



**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

Summary record of the 889th meeting (Chamber B)

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 22 July 2009, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Zou Xiaoqiao (Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of Ms. Gabr, Ms. Zou Xiaoqiao, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

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 Denmark (continued) (CEDAW/C/DEN/7; CEDAW/C/DEN/Q/7 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Denmark took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 1 to 6 (continued)

2. **Mr. Weyhe** (Denmark) said that combating violence against women was a priority of the Greenland Home Rule Government. Various measures had been adopted, including public discussions and television programmes aimed at raising awareness of the problem and of the legal framework set up to deal with it, awareness campaigns in schools and the establishment of shelters for battered women. The Government had worked hard to gather information on the extent and distribution of the problem and hoped that the coming national conference on the problem would contribute to practical solutions. One gap needed urgent attention, namely, the lack of a sufficient number of qualified social workers.

3. **Mr. Egholm** (Denmark), speaking with reference to the Faroe Islands, said that a hotline and a crisis centre had been set up to provide counselling and shelter for victims of domestic violence. A television campaign on violence against women sought to raise awareness of the problem. Such violence was punishable under criminal law. Responding to concerns raised earlier in that regard, he said that current law did not require the expulsion of foreigners convicted of such crimes.

Articles 7 to 9

4. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega** asked what measures and sanctions had been adopted to ensure that local municipalities applied the gender equality measures stipulated in the law and whether information existed on the degree of compliance by the municipalities. It was also not clear what supervisory machinery had been established to ensure gender equality in public

bodies. Denmark had rejected gender quotas but did not seem to have established alternative measures to increase the representation of women in decision-making bodies.

5. **Ms. Neubauer** expressed concern that the degree of representation of women in local decision-making bodies was low and seemed to be stagnating. The onus for correcting the situation should not be on women. Political parties, for instance, probably received some form of support from the Government and that support should be made conditional on the parties' playing an active role in solving the problem. Noting that the Government rejected gender quotas, she asked what other measures were planned to effectively address the problem. It was time to show creativity, innovation and determination.

6. **Ms. Ameline** noted that the Government and Parliament seemed to have disengaged themselves from solving the problem of women's representation at the local level. With the increasing role played by local governments in the European decentralized model, Denmark needed to show more of its traditional leadership in developing solutions to the problem.

7. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** said that human rights and women's rights were indivisible. Several human rights bodies, as well as the Committee, had on various occasions drawn attention to the problem of the low level of the representation of women in local decision-making bodies in Denmark. She noted that local elections had been announced for the autumn and urged the Government to do more to increase the number of women standing for election and gaining seats. She supported the idea of requiring political parties to take action to improve the situation.

8. **Ms. Abel** (Denmark) said that, since there had been no local elections in Denmark since the Committee had last considered a report from Denmark, she was unable to provide it with any new figures. However, measures had been taken in an effort to improve the situation at the next election. There had not been a decrease in the number of women in local government; the number had merely not increased, though that was still not good enough. One possible explanation was that the number of municipalities in Denmark had been reduced significantly, meaning that there were fewer seats overall. Local municipalities were obliged to work towards gender equality, in accordance with the Gender Equality Act, but Denmark

did not impose any kind of quotas on democratic elections and there were no plans to do so.

9. Responding to Ms. Neubauer, she said that the recent 100th anniversary of the election of the first woman to local government had been widely celebrated, raising awareness of the need to do more to promote the nomination of women. A new committee had been set up to examine the working conditions in municipalities and to identify ways of encouraging more women to work in local authorities. A debate among local political parties was also needed with the aim of addressing the obstacles faced by women in workplace culture. All the party leaders had been invited to the conference held on 8 March to discuss measures they could take to encourage more women to stand for local government at the next election. However, no special measures or economic sanctions were envisaged. Responding to the query about the responsibility for ensuring gender equality in local government, she said that the Government had focused its efforts on promoting a discussion of the issue in the local areas.

10. Responding to Ms. Ameline's comment that the Danish Parliament had no specific committee on women's rights or gender equality, she noted that all political parties now had a gender equality spokesperson, so the issue was often discussed. With regard to the gender balance of committees, she noted that each periodic report had shown progress in that regard. Recent amendments to the Gender Equality Act had further strengthened the rules, so that if an organization did not nominate both a male and a female representative for a Committee, with no valid reason, the Minister responsible must now leave the seat open. In practice, Ministers planning to set up a new committee contacted the Department for Gender Equality to say which representatives had been put forward and, if the gender balance was deemed unacceptable, dialogue ensued which often led to the nomination of more women. It should be noted that women already accounted for 41 per cent of committee membership. She also confirmed that Denmark did indeed have a Minister for Gender Equality, but that the Minister's portfolio had changed from Gender Equality and Social Welfare to Gender Equality and Employment. Political parties did receive subsidies from the Government, at both Parliamentary and local levels.

11. **Ms. Neubauer** asked whether the initiative to encourage more women to stand for election was really addressing the problem or whether the problem in fact lay in the internal party procedures for getting onto a list of candidates.

12. In the final analysis, compliance with the obligations under the Convention was the responsibility of the State; the Government must therefore work to encourage compliance by others, including the Parliament and local municipalities, even when it could not act directly.

13. **Ms. Abel** (Denmark) confirmed that unfortunately it was indeed the case that not enough women were interested in standing for local government. Nonetheless, local parties were still being encouraged to get more women on board.

14. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** noted that Greenland and the Faroe Islands could send two of their local representatives to the Danish Parliament but that those representatives were not able to stand for election to the European Parliament. She wanted to know whether that distinction constituted discrimination.

15. **Ms. Abel** (Denmark) wondered why the question pertained to the work of CEDAW, but said that the Danish Constitution specified that both Greenland and the Faroe Islands should have two seats in the Danish Parliament. In order to have representation in the European Parliament, however, it was necessary to be a member of the European Union and Greenland, for example, was not.

Articles 10 to 14

16. **Ms. Bailey** noted that while the legislative and policy framework in Denmark provided for equality irrespective of gender and ethnicity, de facto equality had not yet been achieved in all areas of the education system. The Committee had received reports of marked segregation in vocational education and training, a problem that carried over into the labour market. Referring to the Act on guidance in relation to the choice of education, training and career, and the two-year project on gender, ethnicity and guidance, she asked what the effect had been on segregation in vocational training. She enquired whether the establishment of a group of role models to promote non-specific gender choices had succeeded in changing traditional patterns. More information would also be appreciated about the training of guidance counsellors

and teachers with regard to breaking down gender-based education choices.

17. Turning to the question of the low number of women in academia, she noted that the increase in the number of female professors since the previous periodic report had been just over 1 per cent. The report stated that only men had applied for most vacancies, but alternative sources suggested that most of the posts had been in male-dominated areas and recruitment efforts had been targeted at specific candidates. She asked the delegation to explain how such barriers and practices could be removed so that the process could be made more equitable. In the concluding observations on the sixth periodic report (CEDAW/C/DEN/CO/6), the Committee had urged Denmark to monitor the implementation of the recommendation of a think tank to involve more women in research, calling for universities to have specific objectives in their development plans for gender equality in recruitment, which should be made public and have annual follow-up. According to information received by the Committee, that had only happened in two out of eight cases. She therefore asked what could be done to ensure 100 per cent compliance with that recommendation. It was of concern that the Ministry's guidelines for development plans did not incorporate a gender perspective, making enforcement difficult.

18. Turning to the question of gender stereotypes among children, she asked whether the guide and children's book that had been distributed to kindergartens had been assessed to ensure they were indeed gender-neutral and promoted alternatives for both males and females.

19. Since students in Greenland needed to leave the country to go to university, she wondered whether men and women had equal opportunities in that regard. The Committee would be interested to see some gender-disaggregated data showing how many students went, what subjects they studied and what the return rate was.

20. **Ms. Patten** said that she would like to know more about how the Government was addressing the systemic discrimination in employment and the occupational segregation of women; and how it was encouraging their upward mobility generally, especially in more specialized, non-traditional jobs. She wondered if in practice it was enforcing equal pay

for equal work in both the public and the private sectors; if the labour courts dealing with pay discrimination cases had been trained to avoid gender bias; if an objective evaluation of the pay situation was being done; and whether that was happening at the employer, sectoral or national level, or as part of a collective bargaining or national wage-setting mechanism. The International Labour Organization (ILO) step-by-step guide to gender-neutral job evaluation for equal pay was a useful resource in that connection. It would be interesting to know if employers were in general complying with their obligation under the Equal Pay Act to keep gender-specific statistics on the matter, and if that had led to beneficial changes in the workplace or to litigation. There was also the question of how the Government and the social partners themselves were dealing with the failure of the confederations of employers' associations and trade unions in the agricultural sector to reach agreement.

21. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega**, noting that the Government was advocating a policy of incentives rather than sanctions to bring about change in the labour market, asked whether employers had in fact begun adopting plans to promote equality for women in the workplace and to steer them into non-traditional jobs; and whether the Government was encouraging greater competitiveness through some sort of official recognition of successful firms. Work inspections were another very important tool. She also wondered whether the Government had assessed the impact of the economic crisis on the employment of women.

22. **Mr. Bruun** asked whether the number of female-dominated part-time jobs was rising and what the Government was doing to move women into full-time jobs. He noted that the proportion of women entrepreneurs had been declining since 2004 and, though the report stated that it was not a political priority, Denmark had an obligation under the Convention to address the issue. It would be interesting to know how the Government was able to measure the impact of the greater presence of women on corporate boards and in other senior positions. Firms with more than 35 employees were now required, in the interest of pay-gap reduction, to produce gender-specific pay figures, but perhaps that threshold might be lowered to 25 or 30, as in the other Nordic countries.

23. **Ms. Rasekh**, turning to article 12 of the Convention on health, asked whether the Government

had looked into the reason for the consistent rise in abortions among young women aged 15 to 19 from 2002 to 2006 and had done anything to tackle the problem; also, whether the Government had investigated the health consequences of the very high rate of violence, especially domestic violence, against women, affecting 13 to 14 per cent of the population. It was unclear if any long-term therapy was being provided for battered women. She noted that one case of a female genital mutilation had been prosecuted, but surmised that there must be more such cases in Denmark. It would be interesting to know who reported such cases, who initiated court proceedings and how the Government was trying to control the problem.

24. **Ms. Abel** (Denmark) assured the Committee that the educational materials provided by the Government were by no means gender-neutral: Denmark sought to combat stereotyping and discrimination from the very start by, for example, reinforcing the message of equal treatment within the family itself in picture books for kindergarten children. The schools provided Internet-based guidance, regularly updated, to pupils, counsellors and teachers, encouraging dialogue between children and parents and between them and the teachers. Guidance counsellors were trained to avoid steering children into fields not of their own choosing. It was as yet difficult to assess the results of the Government's educational policy. The aim was certainly to try to attract more girls to science and more boys to fields not usually chosen by males.

25. Denmark did enforce equal pay for equal work, but it still had a pay gap. The fact that nearly all women in Denmark worked was unquestionably a factor in the gender-segregation of the labour market, and the chief reason also for the pay gap. The number of women professors was not yet ideal but a 2-per-cent rise in their numbers in one year was not negligible either. The ministerial think-tank recommendations for attracting more women to research had prompted new measures: the universities themselves had willingly begun to set goals for the recruitment of women, in the interests of attracting the best candidates, having hired gender-equality consultants and opened food pantries for women students with families, among a broad range of initiatives. Both men and women still preponderantly entered traditional fields of study but that was starting to change: at the University of Copenhagen, for instance, the number of women in

scientific fields had gone up from 15 per cent in 2008 to 28 per cent in 2009.

26. **Ms. Andersen** (Denmark) observed that the Government saw employment equality as the important issue — gender segregation and the pay gap were its side effects. The number of women employed part-time had been declining each year, especially in the municipal public sector. The most important overall aim was to achieve a high national employment rate. That was more and more the case because of the impact of the financial crisis, but the Government was making great efforts also to help disabled persons and migrants to have a chance to work. It was studying the reasons for the stubbornly gender-segregated labour market but had no doubt that it was connected to the fact that so many women were employed and that those entering the labour market accepted the easily available work. It should be noted, however, that the pay gap had not worsened even as the employment rate rose.

27. The Government had chosen to require gender-disaggregated statistics from enterprises with more than 35 employees because greater results could be achieved in large firms. The ILO gender-neutral job evaluation guide was not much used in Denmark. The Danish model entailed very active social partners, with their own obligations to see to the enforcement of equality, and the Government believed that such classifications and evaluations should come largely from them. The Government itself was focusing on eliminating discrimination and improving labour conditions, and rooting out the causes of bias. The new Gender Equality Board was proving to be a good tool: three very interesting equal-pay cases brought by individuals were currently before it, and it had heard others in the last three years. Labour courts could also hear pay-gap complaints; and some trade unions had brought cases to the European Court of Justice with very good results.

28. **Ms. Abel** (Denmark) said that some 50 initiatives had been taken to improve entrepreneurship and labour market conditions for women and an action plan to encourage more women to become entrepreneurs would be drawn up before the end of 2009. While women with a migrant background tended to demonstrate better entrepreneurial skills than those with a non-migrant background, a special agency had nevertheless been established to encourage minority women to improve their skills further.

29. In reply to the question on women in management and on boards, she said that companies that signed the charter designed to bring more women into management positions first had to develop a baseline. An evaluation was carried out two years later to assess the companies' progress in respect of the goals they had set. Progress made by companies to include more women on boards was assessed on an annual basis.

30. With regard to abortion, the Government had developed a new action plan for the period 2008 to 2011 designed to reduce the number of young women resorting to abortions; Dkr 20,000 had already been allocated to the action plan.

31. Turning to the issue of female genital mutilation, she said that the Ministry of Social Affairs had published a pamphlet for professionals to help them talk to parents and girls who might be at risk of practising or undergoing female genital mutilation. There had been only one conviction thus far under the new law, which provided that even if genital mutilation was carried out in the country of origin of a citizen or resident of Denmark, rather than in Denmark itself, it could be prosecuted as a crime by the Danish authorities; however, a number of similar cases were pending trial. The conviction demonstrated the unacceptable nature of female genital mutilation and the consequences for those who chose to carry it out.

32. **Mr. Feldbæk Winther** (Denmark) said that the vast amounts of data collected from crisis centres and the national database on violence substantiated the major impact that violence had on the physical and mental health of victims. The Government was aware of the serious consequences of violence and would continue to assist victims of violence, including through the provision of psychological treatment at shelters.

Articles 15 and 16

33. **Ms. Awori** would like to know the results of the research done on the subject of forced marriages thus far. Additional information on the measures in place with regard to forced and arranged marriages as well as family reunification would also be appreciated.

34. **Ms. Abel** (Denmark) said that, unfortunately, her delegation was not in a position to provide preliminary results of the research. In response to the Committee's concluding observations on Denmark's sixth periodic

report, however, a wide range of initiatives, including shelters, hotlines, and Internet-based tools, had been implemented to prevent not just forced marriages, but other forms of repression which affected women disproportionately.

35. **Ms. Ameline**, referring to the United Nations Climate Change Conference, to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009, asked whether the Government of Denmark had taken steps to mainstream gender with regard to the topic of sustainable development. Given the crucial role of women in that area, she wondered whether the Climate Change Conference could be used to stimulate the Government's policy of gender equality.

36. **Ms. Šimonović** said that the issuing of residence permits for victims of violence remained a concern. Denmark's stringent policy on residence permits, which required 7 years of residence, could have deadly consequences for victims of domestic violence; the Government should reconsider its policy in that regard.

37. She would also like to know whether Denmark was considering changing its policy on family reunification. While it was legitimate to focus on the types of crimes committed and the prevention of such crimes, it was also important to consider the perspective of victims and to ensure that their human rights were protected.

38. Lastly, it would be useful to learn whether Denmark had developed any educational initiatives on the Optional Protocol, without which implementation of the Convention would be difficult.

39. **Ms. Abel** (Denmark), replying to the question on the United Nations Climate Change Conference, said that women and men were affected differently by climate change, including the natural disasters that resulted from it. The Government of Denmark, as a member of the Nordic Council of Ministers, had participated in a number of related initiatives, including a project to map information about gender equality and climate change in order to better understand the impacts of climate change on women and men; the Nordic Summit on Climate, Gender and Equality and its recommendations; and a parallel event at the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

40. On the issue of residence permits for women who had divorced owing to violence, she said that of 30

requests for residence permits in 2008 involving a situation of domestic violence, 29 permits had been granted. Violence against women of a minority background was specifically addressed in Denmark's action plan on violence. One of the action plan's particularly successful initiatives involved urging professionals and victims of violence to keep health and police records to substantiate the abuse experienced in order to facilitate the granting of residence permits.

41. **Mr. Ahsan** (Denmark) said that although the Convention had not been incorporated into national law, any individual in Denmark who believed her rights under the Convention had been violated could submit a communication to the Committee.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.