



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

Distr.: General
27 May 2009

Original: English

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

Summary record of the 885th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 4 February 2009, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gabr

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

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

Combined fourth to sixth periodic report of Rwanda (continued) (CEDAW/C/RWA/6, CEDAW/C/RWA/Q/6 and Add.1)

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

Articles 7 to 9

2. **Ms. Mujawamariya** (Rwanda), responding to questions posed at the 884th meeting, said that support for Rwanda's long-term progress from the developed world was lagging behind the commitments made in various international forums. The Government did not believe that it was owed anything, but looked forward to working with its true partners in its future development. As for nationality, a Rwandan woman married to a foreigner could transmit her nationality to her children on an equal basis with men.

Articles 10 to 14

3. **Ms. Popescu** said that women's access to education should be viewed from the perspective of the life cycle, encompassing future employment, family and involvement in public life. Article 40 of the Constitution guaranteed free and compulsory education. The public schools provided nine years of free schooling, and she wondered if there were plans to extend free public education beyond that level. Rwanda should be commended for its high rate of primary school enrolment, in line with Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals, but the completion rate was low — only 52 per cent. She would like to know how many girls dropped out of primary school and the reasons they left. At secondary and higher levels, the enrolment rate for girls declined steadily, and she wondered if negative stereotypes of women, son preference and early pregnancy could be causes. Furthermore, it would be helpful to have an explanation of the discrepancy between the proportion of women enrolled in private universities — over 50 per cent — and public universities, where they represented only 25 per cent of students. Although commendable progress had been made in literacy, 23.2 per cent of women were illiterate, and she asked

for more information about their age group, whether they were from urban or rural areas, and the measures being taken to address their needs. As a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Rwanda had an obligation to provide services to the refugees within its borders. Clarification of its involvement in providing education to residents of refugee camps would thus be helpful.

4. **Mr. Bruun**, noting that the number of women employed in the agricultural sector was growing, asked how workers in that sector were protected, what percentage were covered by the Labour Code and what percentage were considered self-employed. He also noted that there were still no specific rules regarding sexual harassment in the workplace, and wondered if they would be included in the amended Labour Code. He drew attention to the fact that women represented less than 20 per cent of managers, and asked if any temporary special measures were planned to correct that imbalance.

5. **Ms. Patten** said that the difficult situation the country had suffered had had a disproportionate effect on women. She would like to know the extent to which they had been made aware of their rights regarding employment, whether any efforts were being made to eliminate job discrimination in the private sector, how the Government provided benefits to part-time workers, and what efforts were being made to bridge the pay gap between men and women. Information on the efficiency of the labour inspectorate would also be useful. It would be interesting to hear what the Government was doing to reduce occupational segregation, especially in the private sector, and encourage women to enter non-traditional fields. Data on women in the informal sector and efforts to facilitate their transition to the formal sector was also needed.

6. **Ms. Rasekh** said that she would like to learn more about access to health care. She asked the delegation to elaborate on the high perinatal mortality rate, both for mothers and infants, giving any new statistics or changes in the rate since the report was prepared. She would like more details on the number of maternity hospitals, and whether any international funding and technical assistance had been received for training of midwives. She asked about access to contraception, even for girls. Religion had been mentioned as an obstacle to contraceptive use, and she wondered if any change in attitude on the part of

religious leaders had been noted. Although abortion was illegal, she asked if any exceptions were made, for instance if the pregnancy resulted from the rape of a minor girl.

7. **Ms. Patten** requested details on the status and scope of the bill on the social security fund. She would like to know the eligibility criteria for the social security system, and whether single mothers or widows received benefits. On the subject of rural women, she asked what measures had been taken to generate economic policy with a positive impact on rural women workers in both the formal and informal sectors. More information was needed as well on anti-poverty schemes and Government macro-economic and sectoral policies for sustained economic growth that would restructure and target public expenditure towards rural women.

8. **Ms. Arocha Dominguez**, with reference to the Organic Law governing the use and management of land, asked how many women really benefited from land ownership. She requested more information on the kind of economic activities and cooperatives women created in rural areas and if they were sustainable. She would also like to hear how the health insurance cooperatives functioned in rural areas and if they delivered high-quality services. Finally, she was curious to know the reason only one refugee camp gave girls access to secondary education.

9. **Ms. Mujawamariya** (Rwanda) said that six years of primary school and three years of secondary school were provided free to Rwandan children. The public university was not yet free as priority had been placed on universal primary education. Further, the country had not yet developed a middle class that could absorb university graduates in professional jobs, and technical and vocational education must also be developed in order to increase the GDP. The primary school enrolment rate was 95 per cent, but the completion rate did not include students who had repeated a year even once, artificially depressing the rate. Women had suffered exclusion in the educational system under colonialism and were about 40 years behind men. Their numbers in private institutions were higher because those schools often offered evening classes that allowed them to combine their education with work and family responsibilities. Most illiterate women were over 40; literacy among younger women was nearly 100 per cent. The country's policy of education for all addressed special needs and disabled students, and

there was a separate girls' education policy to ensure that they were receiving appropriate attention. Refugee students were not excluded from secondary education; the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees took charge of their higher education.

10. On the subject of employment, she said that sexual harassment in the workplace was covered in the Civil Code. Her Ministry continued to advocate for such benefits as paid maternity leave in the private sector, and in order to increase the number of women in management positions, it maintained a registry of graduate women in Rwanda for the use of prospective employers. The Labour Code had also been translated into Kinyarwanda so that women could know their employment rights, and radio plays were another tool used to raise awareness, as 85 per cent of the population had access to a radio. Payment of a different wage to men and women for the same job was punishable under the Labour Code. Highly-paid jobs required skills, and measures were being taken to motivate women to get training. Girls needed role models to encourage them to enter scientific and technical fields, and a "science olympiad" had been organized to give awards to the top science students. In order to help women make the transition to the formal sector of employment, district mayors had suggested that women should be employed in labour-intensive infrastructure projects on the same basis as men.

11. Turning to reproductive health, she said that the latest statistics for 2008 had not yet been approved and therefore could not be released, but that they showed an improvement in the indicators for maternal and child health. Efforts had also been made to attract medical personnel, in part through salaries that were higher than in other job sectors, and the quality of care had improved markedly since 2007, when the report had been written. There was a school for midwives and also for traditional birth attendants, and UNICEF and UNFPA were helping to ensure that international standards of care were being met. Population growth in the country remained high, and contraception was available in community health centres and hospitals. Minors could have access to contraceptives in hospitals and care centres. In some cases parents were involved and talked to their children about the subject, although it was still largely a taboo. Radio messages were also used to spread information, including facts about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Some change of attitude among the religious

authorities had been achieved by appointing religious leaders to local population control committees. They, in turn, shared the information they had learned about the need to control population growth with their churches. Radio programmes were used for that purpose as well. No exceptions to the abortion laws were made in the case of pregnancies resulting from rape.

12. The laws governing the social security fund were being reviewed with the aim of covering all employees in the public and private sectors alike. Few violations of the Organic Law governing the use and management of land had been reported thus far. Women's cooperatives included such activities as basket-weaving, brick making and growing flowers and vegetables. Micro-credit programmes had been established following the successful model of the Grameen Bank.

13. **Ms. Pimentel** suggested that the Committee's general recommendation No. 24 on health could be helpful. She asked if any link had been discovered between the high maternal mortality rate and clandestine abortion, and if women could receive care in health centres following an abortion.

14. **Ms. Ara Begum** asked for statistics on the HIV prevalence rate among pregnant women and for information on any programmes to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the virus. She was also interested to hear what steps were being taken to eradicate malaria, how health care was provided for the elderly, and if there were awareness programmes for women's cancers and osteoporosis. Lastly, she would like to hear more about the eligibility criteria for health insurance.

15. **Ms. Ameline** asked to hear more about the place of women, especially rural women, in the Vision 2020 plan for decentralization and sustainable development, and if any new mechanisms had been developed under that plan to fight poverty and marginalization.

16. **Ms. Šimonovič** said that it appeared unlikely that the Millennium Development Goals concerning maternal mortality would be achieved, and she wondered what the delegation considered to be the main obstacles to their achievement and the main actions needed.

17. **Ms. Neubauer** said that she shared the concern about the correlation of maternal mortality with illegal abortions, because such deaths were preventable. She

asked if any surveys on illegal abortion had been conducted. She also requested the delegation to elaborate on paragraph 236 of the report, which mentioned that causing a woman to abort, "even unintentionally", was penalized.

18. **Ms. Zou Xiaohua** asked about the extent of coverage of the nine years of compulsory free education, and what guarantees of access were provided to rural girls. It was difficult for girls who dropped out of school to re-enter the educational system, and she wondered if there were any informal education programmes targeted to such girls. She would also like to hear about rural women's participation in decision-making in rural administrative bodies.

19. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** asked what prevention strategies were planned to reduce the prevalence of HIV/AIDS infection, which stood at 3 per cent. She was concerned that if it depended on condom use it might not succeed, as women were not in a position of strength to negotiate in that area.

20. **Ms. Bailey** requested clarification whether there were places in primary education for every child in that age cohort, and whether the figures given in the tables on page 45 of the report represented net or absolute enrolment rates.

21. **Mr. Bruun** asked if the female agricultural workers covered under the Labour Code had the right to maternity leave.

22. **Ms. Popescu** asked how many women were serving prison terms, and of those, how many were serving sentences for abortion, adultery or *concubinage*. It would also be helpful to know what percentage of prison guards were women. Conflicting information had been received about the number of rapes committed in the country, with UNHCR reporting triple the number given by the Government. She would like to know how women were encouraged to report such crimes.

23. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, noted that the report made no reference to female genital mutilation and asked if that practice existed in Rwanda.

24. **Ms. Mujawamariya** (Rwanda) said that care was provided to women after an illegal abortion, but that they must then answer for their actions. Special units had been created to deal with prevention of HIV/AIDS

and STDs, and international funding had been received for medical support services to people who were HIV-positive and to provide antiretroviral medications. The statistics on malaria deaths given in the report dated from 2005, and the situation had improved since then. Countrywide pesticide programmes had helped to reduce the number of cases significantly. Awareness of women's cancers, for instance breast cancer, was not widespread, and care was not well-developed as of yet. Every November, members of the health insurance programme paid a modest contribution (equivalent to US\$ 2) for coverage for the coming year, with the Government contributing for the neediest citizens. Every citizen had a health insurance card.

25. There were several obstacles to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. First and foremost, many pledged contributions from development partners had not been received. There was a lack of medical staff compared to the population and an insufficient number of hospitals and health centres, but funds to build more were not available. No study had been conducted, but illegal abortion was not a major contributing factor to the maternal mortality rate. The long distances to be travelled to reach maternity centres, especially in cases of emergencies or complications, and inadequate training of birth attendants were more likely factors.

26. Coverage at the primary school level was adequate, but at secondary level it had been necessary to have split sessions in some schools because not enough places were available. Vocational and technical education was available to students not continuing to the senior secondary level.

27. No census had been taken of the female prison population, but that information would be included in the next report. Female genital mutilation was not practiced in Rwanda.

Articles 15 and 16

28. **Ms. Awori** said that more information was needed about equality within the family, as a number of provisions of the Family Code appeared to favour paternal authority. She also asked the delegation to provide information on marital property regimes, the percentage of unregistered informal unions, customary marriages, succession and property. It would be interesting to know if any research had been conducted

and if there were any plans for reform of the Family Code.

29. **Ms. Šimonovič** asked if a time frame had been established for dealing with the review of discriminatory legislation and if there was a specific plan for implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

30. **Ms. Mujawamariya** (Rwanda) said that there were three types of marital property regimes: community property, marital property and separation of property. The provisions of the Family Code giving the husband the right to determine the family residence and the right to register the birth of children had been changed to give equal responsibility to both spouses. Marriages must be registered, an action which fell under the competence of the local government. Informal unions were being formalized collectively in many communities in order to avoid problems with succession. The revised Family Code had reached the Office of the Prime Minister for consideration. Rwanda had already implemented many of the recommendations contained in Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and was acting as quickly as possible to implement the rest.

31. The Government had the political will to respect and promote women's rights as human rights, and was committed to putting all the Committee's recommendations into action. It hoped to show in its next report that the recommendations had borne fruit in the lives of Rwandan women.

32. **The Chairperson** said that the role of women was vitally important in Rwanda, and that their awareness of their rights was also vital. Despite the difficult circumstances, however, the Government had a responsibility to continue to make progress in areas of concern to the Committee, including gender stereotypes, gender-based violence and women's participation in the economy.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.