention is binding on all branches of Government and invites the State party to encourage its national Parliament, in line with its mandate and procedures, where appropriate, to take the necessary steps with regard to the implementation of these concluding observations and the Government's next reporting process under the Convention.**

#### **Legal status of the Convention, the principle of equality, definition of discrimination and discriminatory laws**

12. The Committee is concerned that, despite the ratification of the Convention by the State party in 1984, it has yet to be incorporated in Liberian law and it is not justiciable in Liberian courts. The Committee also expresses concern that, although article 11 (b) of the

Constitution guarantees the fundamental rights and freedoms to all persons irrespective of sex, there is no definition of discrimination in the State party's Constitution or legislation in line with article 1 of the Convention, which covers both direct and indirect discrimination, nor is there any legislation embodying the principle of equality between women and men.

**13. The Committee urges the State party to take immediate steps to ensure the publication of the Convention in order to make its provisions directly applicable. It calls on the State party as a matter of priority, to incorporate into appropriate national legislation a definition of discrimination against women in conformity with article 1 of the Convention. The Committee further calls on the State party to incorporate the principle of equality between women and men in line with article 2 of the Convention in the Constitution which is currently under review.**

14. While noting efforts to review, with support from the United Nations Mission in Liberia, national laws to identify those which discriminate against women, the Committee is concerned that statutory and customary laws which discriminate against women in both purpose or effect remain in force, in particular those contained in the Revised Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia which discriminates against women in contravention of the State party's obligations under the Convention. The Committee is also concerned about women's access to justice and the enforcement of their rights under the Convention.

**15. The Committee calls on the State party, within the framework of legal and constitutional review processes currently underway, to take a holistic approach to law reform that will ensure women's de jure and de facto equality. It urges the State party to ensure that all discriminatory laws, including customary law, are amended or repealed and brought into full compliance with the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations as a matter of priority. The committee also requests the State party to remove all impediments women may face in gaining access to justice, in particular those women governed by customary law, and urges the State party to take appropriate measures to enhance women's legal literacy and awareness of their rights, including their right to seek legal redress in courts. It calls on the State party to ensure that the Convention and related domestic legislation are made an integral part of legal education and the training of judicial officers, including judges, lawyers and prosecutors, and law enforcement officers, district**

**officials, chiefs and other traditional and community leaders so as to create a legal culture supportive of women's equality and non-discrimination. It also calls on the State party to disseminate the Convention widely to the general public so as to create awareness of women's human rights, and raise awareness of legislators and the general public of the urgent need to prioritize legal reforms to achieve de jure equality for women.**

#### **National machinery for the advancement of women**

16. While noting with appreciation that the national machinery for the advancement of women is established at the ministerial level and has a clear mandate, the Committee notes with concern that the Ministry of Gender and Development lacks sufficient capacity and resources to give it the capacity to effectively coordinate the implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy across all sectors and levels of Government. The Committee is also concerned at the slow pace of the formulation and adoption of the second draft National Gender Policy, which will serve as the basis of the work of the national machinery.

**17. The Committee calls on the State party to prioritize the strengthening of the national machinery and provide it with the necessary human and financial resources and authority necessary to serve as a catalyst and to coordinate the implementation of the Convention and effective use of the gender mainstreaming strategy across all line ministries and sectors of government at all levels. It further calls for the expeditious adoption of the National Gender Policy, and to proceed with its implementation without delay. It also urges the State party to monitor systematically the impact of its gender mainstreaming efforts, with concrete benchmarks and timeframes, and to report to the Committee in its next report on results achieved, obstacles encountered and steps taken to overcome such obstacles.**

#### **Stereotypes, cultural practices**

18. The Committee is deeply concerned at the persistence of harmful traditional practices, patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles, responsibilities and identities of women and men in all spheres of life. The Committee expresses concern that such norms, customs and practices justify and perpetuate discrimination against women, violence against women and the persistence of harmful traditional practices, including early and forced marriage and trial by ordeal. It regrets that no sustained and systematic action has

been taken by the State party to modify or eliminate such harmful traditional practices, patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes.

**19. The Committee urges the State party to view culture as a dynamic dimension of the country's life and social fabric, subject to many influences over time and therefore to change. It urges the State party to put in place, without delay, a comprehensive strategy, including clear goals and timetables, to modify or eliminate negative cultural practices and stereotypes that are harmful to, and discriminate against, women and promote women's full enjoyment of their human rights in conformity with articles 2 (f) and 5 (a) of the Convention. This strategy should include legislation and specifically- designed educational and awareness-raising programmes targeting women and men at all levels of society, including government officials, chiefs and other traditional and community leaders, and zoes (headwomen of the Sande society), and should be aimed at creating an enabling environment for the transformation and change of stereotypes and discriminatory cultural values, attitudes and practices. It also encourages the State party to put in place monitoring mechanisms to regularly assess progress made towards the achievement of established goals.**

20. The Committee is extremely concerned about the persistence of female genital mutilation, which is a grave violation of girls' and women's human rights to bodily integrity and health and the State party's obligations under the Convention, and regrets that there is no law prohibiting the practice. The Committee is also concerned that the operations of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in issuing permits to the practitioners is an explicit support to the practice and thereby undermines any efforts to eliminate the practice.

**21. The Committee urges the State party to enact without delay and as a matter of priority legislation prohibiting female genital mutilation and to ensure that offenders are prosecuted and punished in accordance with the severity of this violation. The Committee also calls on the State party to immediately stop issuing permits to practitioners as currently being done by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It encourages the State party to extend and accelerate implementation of programmes designed to sensitize and provide alternate sources of income for those who perform female genital mutilation as a means of livelihood. It urges the State party to strengthen its awareness-raising and educational efforts, targeted at both women and men, including government officials at all levels, chiefs and other traditional and community**

**leaders, and zoes, to eliminate the practice of female genital mutilation and its underlying cultural justifications.**

**Violence against women**

22. The Committee notes with grave concern the extent, intensity and prevalence of violence against women in Liberia, especially sexual violence, which occurred both during and after the conflict. It also notes that, during the conflict, women and girls were particularly vulnerable to and affected by sexual violence. The Committee welcomes the important progress made by the State party to develop policies and establish institutional mechanisms to address the pervasive violence against women in the country, but it remains concerned about the lack of a comprehensive legal framework to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women, and the lack of adequate services and protection for victims of violence.

**23. The Committee urges the State party to prioritize the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive legal framework to address all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, and accelerate implementation of existing measures. It encourages the State party to make full use of the Committee's general recommendation 19 and urges the State party to undertake educational and public awareness programmes through the media that all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, are unacceptable.**

24. The Committee is concerned that measures designed to combat and eradicate violence against women are not enforced in practice, lack coordination and remain concentrated in urban areas. It is also concerned that the police, judiciary, and health care providers lack capacity to respond adequately to violence against women and girls in spite of efforts to train and sensitize them. It also notes that there is an excessive backlog of cases in the courts, resulting in a lack of access to justice for victims and the prevalence of impunity of perpetrators.

**25. The Committee calls upon the State party to continue efforts to train the judiciary, law enforcement officials, legal professionals, social workers and health care providers on violence against women so as to ensure that the perpetrators of violence against women are effectively prosecuted and punished with the required seriousness and speed, and that effective and gender-sensitive support is provided to victims. The Committee requests the State party to remove impediments women face in gaining access to justice at all levels, in all areas of the country. It also calls on the State party to establish support measures for victims of violence, including shelters and legal, medical and psychological**

support, in particular for those women and girls affected by violence during the conflict, and to continue efforts for their rehabilitation and reintegration. The Committee requests the State party to provide information in its next report on the laws, policies and programmes in place to deal with all forms of violence against women and on the results achieved in the implementation of such measures, as well as on data and trends in the prevalence of various forms of such violence.

### **Trafficking**

26. While noting the passage of the 2005 Anti-Human Trafficking Act, the Committee is concerned at the status and effectiveness of measures taken to ensure the law's practical implementation. The Committee is also concerned about the lack of clarity on the extent of trafficking in the country.

27. The Committee requests the State party to accelerate its efforts aimed at the effective implementation and full enforcement of the 2005 Anti-Human Trafficking Act. Such efforts should in particular include the effective prosecution and punishment of traffickers. It also recommends that the State party increase the provision of assistance and support to women victims, as well as prevention efforts, by addressing the root causes of trafficking and improving the economic situation of women so as to eliminate their vulnerability to exploitation and traffickers. It also invites the State party to enhance its collaboration with countries in the region to prevent and combat trafficking in women and girls as well as undertake studies on the prevalence of trafficking in the country.

### **Political participation and participation in public life**

28. While noting efforts made to ensure women's participation in public and political life at all levels, including within the framework of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, the Committee is concerned about the low level of participation of women at the highest levels of decision-making, and the lack of concrete steps to address the underlying causes, including prevailing social and cultural attitudes.

29. The Committee urges the State party to take concrete measures to accelerate the increase in the representation of women in all branches and levels of Government and, in accordance with article 7 and 8 of the Convention and its general recommendation 23 on women in political

and public life, including through the use of temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation 25. The Committee encourages the State party to take cognizance of articles 7 and 8 of the Convention as well as general recommendations 23 and 25 in the consideration of the draft Fairness Bill/Bill for the Equal Participation and Representation of Women in the Political Process. The Committee also encourages the State party to implement awareness-raising campaigns to highlight the importance to society as a whole of women's full and equal participation in leadership positions at all levels. The Committee invites the State party to monitor carefully the impact of measures taken and the results achieved, and to report thereon in its next periodic report.

### **Nationality**

30. The Committee notes with concern that certain provisions of the 1973 Revised Alien and Nationality Law discriminate against Liberian women. In particular, it is concerned that according to the law, a child born abroad to a Liberian mother and a non-Liberian father is not automatically granted its mother's nationality.

**31. The Committee urges the State party to remove all discriminatory laws relating to nationality, in accordance with article 9 of the Convention during the ongoing legal reform process.**

### **Education**

32. The Committee notes that education is key to the advancement of women and that the low level of education of girls and women remains among the most serious impediments to their full enjoyment of human rights and the achievement of women's empowerment. While recognizing ongoing efforts aimed at enhancing girls' increased enrolment and retention in schools, as well as progress made in reducing the gender gap in primary school enrolment, the Committee is concerned at the persistence of structural and other barriers to quality education which constitute particular obstacles to the education of girls and young women. These include lack of physical infrastructure, the persistence of gender-based stereotypes in text books and school curricula that reinforce discriminatory attitudes against women in society, and lack of trained and qualified teachers. The Committee is also concerned about the persistence of sexual abuse and harassment of girls in schools, the negative impact of harmful traditional practices, such as early and forced marriage, on girls' education, and barriers to pregnant girls' access to schools.

**33. The Committee recommends that the State party take steps to improve the educational infrastructure, especially in rural areas, and to raise awareness of the importance of education as a human right and a basis for the empowerment of women. It recommends that the State party implement measures to ensure equal access for girls and women to all levels of education and retention of girls in school, including through temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation 25. It also calls on the State party to ensure that sexual abuse and harassment in schools is addressed and punished appropriately, and to remove all barriers to school attendance for pregnant girls and young mothers. It encourages the State party to take steps to overcome traditional attitudes that constitute obstacles to girls' and women's education, and to develop non-stereotyped educational curricula that address structural causes of discrimination against women. The Committee calls on the State party to make strong efforts to improve the literacy level of girls and women through the adoption of comprehensive programmes at the formal and non-formal levels, and through adult education and training.**

#### **Employment and women's economic empowerment**

34. The Committee is concerned that women in Liberia do not enjoy their full rights under article 11 of the Convention. It is also concerned at the lack of clarity on the existence and scope of labor laws and policies in force in the country and the extent of their implementation. It is particularly concerned with the situation of women working in the private sector, including in rubber plantations, as well as the high number of women in the informal sector, and the lack of rights and social benefits, including maternity protections, available to them. While the Committee recognizes measures being taken by the State party to enhance women's economic empowerment and access to employment, it is also concerned with the disadvantaged situation of women in the labour market noting, for example, the creation of the Liberia Emergency Employment Program and Liberia Employment Action Program, under which only 900 women benefited from the reported 83, 000 jobs created there under.

**35. The Committee requests the State party to take all appropriate measures to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market, in accordance with article 11 of the Convention, including through the use of temporary special measures in accordance with its article 4, paragraph 1 and general recommendation 25. The Committee calls on the State party to**

ratify ILO Convention No. 100, and to incorporate the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value into its labour laws and policies. It calls upon the State party to give full consideration to the adoption of draft legislation on decent work, and to ensure that all provisions that discriminate against women are removed without delay from existing laws and policies, that they extend to both the public and private sectors, and are fully enforced. It also calls upon the State party to ensure that women receive adequate social benefits and services. It recommends that the State party address women's disadvantaged situation in the labour market and invites it to intensify efforts to enhance women's access to employment in the formal sector, including through increased opportunities for education and training, and ensure that all employment-generation programmes are gender sensitive and fully benefit women.

### **Health**

36. The Committee is deeply concerned at the highly negative effects of conflict on Liberia's health care infrastructure, which constitutes a grave obstacle to the access of women and girls to adequate health care and services on an equitable and equal basis, especially in rural areas. While recognizing the crucial role played by the international community and non-governmental organizations in the delivery of health care and services, and noting recent steps taken by the State party in the area of health care, for example the development of the Basic Package for Health Services and the Road Map for accelerating the reduction of maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality, the Committee is concerned that the State party lacks the basic resources and capacity to implement its health care policies, and ensure the full enjoyment of women's rights under article 12 of the Convention. The Committee is particularly concerned about the alarming rates of maternal mortality, high incidence of teenage pregnancy, and the high rates of HIV/AIDS affecting women and girls in the country. It is also concerned at the lack of access of women, particularly in rural areas, to sexual and reproductive and health services, including skilled birth attendance and adequate post-natal care.

37. The Committee encourages the State party to continue its collaboration with civil society and the international community in the area of health care, including the development of physical infrastructure and human resources, with a view to strengthening its own capacity to deliver basic health care and services, including mental health, and increasing the access of women and girls to those services on an equal and equitable basis. The Committee encourages systematic use of its general recommendation 24, on women and health in this regard. It urges the State party to make every effort to raise awareness of and increase women's access to health-care facilities, medical

assistance by trained personnel, particularly in the areas of birth attendance and post-natal care, especially in rural areas. The Committee recommends that the State party step up its efforts to reduce the incidence of maternal mortality and teenage pregnancy, and recommends the continued implementation of awareness-raising initiatives on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including those which target adolescent girls, with special attention paid to the prevention and control of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. It suggests that the State party assess the actual causes of maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS, and set targets and benchmarks within a time frame for their reduction.

### **Rural women**

38. While welcoming the National Rural Women's Project currently underway, and the attention given to gender equality in the recent Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Committee is concerned about the precarious situation of women in rural areas, who form the majority of women in Liberia and who are disproportionately affected by a lack of adequate health services, education, economic opportunities, social benefits, and access to adequate living conditions, in particular basic sanitation and water infrastructure. As previously noted, the Committee is deeply concerned about rural women's access to justice and the enforcement of their rights under the Convention, in view of discriminatory customary laws contained in the Revised Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia) which govern rural women. It expresses its particular concern about the prevalence of harmful traditional practices and persistence of customs and traditions in rural areas that violate the human rights of women and girls and adversely affect their equality and advancement.

39. **The Committee urges the State party to take appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against rural women and eradicate harmful traditional practices and those customs and traditions which justify and perpetuate them. The Committee urges the State party to pay special attention to the needs of rural women and ensure that they participate in decision-making processes, including community decision-making processes and development planning, and have equal access to basic services and infrastructure, and economic opportunities, including income-generation projects and credit facilities, on an equal and equitable basis with men, and with their urban counterparts. The Committee reiterates its request that the State party ensure that all discriminatory customary law is amended or repealed and brought into full compliance with the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations, and calls on the State**

**party to remove all impediments rural women may face in gaining access to justice. The Committee urges the State party to take special measures to enhance rural women's knowledge and awareness of their rights, including their right to seek legal redress in statutory courts.**

#### **Family relations**

40. The Committee expresses concern at the persistence of discriminatory provisions in customary law and the prevalence of harmful traditional practices in contravention of articles 15 and 16 of the Convention. It welcomes steps taken to harmonize statutory and customary law in the area of women's right to property with the passage of the 2003 Inheritance Law, but is concerned that women's rights with regard to property remain restricted. The Committee is also concerned that women are not allowed to appear before traditional courts without their husbands, that early and forced marriages remain prevalent, and that women do not enjoy equal rights with men in customary marriage. The Committee is also concerned at the lack of information on widows and divorce.

**41. The Committee urges the State party, in accordance with articles 15 and 16 of the Convention and in line with its general recommendation 21, to eliminate all discriminatory provisions in customary law and statutory law, so that women can enjoy the same legal rights in marriage with men. The Committee further urges the State party that traditional courts' procedures are in conformity with human rights norms and standards, so as to guarantee women equal access with men to the courts. The Committee calls on the State party to include information on widows and divorce in their next report.**

#### **Data collection and analysis**

42. While noting recent efforts to improve the collection of sex-disaggregated data, including the recent launch of the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics aimed at rebuilding statistical capacity and strengthening coordination across government ministries and agencies responsible for data collection, the Committee is concerned at the lack, or limited availability, of data disaggregated by sex in a number of areas of the Convention, which is necessary for targeted policy-making, as well as the systematic monitoring and evaluation of progress achieved towards women's de facto equality and the accurate assessment of the situation of women and trends over time, with regard to all areas covered by the Convention.

**43. The Committee calls on the State party to give priority to the systematic collection of comprehensive data disaggregated by sex and of measurable indicators to assess trends in the situation of women and of progress towards women's de facto equality, and calls its attention to general recommendation 9 in this regard. The Committee invites the State party, as necessary, to seek international assistance for the development of such data collection and analysis efforts, and ensure that such efforts are informed by the needs of users of data. The Committee requests that statistical data and analysis, disaggregated by sex and rural and urban areas, indicating the impact of measures and results achieved, be included in its next periodic report.**

#### **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

**44. The Committee urges the State party to utilize fully, in the implementation of its obligations under the Convention, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which reinforce the provisions of the Convention, and requests the State party to include information thereon in its next periodic report.**

#### **Millennium Development Goals**

**45. The Committee emphasizes that full and effective implementation of the Convention is indispensable for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It calls for the integration of a gender perspective and explicit reflection of the provisions of the Convention in all efforts aimed at the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and requests the State party to include information thereon in its next periodic report.**

#### **Ratification of other treaties**

**46. The Committee notes that States' adherence to the nine major international human rights instruments<sup>1</sup> enhances the enjoyment**

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<sup>1</sup> The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in all aspects of life. Therefore, the Committee encourages the Government of Liberia to ratify the treaties to which it is not yet a party, namely the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which it signed in 2007, and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

#### **Dissemination of concluding observations**

47. The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Liberia of the present concluding comments in order to make the people, including Government officials, politicians, parliamentarians and women's and human rights organizations, aware of the measures that have been taken to ensure de jure and de facto equality of women, as well as the further steps that are required in this regard. It requests the State party to continue to strengthen the dissemination, in particular to women's and human rights organizations, of the Convention, its Optional Protocol, the Committee's general recommendations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, on the theme "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

#### **Optional Protocol to the Convention**

48. The Committee encourages the State party to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which it signed in 2004.

#### **Follow-up to concluding observations**

49. The Committee requests the State party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps undertaken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 13 and 21 above.

#### **Technical assistance**

50. The Committee recommends that the State party continue to avail itself of technical assistance in the development and implementation of a comprehensive programme aimed at the implementation of the above recommendations as well as the Convention as a whole. The Committee expresses its willingness to continue the dialogue with the State party, including through a

country visit by Committee members to provide further guidance on the implementation of the above recommendations and the State party's obligations under the Convention. The Committee also calls upon the State party to strengthen further its cooperation with specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, including the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Statistics Division and Division for the Advancement of Women in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat.

**Date of next report**

51. The Committee requests the State party to respond to the concerns expressed in the present concluding observations in its next periodic report under article 18 of the Convention. The Committee invites the State party to submit its combined seventh and eighth periodic report in 2013.

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