

Slovenia

(16th session)

81) The Committee considered the initial report of Slovenia (CEDAW/C/SVN/1) at its 314th, 315th and 321st meetings, on 15 and 20 January 1997 (see CEDAW/C/SR.314, 315 and 321).

82) The report was introduced by the Permanent Representative of Slovenia, who emphasized the importance his Government attaches to the international human rights treaties and in particular to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and expressed its support for an early adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention.

83) The Director of the Office for Women's Policy of Slovenia then proceeded to provide an update of Slovenia's initial report, submitted to the Secretariat in 1993 in accordance with article 18 of the Convention. She noted that the report had been prepared during a period of economic and political restructuring by the Office and in cooperation with the responsible ministries and other institutions, including non-governmental organizations. The impact of the transition on women could not yet be fully assessed, but Slovenia had prepared an updated report as an appendix to the initial report, which it had submitted to the Committee early in 1997. The information provided in that document allows some initial assessment in this regard.

84) The Committee was informed that the Office for Women's Policy had been created during the early stage of transition from socialism to parliamentary democracy. It had been established by the Government in July 1992 as the central policy coordinating unit of the Government responsible for implementing the rights of women guaranteed by the Constitution, laws and international agreements. The Office was an important step forward in the integration of the principle of gender equality into government policies.

85) The representative of Slovenia outlined the political, economic and legal situation in Slovenia and its impact on the de facto status of women. Slovenia is a country in transition which has preserved a relatively high degree of social protection in an environment of economic stability and growth. Unemployment and other problems of transition have affected women but to a lesser degree than men. The Committee took note of the general circumstances and focused on the specific issues pertaining to the questions of the rights of women. The Committee also took note of how the rights of women were guaranteed and protected by the Constitution, to what extent Slovene women were involved in political decision-making and how they had been participating in ongoing democratization.

86) The Government of Slovenia was particularly concerned about the prevalence of traditional gender stereotypes and certain forms of de facto

discrimination against women. With regard to education, it was reported that while women enjoyed a high level of education in general, there were clear differences in what women and men preferred to study, with women concentrated in traditionally female subjects. Women, especially the young and educated, were facing difficulties in finding employment. The Slovene pension system benefited women and men differently. Women's generally lower pensions were a reflection of the lower-paid sectors in which women were employed and the frequent leave they took in order to care for their children. Despite the law that guarantees the right of both parents to take parental leave, fathers still failed to play an equal role in the care and education of children. With regard to women's reproductive health, it was noted that the right to abortion was guaranteed by the Constitution, however, the Committee was alerted to the high rate of abortion, despite the wide and legal availability of contraception and contraceptive advice.

87) In concluding the presentation, the representative of Slovenia recognized that much remained to be done to achieve full equality between women and men, and assured the Committee of the willingness of her Government to undertake all the necessary measures to achieve the principles established in the Convention.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

88) The Committee welcomed the high-level representation of the Government of Slovenia and applauded the fact that, after gaining its independence, the Government had quickly accepted the international human rights obligations assumed by the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It commended the Government for its timely submission of a well-structured, informative and honest report, which followed the reporting guidelines of the Committee and gave a frank picture of the situation of women in Slovenia. It also welcomed the additional collection of statistical data, which were comprehensive in certain areas and were disaggregated by sex, as well as the extensive answers to the Committee's questions, which were given in both oral and written form. The Committee also took note of the support of the Government of Slovenia to the formulation of an optional protocol to the Convention and applauded the fact that an action plan was being prepared to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

89) The Committee was aware of the difficulties Slovenia was facing as a result of the transition towards democracy and a social/market economy and the need to build a different civil society. Many of those difficulties could and did have a negative impact on the situation of women in Slovenia and thus impeded the legal and practical implementation of the Convention. The Committee was also aware that sex-role stereotypes relating to the nature of women and men and the "appropriate" work for each sex were pervasive in Slovene society. Those stereotypes had not been questioned under the former political system, despite its adherence to formal equality between women and men.

Positive aspects

90. The Committee welcomed the sensitivity towards gender issues expressed by the Government of Slovenia and by certain sectors of the newly emerging civil society, in particular in the number of non-governmental organizations for women.

91. The Committee noted with satisfaction the extensive human rights guarantees in the Slovene Constitution, in particular those guarantees relating to the human rights of women. It welcomed the fact that the Convention took precedence over national legislation. The immediate effect of the Convention in the Slovene legal system and legislation providing women with de jure equality were welcomed by the Committee, as was the integration of human rights principles into its ongoing process of legislative reform and into its newly formulated policies.

92. The Committee commended the active role of the women's machinery, the Office for Women's Policy, founded in 1992, which operated as an independent government advisory service advising the Government on legislation, policies and programmes and which, through campaigns and programmes, sought to improve gender sensitivity in the population.

93. The Committee welcomed the efforts of the Government to eliminate stereotyped images of women in the media and in advertising, as well as the National Programme for Households, which aimed at helping young women and men to share work and family responsibilities in a non-stereotypical way.

94. The Committee noted that the Government of Slovenia was aware of the widespread violence against women in the private sphere and that it was developing, through its national machinery and by supporting non-governmental organizations that act on behalf of women, measures to combat that violence and to assist victims. It also commended the steps towards new legislation to protect prostitutes.

95. The Committee applauded the temporary special efforts of the Office for Women's Policies to raise public awareness and to introduce measures to

increase women's representation in Parliament. It noted with satisfaction the high number of women in the judiciary and the promising figures of women's enrolment in the faculties of law at Slovene universities. It also noted the significant representation of women in high-level administrative jobs. It applauded the fact that a large number of non-governmental organizations for women had been formed in a relatively short time and the cooperation fostered by the Office for Women's Policies with non-governmental organizations, in particular during the preparation of the report and in the formulation of the National Platform of Action, the aim of which was to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

96. The Committee commended the Government on the high level of women's education in Slovenia, on envisioned educational reforms and on the efforts that had been made to include human rights education at various levels of the school curriculum. It noted with satisfaction that courses in women's studies were offered at some universities and that research on the impact of the depiction of women in textbooks was being carried out.

97. The Committee took note of the existence of a formal day-care system that provides day care to slightly more than 50 per cent of children up to the age of six. The Committee welcomed the revision of the existing labour legislation and the formulation of new equality provisions in that legislative area. It also welcomed the fact that in labour legislation, the principle of equal pay for equal work and for work of equal value would be considered. It noted with satisfaction that a high percentage of women were employed. It welcomed the envisioned provisions against sexist language in job classifications and advertisements and noted with satisfaction the discussion of a legislative proposal on parental leave that would give a greater share of responsibility to fathers.

98. The Committee noted with satisfaction the inclusion of the right to abortion in the Constitution of Slovenia.

Principal areas of concern

99. The Committee was concerned that the Office for Women's Policies had an advisory role only and was, therefore, dependent on the political will of the Government. It was concerned that the human and financial resources of the Office might be too small considering the tasks it had to tackle.

100. The Committee also noted with concern the pervasiveness and entrenched nature of sex-role stereotypes and pointed to the risk that such stereotypes might be strengthened because of the difficult economic, social and cultural changes the population of Slovenia was facing. The Committee was of the view that one of the results of sex-role stereotyping was that women performed most of the household work and thus had a double burden of work.

101. Concern was also expressed as to whether the real extent of violence against women was being discovered and whether the current measures were

sufficient not only to combat it, but also to assist its victims. The Committee was concerned that the Government should ensure that victims of violence receive support from the police, understanding of the dynamics of violence against women from judges, counselling and placement in shelters and, in particular, that they be assisted in rebuilding their lives.

102. The Committee noted with great concern that the number of women represented in politics was falling despite the various measures that had been undertaken in that sphere.

103. The Committee was concerned about the clustering of female students in certain disciplines, at both schools and universities, that did not provide optimum employment opportunities.

104. The Committee was concerned that less than 30 per cent of children under three years of age and slightly more than half of all children between three and six were in formal day care, and that the remaining children, while cared for by family members and other private individuals, might miss out on educational and social opportunities offered in formal day-care institutions.

105. The Committee noted with concern that women were clustered in certain jobs and professions and at certain job levels. It noted the feminization of the medical profession and the low wages in that sector. It was alarmed by the high number of young unemployed women who were looking for a first job and was aware that failure to find such employment might confine women to the role of homemaker. In that context, the Committee took account of the unfortunate fact that market economies tended to favour male employees who, by virtue of traditional roles and work allocation, were deemed to be unencumbered by family responsibilities.

106. The Committee was concerned that temporary work for women might be institutionalized and that women would thus be marginalized in the labour market and become victims of indirect discrimination. It was also concerned that occupational health standards for women might result in discrimination against women in employment.

107. The Committee noted with concern the very high number of abortions and the corresponding low use of contraception. Concern was also voiced with respect to the large numbers of single-parent families, which were usually headed by women.

Suggestions and recommendations

108. The Committee recommended that the ongoing revision of laws should take account of hidden, indirect and structural discrimination and that sufficient attention should be paid to the formulation of temporary special measures in the fields of politics, education, employment and the implementation of de jure and de facto equality for women. It recommended that the judiciary be

made aware of the meaning of indirect and structural discrimination, de facto equality and the concept of temporary special measures.

109. The Committee suggested that the Government of Slovenia, as well as the non-governmental organizations for women, should be aware that the concept of privacy of family life and the reproductive role of women could be utilized to hide violence against women and reinforce sex-role stereotypes.

110. The Committee recommended the establishment of the proposed gender equality ombudsperson.

111. It recommended the establishment of a formal complaint procedure and a formal evaluation board outside the Chamber of Commerce, which would include all sectors of society, to address sexist advertisements. That procedure should incorporate sanctions against offending advertising agents.

112. The Committee recommended new efforts directed at the political education of women and men and of political parties in order to ensure more effective temporary measures that would increase the representation of women at all levels of political life.

113. The Committee suggested that the Government of Slovenia make systematic efforts to ensure that women students are encouraged to enter diverse disciplines so as to overcome the clustering of female students in certain disciplines at schools and universities. Such measures could include special counselling and gender-specific temporary measures with numerical goals and timetables. It also recommended that women's studies be formally established at universities and made part of the school curriculum. The Committee suggested that the Government of Slovenia review its gender-neutral educational framework and develop positive measures to counteract hidden stereotypical educational messages and practices.

114. The Committee recommended the creation of more formal and institutionalized child-care establishments for children under three years of age as well as for those from three to six.

115. The Committee strongly recommended that revised labour legislation contain equality and anti-discrimination provisions and strong sanctions for non-compliance. It also recommended temporary special measures with concrete numerical goals and timetables in order to overcome employment segregation. The Committee strongly recommended the adoption of parental leave legislation in which part of the leave must be taken by the father.

116. The Committee encouraged the Government to create assistance programmes for women who wished to start their own businesses, to educate banks and other relevant institutions about women's capacities in that area, to create specific government-subsidized employment opportunities for young women and to address their unemployment with specific measures, including quotas related to their percentage of the unemployed population.

117. The Committee also recommended measures be put in place to expedite the collection of data in the health sector so as to provide the basis for legislation, policies and programmes.

118. The Committee recommended that current efforts to restructure the financial systems underlying health care and social security benefits, including pensions, should be designed to avoid detrimental effects on women as wage earners and beneficiaries in those sectors.

119. The Committee suggested that there was a need to analyse the reasons for the high rate of abortion among Slovene women. It strongly recommended education for women and men on the full range of safe and reliable contraceptive methods, stressing the mutual responsibility of both sexes for family planning as well as recommending that such methods be widely available.

120. The Committee recommended that education for sexual and reproductive health cover gender relations and violence against women and that health-care professionals also be trained to identify cases of violence against women and to treat them appropriately.

121. The Committee recommended increased measures for the early detection and the preventive treatment of breast cancer.

122. The Committee urged the wide dissemination of the present concluding comments in Slovenia to make Slovenes aware of the steps that had been taken to ensure de facto equality for women and the further steps required in that regard.