



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

Pre-session working group

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**Responses to the list of issues and questions with regard to
the consideration of the combined fifth, sixth and seventh
periodic report**

Sri Lanka*

* This document was submitted late due to delayed inputs from other sources.

**RESPONSES TO ISSUES AND QUESTIONS WITH REGARD TO THE
CONSIDERATION OF SRI LANKA'S 5TH, 6TH AND 7TH PERIOD REPORT**

Reference is made to the list of issues and questions raised after the pre-session working group that examined Sri Lanka's combined 5th, 6th and 7th periodic Report. The responses are set out below.

General

1. Process followed in the preparation of the combined 5th, 6th and 7th periodic Report

The Report compiled for the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs by obtaining reports on the progress with regard to the obligations under the several Articles of CEDAW, from the relevant stakeholder Government Institutions. These Institutions included those responsible for the administration of justice, health, rural development, employment, social services and education. A draft Report discussed at several meetings with the stakeholder Government Institutions prior to finalization and submission to UN CEDAW.

Civil society organizations were not directly consulted in the preparation of the report. However, a consultative meeting was held with the participation of Non-Governmental Organizations at which a draft of the report was discussed.

There is no requirement to table Country Reports in Parliament nor is it customary. Hence, this was not done.

2. Legislative and Institutional framework

Re. the amendment to the Land Development Ordinance

The Land Development Ordinance includes provision (in section 51) for an owner or permit holder of state lands alienated under that Ordinance, to nominate a successor. The successor that could be so nominated is a spouse or other relative as set out in the 3rd schedule to that Ordinance, in the order of priority in which they are mentioned. That schedule gives preference to male relations (sons, grandsons, father, brothers, uncles, nephews) over female relations (daughters, grand daughters, mother, sisters, aunts and nieces). The amendment sought to remove the discrimination by referring to children, grand children, parents, siblings, uncles and aunts and nephews and nieces.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act No. 16 of 2003

The above Act was enacted only to remove a provision that was discriminatory against women. Prior to the amendment Sri Lankan women citizens could not pass citizenship to their offspring. By the amending Act, that discriminatory provision was removed and the right of women to pass citizenship to children was recognized equally with men.

No other amendments were made to change the policy with regard to the acquisition of citizenship by foreign spouses of Sri Lankan citizens since there was no discrimination in that regard. Accordingly, the amending law did not provide for any changes to the law governing the acquisition of citizenship by foreign spouses of Sri Lankan women.

Reference is made however to Sri Lanka's Third and Fourth Reports, which, in paragraph 73 (page 22)¹ set out how the issue of granting visa's to foreign spouses of Sri Lankan women citizens, was resolved.

National machinery for the advancement of women

3. Mandate and functions of the National Commission on Women

An extract of the provisions of the draft National Commission on Women Bill which provides for the mandate of the proposed Commission, is annexed hereto.

The National Commission on Women Bill was presented to Parliament in March 2010 but lapsed since Parliament was dissolved soon thereafter. There is now a new Minister responsible for the subject of Women's Empowerment, who has appointed a Committee to examine the provisions of the draft Bill. Steps are being taken to present the Bill to Parliament once again after fresh consultations with stakeholders. It is expected that the Bill will be finalized for presentation to Parliament by July 2011.

Stereotypes

4. Eradication of negative stereotypes and discriminatory cultural practices-

Most of the strategies adopted and activities undertaken by the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment have focused on communicating messages related to gender roles to the general public. The state continues to be committed to continue such efforts to impact on gender stereotyping, but are also aware that such behavior changes are difficult in adulthood and need to be inculcated in adolescence and even better, during early childhood. The mass media, particularly the TV as well as the radio have been utilized. Educational materials are distributed through relevant government Ministries, in addition to the conduct of workshops, seminars and meetings. A co-ordinated, multi media initiative is planned.

However, Sri Lanka believes strongly that the most effective method of eliminating gender stereotyping is by opening avenues and opportunities to women across all sectors without bias. In a country in which strong cultural beliefs still find acceptance albeit among much smaller numbers than before, it is wiser to approach the task of eliminating stereotypes through indirect methods. Sri Lanka has a strong focus on education. The achievements in the area of girls education are admirable with higher levels being accomplished by girls as opposed to boys. Sri Lanka believes that education is one of the most effective methods of ultimately eliminating gender stereotyping.

Action has been initiated by the Ministry of Education to review gender based information in the text books of Grades 5 and 6 and effect the necessary changes.

Measures taken to raise awareness among women and girls of their human rights - The Human

Rights Commission (HRC) has conducted educational programmes to raise awareness on the Rights of Girls and Women. These were conducted by the regional offices of the HRC in 2008.

5. Steps taken to suppress stereotyping and provide more opportunities to women to attain higher education in science, engineering and other technical disciplines

¹ CEDAW/C/LKA/3-4

As stated in Sri Lanka's 5th, 6th and 7th periodic Report, the pursuit of a profession is completely a matter of choice. While the State provides absolutely equal opportunities to both men and women to pursue their chosen professions there is no policy that more opportunities should be provided for women to attain higher education in the disciplines referred to. Affording equal opportunities to girls and women throughout the education system has been given priority in national policies in preference to constructively eliminating gender stereotyping. As stated in Sri Lanka's Report, as at 2006 approximately 1/3rd of the participants following vocational training courses at Government Technical training Institutions were women.

Violence against Women

6. Delays in processing sexual violence cases and women's safety during the interim period

The criminal and civil regimes to deal with violence against women are distinct. Acts of sexual violence that amount to crimes under the Penal Code, are dealt with in terms of the criminal law and procedure. It is true that there are delays in the conclusion of criminal cases where women are victims. Delay in arriving at conclusion is a phenomenon that is prevalent in the administration of justice in this country both in respect of criminal and civil cases. Policy makers have, over several years, attempted to introduce reforms to deal with this problem. The problem is not gender specific. Delays that occur in the administration of criminal justice are not confined to delays in respect of sexual cases, but a serious issue in respect of all criminal cases.

7. Explain why domestic violence is handled through police mediation and why the 205 Act is not being applied

Handling of domestic violence through police mediation and the use of the 2005 Act

The State does not have information in support of the statement that "most cases (of sexual violence) are dealt with through Police mediation or Media (sic) Boards with the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act rarely used "and therefore cannot accept the statement as accurate. The information available to the State confirms that the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (PDVA) IS used and many cases have been filed in court with the assistance of the Legal Aid Commission and Non-Governmental Organizations (particularly Women in Need (WIN)). In fact in 2009, 36 cases filed by WIN were analyzed and the findings are being used in the training of Judges and Police officers.

It is true that the Police do attempt mediation in family disputes with a view to restoring family unity. Mediation is acceptable if carried out effectively, since family disputes are best resolved without recourse to litigation. The Police action is a continuation of a practice that had developed over the years as a measure that was seen as the best remedy in respect of family disputes. After the PDVA was enacted, the Police are being trained in implementing the PDVA. A part of that training teaches them that resolution of disputes through mediation is not always an effective remedy, and that the remedy available under the PDVA should be used where appropriate.

The Legal Aid Commission which is a statutorily established entity which receives funding from Government has filed approximately 217 applications under the PDVA in 2006, 2007 and 2008. It is also known that WIN has filed over 125 applications up to date and obtained Protection Orders in almost all of them since the enactment of the Act.

8. How do illiterate women to apply for protection orders and legal representation for women

The state sponsored free legal aid centers established under the Legal Aid Commission (LAC) offer free legal aid to victims of domestic violence. There are 59 LAC's established

around the country. There are other Non-Governmental Organizations, notably Women in Need (WIN) that offer free legal and other assistance to women victims of violence. Most women, illiterate and literate, usually obtain the assistance of such service providers.

A “Complaints Centre” has been established by the National Committee of Women. The Centre entertains complaints from women and guides the complainants to appropriate Institutions that can provide a remedy. The Centre also refers complaints of violence to the Police and engage in necessary follow up action. In 2009, 223 such complaints were received and acted upon. A dedicated Women’s help line is proposed. This will provide women victims of violence with direct access to advice and assistance via the telephone.

Criminalizing marital rape

There is no decision by the State to criminalize marital rape. Neither is it contemplated.

9. Gender sensitive training for police and judges

The Sri Lanka Judge’s Institute has conducted several programmes to sensitize Judges with regard to issues relating to violence against women including programmes on the provisions of the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act. The Police and Prosecutors have been included in these training programmes.

Shelters for victims of gender based violence

There are no state sponsored shelters in which women victims can be placed as at present. There are some run by NGO’s. Establishment of shelters has been identified by the State as a priority and action is being pursued in this regard. Guidelines to be applied in the management of shelters have been developed by the National Committee on Women.

Measures are taken by the Ministry of Child development and women affairs to establish state shelter for women victims with collaboration of WIN and IOM. Although yet there are no state sponsored shelters, the Ministry of Health has established “Help Desks” in certain hospitals with the assistance of NGO’s to provide counseling and medical services for victims of gender based violence. A core group of health personnel who have been specially trained are engaged in training and sensitizing care givers such as Medical Officers of Health, Public Health Midwives and Public Health Inspectors in other hospitals so that they are able to refer victims to the Help Desks. Appointment of ‘Gender Focal Points’ to the Family Health Bureau has ensured sustainability of these initiatives.

National Committee on Women of Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Affairs conduct sensitization programs for judges and police personnel on the provision of prevention of Domestic Violence.

The State’s action to suppress violence against female IDP’s

The State, through the Ministry responsible for the subject of Human Rights, received monthly reports from Protection agencies (funded and co-coordinated by the UN) that were mandated to monitor the situation with regard to IDP’s. It was found that almost all complaints of abuse that were received were in relation to acts perpetrated by IDP’s against female IDP’s. These were dealt with as required in the circumstances.

10. Teenage sexual violence resulting in forced marriages

The State is aware of underage marriages becoming an issue in a few instances arising from the prosecution of young persons for the offence of statutory rape where there has been *consensual sexual intercourse* involving a girl under 16 years. The Law Commission has considered this concern extensively, and has recommended amendments to the Penal Code to deal with this issue. The proposals are currently under consideration by the State. No

change in the law is contemplated in respect of the minimum age for marriage which is 18 years.

Prostitution and Trafficking

11. Prosecution of cases and measures taken to address stigmatization against female victims

Trafficking, being an indictable offence under the Penal Code (section 360(3)), is investigated by the Police and offenders are indicted by the Attorney General before the High Court. A special unit to handle trafficking cases has been established in the Attorney-General Department and action is being taken secure more convictions in respect of trafficking offences. Training programs on Trafficking were conducted for officers of the department to enhance their knowledge on international and national legislation on trafficking. The Judges Training Institute in association with the Ministry of Justice organized a judicial colloquium for the High Court Judges.

In order to prevent trafficking of migrant workers the government plans to develop a system to rank problematic employment agencies and take measures strict measures against them

A counter trafficking National Data Base unit has been established at the Police Criminal Records Division for sharing information and for monitoring the progress of all the cases. Other recent national Government initiatives include training programs on victim identification and a recently opened Immigration and Emigration Department National Counter-Trafficking Research Center that provides training and the promotion of research and information sharing among key stakeholders.

The government has promoted general awareness of the sex trafficking of women and girls and the issue of safe migration. The Police Training School and the Police Academy have integrated a trafficking training module as part of the standard police curriculum and trained more than 1600 officers with the new module. The government has also produced guidelines for law enforcement agencies to identify trafficking victims.

In order to institute a multi-agency approach towards successfully combating human trafficking in Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Justice has recently established an Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force. This new initiative will bring together key government stakeholders to comprehensively tackle the problem of human trafficking. The Ministry with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) will facilitate monthly Task Force meetings, where the participants will share information and good practices, foster partnerships among stakeholders and plan active collaboration to combat human trafficking. The issue of protection to victims is one of the key areas that is being examined.

The Task Force will be examining all aspects of the offence of Trafficking including the impact on women victims and other matters referred to in the UN Palermo Convention and its Optional protocol on Trafficking.

Criminalization of prostitution - Prostitution is not criminalized.

Efforts to prevent spread of sexually transmitted diseases and programmes to divert commercial sex workers

There is a National STD/AIDS control programme that has a focus on controlling the spread of STD's as well as HIV AIDS. Diverting commercial sex workers away from prostitution is an identified activity of this programme.

Political Participation

12. Has any survey been conducted to inquire into women's interest in political careers?

No.

Measures taken to encourage women to participate in political life

Several recommendations with regard to the inclusion of a mandatory quota are currently under consideration.

13. Efforts made to encourage and provide more opportunities for women to enter the diplomatic service

Entry into the Foreign Service is through a competitive recruitment process including a written examination. Equal opportunities are afforded to men and women alike.

Education

14. Measures to encourage more women to take up engineering and technology

As stated in Sri Lanka's Report, selection of academic courses is purely a matter of choice.

Percentage of women teachers

The percentage of women who are teachers was 71 % as at 2009.

Academic curriculum discriminatory towards women or perpetuating stereotypes

A review has been undertaken of gender bias in the primary and secondary school curricula. The recommendations of the review have been noted and are being implemented by the Ministry of Education.

15. Integration of gender concerns into technical and vocational education and its impact on women's participation in technical and vocational education

Although gender concerns have been integrated into policies and programmes with regard to technical and vocational education, there has not been a rapid increase in the participation of women in technical and vocational education as yet. Impacts of such integration are not expected within a short period of time. Behavior change is dependant on a multiplicity of factors and takes time to occur. What is most important is that such changes are occurring and there is hope that the desired outcome will take place.

Employment

16. Measures taken to address the unemployment of females

Reference is made to Sri Lanka's periodic Report, which states that although the percentage of unemployed women is higher than that of males, the female unemployment rate has dropped more rapidly than that of males. It is as a result of a multiplicity of State policies and actions that the rate of unemployment of women is reducing, eg. The policy of equal treatment in respect of recruitments; the attainment of higher levels of education by women, grant of better maternity leave facilities, to name a few.

Disparity in salaries between men and women in the private formal sector

There is no such disparity permitted under the law.

Steps taken to address physical and sexual abuse of migrant women workers

The ill treatment of migrant workers is of serious concern to the State and this matter receives the attention of the relevant Line Ministry. Several measures that have been taken have been set out in the periodic Reports.

Proposal to prohibit mothers with children under 5 years of age from proceeding overseas for employment

The proposal to impose a restriction on mothers of children under 5 years of age, from proceeding on overseas employment was considered to be necessary in the best interests of young children. This recommendation was made having considered the serious adverse impact on children who are required to grow up without their mother and some of who even face emotional and physical abuse. However, in view of representations received against implementing such a proposal it was not proceeded with.

Health

20. Law relating to abortion

The Penal Code section on abortion is contained in section 303 abortion is allowed in the instances when it affects mother's health. Accordingly, the termination of a pregnancy could be done in good faith and only to save the life of the mother. The reform of this section to permit the termination of pregnancies in the case of congenital abnormalities, rape and incest has been under consideration. Such reform can be effected after discussion/consultation with policy makers and other stakeholders including religious bodies and upon sensitizing them as to the real need for reform. As in most countries, this remains a controversial issue.

Availability of and accessibility to family planning and contraceptive methods

Family planning services are provided through provincial and district level clinics as well as health care institutions. According to the most recent data available for 2007, a total of 248,897 new acceptors were recorded. This signifies a 10.7 per cent increase compared to the previous year. 26.4 % of this is related to modern temporary FP methods while 27.9% was permanent methods. The management information system in relation to FP was revised in 2007 to improve accuracy. It is believed that more training for both preventive and curative health staff contributed to the wider coverage and improved quality of the data collected.

The highest level of FP acceptance was recorded in the 30 to 39 age groups for permanent methods while temporary modern method was highest in the age groups, less than 20 years. This has been gradually declining with increasing age in 2006 and 2007.

The State regards family planning as a component of family health which also includes maternal and new born health, infants and child health, school and adolescent health and women's health. This integrated approach is considered the most acceptable to Sri Lankan families of all communities.

Compulsory family planning and sterilization for plantation women workers

The State has no information regarding compulsory family planning or sterilization programmes in the plantation sector. FP is entirely voluntary in all parts of the island including the plantation sector.

Rural women, older women and women with disabilities

22. Poverty reduction programmes, and other services provided for rural women in the agriculture sector in terms of education health, economy and employment

As stated in Sri Lanka's periodic Report, women have been included as beneficiaries under the poverty reduction programme within the *Mahinda Chitana* policies of the government. The main aim is to narrow income disparities and reduce poverty. The head count ratio measures poverty by the percentage of the population whose income is less than the national poverty line. This has been considered to have declined from 26.1% in 1990/1991 to 22.7% in 2002. Assuming a linear trend, poverty is anticipated to fall to 19.0% by 2015. This is less than the targeted 13%

At present, disaggregated information is only available by rural/urban and not gender. Accordingly, the urban sector has experienced a faster improvement and has exceeded the national target. Although rural areas do demonstrate a steady decline, the pace is relatively slow. The estate population in contrast has shown a rising trend in income poverty, particularly among male headed households. There are ongoing behavior change programmes to alter such behaviour. Such programmes take time to have the desired impact. Female headed households have experienced improvements in poverty levels compared to male headed households.

Under a Cash Management programme conducted in the estate sector, awareness is provided on how to manage the family budget. In these programmes the money wasted on liquor by each family is also calculated. It is hoped that these programmes will help prevent domestic violence that takes place due to alcoholism.

All rural women have access to free health care, both preventive and curative. This includes the provision of the services of a network of well - women clinics.

Reproductive organ malignancies are detected at such clinics. This assists in the detection of hypertension and diabetes which are relevant in the case of older women.

By end 2007, there was a network of 611 well women clinics functioning in the Medical Offices of Health in all parts of the island. All women over 35 years are able to get a check up for hypertension, diabetics, breast malignancies and cervical cancer. If abnormalities are detected, the clients are referred to the relevant specialist service in the health care system. Where necessary, free care is available. Follow up at home level is undertaken by the public health midwife of the area of residence.

In the case of disabilities, women, similar to men and children are included in a community based rehabilitation programme. Since Sri Lanka as a developing country has no financial resources for an individual therapy approach as in developed countries, the most cost effective which is a community based approach is adopted. Within the CBR, family members are trained in providing care by trained family members.

For disabilities related to sight, hearing, etc. there are initiatives by both the Government as well as civil society organizations. There are only a few institutions available for those who have severe disabilities, where community/family may not be available. This includes those who have a total lack of sight and hearing as well as those who have chronic mental conditions and who cannot be managed in homes.

23 Older women

Older women who seek education are able to attend non formal education centers which provide education for people of all ages. This mainly includes numeracy and literacy skills. Few of the older persons make use of such services.

Such centers are available island wide and function under the non-formal section of the Ministry of Education. Teachers in non-formal education provide services for those who have "dropped" out of the formal system of education or who have never attended school. People of all ages are eligible for such education which is provided without cost.

In relation to economic advancement and employment, there are specific interventions, but not opportunities on a universal basis. These are provided by government, private sector and civil society organizations. These programmes tend to be area based, and depend on the skills and needs of potential women beneficiaries. Such services exist in both rural and urban areas. The situation varies according to age. Many unmarried, young rural women are employed in the garment industry. Women also work in the rubber and coconut plantation as well as in small cottage industries.

A Revolving Loan Scheme has been introduced to enable self employment among women. Members of Women's Societies registered with the Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka are the beneficiaries under this scheme. In 2009, there were 1589 beneficiaries. Office bearers of these societies are trained in keeping accounts so that the scheme can be operated properly. This also ensures the stability of the societies while guiding women in decision making in their undertakings. There is also a "Vanitha Shakthi" Bank Society programme under which rural women are granted affordable loans.

Skills development programmes are conducted for members of the Women's Societies to promote production of high quality products to meet the market demand. They are also afforded opportunities to sell their products through the organization of exhibitions. They are also trained in pricing, packaging and exploring market opportunities.

Home gardening programmes are implemented for low income families both for self employment purposes as well as to avail these families of a balanced, nutritious and toxic free diet, while also helping to reducing their cost of living.

Resource Centres have been established for older women providing them with reading material and recreational activities for their relaxation.

24. Policies in place with respect to disaster risk reduction and mitigation and incorporation of women's participation in implementation process

Information on the Tsunami rehabilitation programmes for victims especially women and girls including older women in rural areas

National Committee on women implemented the "suviderika" project for strengthen of mental, social, moral behavior of tsunami victims with assistance of UNFPA. Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka also implemented special income generation projects for women affected by tsunami. Women's bureau of Sri Lanka conducts programs for women's Society members are given information and knowledge on disaster situations and mitigation of risk in such situations

Equality before the law and civil matters

25. Treatment of women with respect to inheritance and laws protecting their right to property ownership.

There is no discrimination in respect of inheritance under the General law, the Kandyan law and the Thesawalam law. Under the Muslim law, inheritance is dependant on the law applicable to the sect to which the woman belongs. A committee appointed by the Minister of Justice to examine and report on reforms required to the Muslim law is currently deliberating this, among other issues.

26. Do women have equal access to legal services? Can they obtain free legal help if they are unable to pay for it?

Yes, women have equal rights of access to legal services and to free legal aid. Free legal aid is available without gender bias. There are special programmes for women (eg. legal services for victims of domestic violence). The fact that the availability of free legal aid is known by many and that the data shows an increase in the numbers that access free legal aid services, indicate that there is awareness regarding the services offered.

27. Information on the internally displaced women's and children's access to services and facilities to address their economic and health needs

There are Counsellors attached by the Ministry of Social Services, to some of the IDP Welfare Centers in resettled areas. Their duties include the identification of psychosocial problems as well as vulnerable groups such as elders, women and children and their reference as required to psychiatric, or psycho therapist treatment or to government authorities for public services.

Some of the main achievements have been to assist with self employment and the conduct of awareness programmes on Sexual and Gender Based Violence Prevention. The Women's Bureau also implements programmes to promote the status of women IDP's by conducting income generation projects to uplift their economic conditions.

28. National policy or an action plan on the return of internally displaced persons as well as their resettlement and reintegration into society

Female ex-combatants or detainees

In 2006, the Government appointed a Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (CGR) to implement its rehabilitation programme for ex-combatants. Pursuant to the completion of the rehabilitation process it was necessary to provide those rehabilitated with opportunities to re-integrate into society. In order to fulfill this objective, the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Prison Reforms has formulated "A Way-Forward on Re-Insertion and Re-Integration of Rehabilitates" (WRRR).

The Guiding Principles of the WRRR include **Gender**, thus recognizing the need for special measures to address the concerns of female ex-combatants and detainees (who are termed as *beneficiaries* in the WRRR.) The WRRR specifically states that the direct beneficiaries will include women. The aim of the social integration programme is to promote the re-building of relationships between the beneficiaries and the members of the receiving community, including those marginalized, among them women. The WRRR has a seven-fold approach, one being the inclusion of needs of women, youth and differently able persons in planning and implementation of its re-insertion and re-integration programmes. The following activities identified to implement the WRRR lay emphasis on women –

- To set up 'Community Integration Societies' which promote interaction between the beneficiaries and the receiving community members, including women, youth and differently able persons. (Activity 2.1.2.)
- To assess the existing psychosocial and healthcare facilities and identify the specific psychosocial needs of male and female beneficiaries and the receiving communities and if necessary establish community centers (Activity 2.4.1)
- To conduct community based health education programmes on basic hygiene practices, nutrition, communicable diseases, re-productive health, sexually transmitted diseases and sexual and gender based violence (Activity 2.4.3)
- To provide healthcare services to meet the special needs of women, pregnant mothers and mothers with infants, among the beneficiaries and their families. (Activity 2.4.4)

- To review training curricula and facilities to suit the specific needs of women, youth and differently able persons (Activity 3.2.6)
- To sensitize service providers to the specific needs of women, youth and differently able persons (Activity 6.2.3)

Participation of women in the implementation process of Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820

Information will be submitted shortly

Marriage and Family relations

29. Muslim law reform

Age of marriage under the Muslim Personal laws

Ban on child marriage

Obtaining the written consent of the bride and the groom

The Ministry of Justice, in 2009 appointed Committees to examine and report on Personal Law reforms. The recommendations of these Committees are expected and will be considered. The issue of the age of marriage under the Muslim Law will also receive consideration under this initiative.

With regard to the ban on child marriages, please see Sri Lanka's periodic Report which states that *"It is not considered advisable or necessary to attempt law reform and thereby disturb religious sensitivities since the issue appears to be sorting itself out."* The State will be guided by the recommendations of the Committee in respect of all of the above concerns.

Higher education of Muslim girls and preventing child marriages

Education of girls is pursued in preference to marriage at a young age. Hence the resulting situation where there is a greater focus on educating Muslim girls rather than giving them in marriage at a young age.
