

Combined initial, second, third and fourth report

Saint Kitts and Nevis

(27th session)

73. The Committee considered the combined initial, second, third and fourth report of Saint Kitts and Nevis (CEDAW/C/KNA/1-4) at its 553rd, 554th and 556th meetings, on 5 and 13 June 2002 (see CEDAW/C/SR.553, 554 and 556).

Introduction by the State party

74. In introducing the report, the representative of Saint Kitts and Nevis acknowledged the efforts and contributions of non-governmental organizations, women's groups and international agencies in advancing the cause of women in the country and expressed regret for the late submission of the combined initial, second, third and fourth periodic reports of Saint Kitts and Nevis to the Committee.

75. The representative informed the Committee about the institutional structure that existed in the State party to address women's issues. The national women's machinery included a Ministry of Gender Affairs, which had initially been established as the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 1984, an inter-Ministerial Committee, a National Advisory Committee and gender focal points. The national women's machinery had been strengthened through an increase in budgetary allocations and human resources. In 2000, the name of the department had been changed from Women's Affairs to Gender Affairs as it was felt that that name would more accurately represent the goals of gender and development with women and men as decision makers.

76. The representative indicated that the National Plan on Gender and Development for 1996-2000, developed and approved by the Government in 1996, included five of the twelve critical areas of concern highlighted in the Beijing Platform for Action, namely: violence against women and children; poverty; institutional mechanisms; health and leadership. He also mentioned that gender mainstreaming had been embraced by the Government as the most practical means to ensure women's equal participation in national development.

77. The representative stressed that, although Saint Kitts and Nevis had made tremendous progress in the area of women's participation, there was still not a critical mass of women in decision-making or political representation. Only three women had been elected to political office in the nation's history, and no women had ever been appointed ambassador.

78. The representative informed the Committee that Saint Kitts and Nevis had achieved greater success in the area of violence against women than in any other area. In that context, he described some relevant initiatives launched during the period under review, such as awareness courses on gender-based violence for police officers, public health nurses, social workers, counsellors and career guidance workers, a Domestic Violence Act tabled and passed in 2000, various dissemination activities in the media and awareness-raising campaigns, including Zero Tolerance in 1997 and a Life Free of Violence Campaign in 1997-1998.

79. The representative pointed out that numerical gender equality in education was outstanding. In fact, enrolment statistics for 2001 indicated that, at all levels with the exception of the primary school level, the enrolment rate was higher for women than for men, and a new policy had been announced affirming the right of pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers to return to school. In that regard, in November 2001, "Project Viola" had been launched, with the main objective to create an enabling environment in which teenage mothers could complete their education.

80. The representative also underlined a number of achievements attained with regard to health, in particular, the efforts made by the Ministry of Health

in bringing the maternal death rate as close to zero as possible and to implement an ante/post-natal health programme that would ensure optimum health for women. He further indicated that family planning was provided at health centres and by the family planning association. Breast examinations and cervical cancer screening had been instituted free of charge.

81. The representative informed the Committee that, although women were outperforming men at various educational levels, that achievement had not been translated into economic returns for women. Hence, women continued to be concentrated in the jobs that paid the least. In addition, many women were solely responsible for the care of children and that created a financial burden for them. The representative added that the Ministry of Women's Affairs/Gender Affairs had always implemented programmes that sought to encourage women to improve their caring capabilities. Skills training programmes with an entrepreneurial component had been organized in every rural community and many women had become self-employed or had used the skills gained to augment their income.

82. Finally, the representative stated that the Counselling Department of the Ministry of Social Development, Community and Gender Affairs piloted a parenting programme for fathers which had been very successful as fathers were able to interact in a non-threatening environment with facilitators. It also benefited women and children, since the sensitivity of men to their role as nurturers of children facilitated the mainstreaming of gender in the domestic sphere. As a result, a National Fathers' Association had been created.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

83. The Committee commends the State party for its ratification of the Convention without reservations in 1985 and for preparing and submitting its combined initial, second, third and fourth report. It expresses appreciation for the State party's efforts to follow the Committee's guidelines when preparing the report.

84. The Committee also thanks the State party for sending a high-level delegation headed by the Minister for Social Development, Community and Gender Affairs. It also commends the State party for the frankness of the report and the sincerity of its presentation, which enabled the Committee to enter into a constructive dialogue.

85. The Committee notes that the measures taken by the State party, particularly the National Plan on Gender and Development, are relevant to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Positive aspects

86. The Committee welcomes the high level of commitment and political will demonstrated by the State party in the implementation of the principles of gender equality laid down in the Convention and the important leadership role played in the region.

87. The Committee commends the State party on the innovative national mechanisms established with a view to ensuring that women and men enjoy equal rights and on the progress achieved in the advancement of women over the past five years.

88. The Committee commends the State party on the achievements made in its health policy, particularly the reduction of the maternal mortality rate and programmes for post-partum care.

89. The Committee commends the State party on the progress achieved in the educational sphere, with a larger number of females enrolled, except in the primary schools.

90. The Committee is pleased to note that the State party has achieved great success in promoting gender equality in the information media through close collaboration with the Ministry of Gender Affairs. In this respect, the Committee particularly appreciates the prohibition laid down in the Law Reform Act on reporting or broadcasting matters which might lead to the identification of the defendants in sex offence cases.

91. The Committee commends the State party on the establishment of a Code of Ethics and Standards within the Labour Code to regulate the activities of foreign companies which wish to operate in Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

92. The Committee notes that one of the main obstacles to the full implementation of the Convention in Saint Kitts and Nevis has been the hurricanes which frequently devastate the country, and which in 1998 destroyed 85 per cent of the housing stock.

Principal areas of concern and recommendations

93. The Committee is concerned that the provisions of the Convention cannot be invoked in the courts.

94. The Committee encourages the State party to accord the Convention the legal status it deserves as the most important and binding international legal instrument in the sphere of the advancement of women and the elimination of discrimination against them.

95. The Committee expresses concern about the underrepresentation of women in decision-making posts and in political bodies, particularly Parliament.

96. The Committee urges the State party to introduce a range of legal, political and administrative options, in line with, temporary special measures, in accordance with the provisions of article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, in order to improve the access of women to decision-making. The Committee recommends the adoption of programmes to change the tenor of the political discourse in campaigns in order to achieve greater female participation in them.

97. The Committee expresses concern at the low number of women in the diplomatic service, particularly in higher posts.

98. The Committee recommends that the State party take measures, including in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1 of the Convention, to encourage women to enter into diplomatic careers.

99. The Committee is particularly concerned that, although women have a higher level of education than men, this has not been translated into promotion of women to senior posts in the public and private sectors and/or increased economic returns for women, who continue to be concentrated mainly in the informal sector and in the jobs that pay the least.

100. The Committee recommends the adoption of legislation that guarantees equal pay for work of equal value. It also recommends that measures should be taken to deal with the situation of unemployed women, and the large number of women who work in the informal sector, with a view to their inclusion in the formal sector, and access to social benefits.

101. The Committee expresses concern about the high rate of teenage pregnancy.

102. The Committee urges the State party to intensify awareness raising and sexual education aimed at responsible sexual behaviour in the schools and society at large in order to prevent pregnancies. In addition, the Committee recommends that men be involved in the design and implementation of all family planning strategies, policies and programmes.

103. The Committee expresses concern about the persistence of cultural practices and strong stereotyped attitudes towards the roles and responsibilities of women and men, which affect all spheres of life and impede the full implementation of the Convention.

104. The Committee urges the State party to increase its efforts to create awareness in the society about the need to change stereotyped and discriminatory attitudes concerning the role of women and girls, including through specific programmes directed towards boys and men. In particular, the Committee recommends the extension to all communities of the Ministry of Social Development's pilot parenting programme for fathers, in order to promote the idea of shared parental responsibility.

105. Although it welcomes the legislation that has been adopted, in particular, the Law Reform Act and the 2000 Domestic Violence Act, and the programmes to prevent violence against women which are being implemented, the Committee expresses concern about the persistent high level of violence, particularly domestic violence, in the State party. The Committee is concerned about the high incidence of sexual abuse of girls particularly by older men. It is also concerned about the unwillingness of women to initiate complaints of domestic violence against husbands and to testify against them because of the unwritten code of family loyalty, which regards such violence as a private matter.

106. The Committee urges the State party to enhance its efforts to combat violence against women and girls, in accordance with general recommendation No. 19. It also encourages the State party come up with creative solutions for shelters for victims of violence, adopt a zero tolerance approach to the sexual abuse of girls, and establish telephone help lines, rehabilitation programmes for offenders, and educational programmes targeted at men and boys on the prevention of violence and the reform of traditional negative attitudes towards women. The Committee also urges the State party to prosecute the perpetrators of abuse against girls. The Committee further urges the State party to pursue prosecution of offenders in cases of domestic violence even in the absence of testimony of the victim in the Court.

107. Noting that marijuana is used in the country, the Committee is concerned about the lack of sex-disaggregated data on drug use.

108. The Committee encourages the State party to collect data on the use of drugs and alcohol and its possible correlation with violence against women. It also encourages the State party to implement measures in order to prevent addiction to all types of drugs by young people.

109. The Committee expresses concern about the lack of legal aid for women and the lengthy process which makes it difficult for women to take men to court in order to obtain child support. The Committee is also concerned that such a lengthy process allows men to serve a prison sentence instead of paying maintenance.

110. The Committee urges the State party to take adequate legislative measures to make it easier for women to obtain child support and access to legal aid.

111. The Committee is concerned about the lack of information about the phenomenon of prostitution in Saint Kitts and Nevis. The Committee is particularly concerned about the lack of adequate measures to prosecute pimps.

112. The Committee encourages the State party to study the phenomenon of trafficking in persons, especially in view of the recent increase of tourism in the country. The Committee also urges the State party to formulate a broad strategy against trafficking and prostitution, which should include the prosecution and punishment of traffickers and pimps.

113. The Committee notes the lack of statistical data disaggregated by sex in the economic sector, in particular as to the informal employment sector and part-time work. It also notes the lack of data on sexual harassment at the workplace.

114. The Committee recommends broad collection of data disaggregated by sex, in particular with regard to the economic sector and urges the State party to include these in its next report.

115. The Committee urges the State party to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention, and to deposit its instrument of acceptance of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1 of the Convention, on the Committee's sessions, as soon as possible.

116. The Committee urges the State party to respond in its next periodic report to the outstanding issues raised in the constructive dialogue and the specific issues raised in the present concluding comments.

117. Taking account of the gender dimension of declarations, programmes and platforms for action adopted by relevant United Nations conferences, summits and special sessions (such as the special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (the twenty-first special session), the special session on children (the twenty-seventh special session), the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the Second World Assembly on Ageing), the Committee requests the State party to include information on the implementation of aspects of these documents relating to relevant articles of the Convention in its next periodic report.

118. The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Saint Kitts and Nevis of the present concluding comments in order to make the people of Saint Kitts and Nevis and, in particular, government administrators and politicians aware of the steps that have been taken de jure and de facto to achieve equality for women and the future steps that are required in that regard. It also requests the Government to continue to disseminate widely, and in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention, the Committee's general recommendations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".