

Philippines

16th session

275. The Committee considered the third and fourth periodic reports of the Philippines (CEDAW/C/1997/PHI/3 and 4)* at its 327th and 328th meetings, on 27 January 1997 (see CEDAW/C/SR.327 and 328). The representatives, including the Chairperson of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, presented a three-part document containing extensive responses to the questions of the Committee's pre-session working group. The document had been prepared collaboratively by ministerial agencies and non-governmental organizations.

276. The Committee was informed of the various measures the Government had taken in the implementation of the Convention. A 30-year perspective plan had been devised containing information on the status of women in every sector and stipulating measures to be taken to achieve full equality between women and men. It was the policy of the Government to pursue a gender-responsive approach to poverty alleviation. Moreover, the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women had been given direct access to the highest policy-making level. The Government's commitment was also reflected in the secured funding within the national budget for the purpose of improving women's lives. The Committee was further informed that considerable improvements had been made in the fields of women's health and education.

277. At the same time, the representative of the Philippines acknowledged that, although much progress had been achieved since the consideration of the State party's second report, there was still more to be done before the Convention was fully implemented in the country. She also noted the lack of an effective mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Convention. She described the major challenge posed by the Government's decentralization policy to the achievement of the effective implementation of the Convention.

278. The representative noted that, in spite of the rapid economic recovery, women in the Philippines suffered disproportionately from poverty, thus contributing to the continued feminization of overseas employment. Rural women were particularly affected, and this had led to the migration of a large number of rural women to urban areas as well as overseas. She reported that that was a major concern of the Government of the Philippines, which had set up, inter alia, monitoring centres, counselling services and specific

* At its 313th meeting, the Committee was informed that its Bureau had waived the general rule requiring simultaneous release of official documents in all working languages of the Committee and agreed to take up document CEDAW/C/1997/PHI/4 on the basis of the edited English version.

support programmes, as well as providing welfare assistance. The Committee was informed that most women migrant workers were employed as entertainers and domestic helpers. Those jobs often put them in a very vulnerable position and exposed them to risks of violent abuse. In that respect, the representative recognized that further efforts were required to establish more effective systems to allow the particular needs and problems of women migrant workers to be addressed.

279. The representative alerted the Committee to the increasing incidence of crimes of violence against women. Various measures had been taken by the Government to combat such violence, reflecting the Committee's general recommendation 19 on violence against women. The Committee was informed that various support systems had been set up, including women's shelter homes and a 24-hour helpline. Several bills had been proposed, for example on rape and domestic violence, as a result of the lobbying of non-governmental organizations and government agencies. However, it remained to be seen whether they could be effectively implemented. The Government was aware that the prevailing gender-stereotyped images had to be eliminated and that a public awareness-raising campaign needed to be organized in that regard.

280. The Committee was further informed that prostitution was illegal in the Philippines. However, the representative noted that there had been changes in public opinion on that subject, and much debate had been taking place in the country in relation to the issue.

281. The representative of the Philippines concluded her presentation by assuring the Committee of her Government's commitment to advancing the status of women.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

282. The Committee welcomed the presentation by the Government of the Philippines, and commended it in particular on the high quality of its fourth periodic report, which contained detailed information on the implementation of the Convention in accordance with the Committee's guidelines. The report gave a comprehensive overview of legal and administrative measures taken by the Government of the Philippines, and the analysis indicated a good understanding of the obstacles to the advancement of women. At the same time, it lacked factual information, including statistics, on the actual effect of government programmes and policies. The Committee applauded the initiative of the Government to collaborate with non-governmental organizations in preparing the report. It was particularly pleased with the frank and sincere approach of the national machinery in identifying the major obstacles to the elimination of discrimination against women.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

283. The Committee noted the major economic policies undertaken by the Government, including economic and trade agreements at the regional and global levels, which will have a profound impact on women. In particular,

the direction towards economic liberalization and privatization may have serious implications for the economic position of women and, in particular, on the economic position of women in the free-trade zones and in rural areas. The Committee was concerned that the trend towards feminization of migration and its attendant problems, including violence against women migrant workers, might be exacerbated.

Positive aspects

284. The Committee welcomed the adoption by the Government of the Philippine Plan for Gender-responsive Development, 1995-2025, and also the priority policy imperatives set by the national machinery for women to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and to mainstream gender and development throughout the Government.

285. The Committee commended the decision to allocate a given percentage of all governmental budgets to women's programmes and projects, and encouraged an increase in the minimum percentage allocated.

286. The Committee noted with satisfaction several measures taken between the third and fourth periodic reports, such as the provision of credit assistance to women, legislation prohibiting sexual harassment, raising the minimum wage for domestic workers and increasing maternity and paternity benefits for employed persons.

287. The Committee applauded the report on an initial consultation to measure women's unremunerated work within a satellite account to the national economic system.

288. The Committee also commended the increase in the number of women's non-governmental organizations working at the grass-roots level and their significant contribution to the advancement of women, which was reflected in the reports of the State party.

289. The Committee was gratified at the exceptionally high level of literacy (93 per cent) among Filipino women.

Principal areas of concern

290. The Committee noted with concern the inadequacy of monitoring mechanisms and indicators to measure the impact of government policies and programmes, as well as laws and administrative directives and regulations, especially at the local level.

291. The Committee expressed its grave concern about the economic reforms, which had resulted in growth in the gross national product, on the one hand, but in an increasing gap in the rates of employment of women and men and the economic marginalization of women on the other. Such damage, even if short-term, would be increasingly hard to rectify. It appeared that, owing to the lack of a livelihood, rural women were migrating to urban areas, where unemployment was higher than ever, which could account for the large number

of women working as prostitutes and for the high proportion of women migrating as overseas contract workers.

292. The Committee commented on the discriminatory application of laws enforced against women prostitutes and not the men involved as traffickers, pimps and clients, and noted further that forced medical examinations of the women without similar attention to the male clients was not effective as a public health measure.

293. The Committee expressed its deep concern about deficiencies in the legal system with regard to violence against women, in view of the fact that incest and domestic violence were not specifically penalized by law and were still shrouded in silence.

294. The Committee noted that the decentralization of population and development programmes should bring services closer to the people. The Committee was concerned that without the requisite resource capacities and gender sensitivity of officials, such decentralization could deny women access to those services in contravention of the Convention.

295. The Committee noted with concern that despite the increased participation of women in decision-making in the public sphere, especially in non-governmental organizations, there was still very low representation of women in politics, top levels of Government and the judiciary.

Suggestions and recommendations

296. The Committee urged the Government of the Philippines to adopt a top-priority policy of creating safe and protected jobs for women as a viable economic alternative to the current unemployment of women and their participation as subcontractors and, in the informal sector, as workers in free-trade zones, as prostitutes or as overseas contract workers.

297. The Committee suggested that the Government ensure that its economic policy did not lead to marginalization and exploitation so that women were encouraged to seek overseas employment to the detriment of society.

298. The Committee strongly recommended that the Government strengthen agencies that provide information and support services to women before they depart for overseas work, as well as in the receiving countries in cases of need.

299. The Committee suggested that measures for dealing with prostitution should focus on penalizing traffickers and creating alternative job opportunities for the women.

300. The Committee strongly urged the Government to enact legislation to combat violence against women and to compile the relevant data.

301. The Committee recommended that reproductive and sexual health services, including family planning and contraception, be made available and accessible to all women in all regions.

302. The Committee recommended that temporary special measures be adopted to increase the participation of women in top-level decision-making positions in the public sector.

303. The Committee suggested that there was a strong need for developing gender-disaggregated data in all areas.

304. In order to facilitate the implementation of the Convention, the Committee recommended that monitoring mechanisms and indicators be developed to measure the effect of government policies and programmes.

305. The Committee requested the Government of the Philippines to address the concerns included in the present concluding comments in its next report and to include information on the implementation of the Committee's general recommendations, as well as information relating to the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action in accordance with its revised reporting guidelines. It also requested wide dissemination of the comments throughout the Philippines.