

Sweden (25th session)

319. The Committee considered the fourth and the fifth periodic reports of Sweden (CEDAW/C/SWE/4 and CEDAW/C/SWE/5) at its 510th and 511th meetings, on 5 July 2001 (CEDAW/C/SR.510 and 511).

(a) Introduction by the State party

320. In introducing the report, the representative of Sweden informed the Committee that non-governmental organizations, including women's organizations, with which the Government had an open dialogue, had been given the opportunity to comment on the reports and that the Government expressed its appreciation for their contributions.

321. The representative stressed that Sweden's vision of society was one in which women and men enjoyed equal rights, equal opportunities and equal responsibilities, and in which each individual was treated with respect, regardless of age, gender, ethnic or cultural background, disability or sexual orientation. Since 1994, the Government's annual statement of governmental policy on mainstreaming had been adopted and, accordingly, all ministers were responsible for ensuring gender equality within their respective policy areas. She pointed out, however, that gender mainstreaming did not exclude women from measures aimed specifically at the promotion of gender equality.

322. The representative indicated that, although Sweden was generally considered to be a society in which there was a high degree of equality between women and men, there were examples of power imbalances between the sexes. An extreme example was men's violence against women, which was frequent and widespread and which was a priority area for governmental action. While there was no evidence that violence against women had escalated, the rate of reporting had increased as a result of efforts aimed at the collection and dissemination of information and improved response by the police and social welfare authorities. Governmental efforts to address violence against women included research, the introduction of training programmes for relevant sectors and the passage of legislation, including laws concerning support for crime victims. Violence against women with disabilities was being addressed. Increased attention needed to be given to men who committed acts of violence against women, and the representative noted that Sweden supported men's organizations working against violence against women. A special project to address violence against immigrant women had been introduced, and amendments to the Aliens Act provided for special residence permits for immigrant women and children who had been subjected to violence by their partners. The Aliens Act also restricted the capacity of Swedish residents with a history of violence to women and children to bring partners into the country.

323. The representative indicated that action to combat trafficking was also a priority for Sweden and that, in addition to regional and national efforts undertaken in that regard, the Government had, in December 2000, signed the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Since January 1999, with the entry into force of a law prohibiting the purchase of sexual services, the exploitation of prostitutes had been a criminal offence, and the number of street prostitutes had declined.

324. In 1999, the Aliens Act had been amended to provide for the granting of asylum on the basis of gender-based persecution. Few women had taken advantage of the provision, although the majority of all women seeking asylum had been granted permission to remain. Guidelines on refugee women had been prepared by the Migration Board, and projects to support immigrant girls and women had been introduced.

325. Although significant progress had been made with respect to representation of women in decision-making, further efforts were required. Representation was strong in the public sector, but only 5.2 per cent of those on boards of directors in the private sector were women. The starting point in Swedish efforts towards equality between women and men was the provision of equal access to education. The educational choices of women and men were, however, divided along gender lines and, although some women had entered male-dominated fields of study, few men had entered female-dominated ones. Only 13 per cent of professorships were held by women, and the Government had introduced revised recruitment targets for universities.

326. Women and men enjoyed high employment rates, although the labour market was segregated along gender lines. Since 1993, the Swedish Labour Market Board had received earmarked funds for work to address gender segregation in the labour market, and the National Board for Industrial and Technical

Development had carried out programmes aimed at increasing the number of women entrepreneurs. The representative noted that a key to reducing discrimination against women in the labour market was the reconciliation of family and work responsibilities. In 2002, the parental benefit would be increased by 30 days, with two fathers' months included in the benefit scheme.

327. The representative informed the Committee that the pay gap between women and men was a governmental concern. On average, women's wages were about 83 per cent of men's. She indicated that the pay gap should be made visible and its underlying causes studied closely. New provisions in the Equality Act obliged employers, together with trade unions, to survey and analyse all discriminatory wage differences and to take appropriate measures to resolve them.

328. The representative indicated that the issues addressed in the Beijing Platform for Action corresponded with issues that formed the basis of Sweden's national policy for gender equality. Sweden, along with other European Union partners, was developing indicators to evaluate progress in the 12 critical areas of concern.

329. The representative expressed satisfaction at the adoption and entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, and indicated that Sweden's ratification process would be finalized in 2002. She concluded by indicating that a press conference, focusing on the Committee's concluding comments, would be convened after the current session.

(b) Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

330. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Government of Sweden on its fourth and fifth periodic reports, which comply with the Committee's guidelines for the preparation of periodic reports. It commends the Government for involving non-governmental organizations in the preparation of the reports. The Committee also expresses its appreciation for the information given in response to the issues raised by the pre-sessional working group and during the oral presentation.

331. The Committee commends the Government of Sweden for its large delegation which made possible a constructive and frank dialogue with the members of the Committee.

Positive aspects

332. The Committee commends the Government of Sweden for the progress made in ensuring gender equality in women's political participation and decision-making, where it is regarded by many other countries as a model. It notes with satisfaction that the application of measures in line with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention has led to concrete results in some areas.

333. The Committee commends the Government of Sweden for its important achievements in the promotion of equality between women and men and especially for the involvement of boys and men in promoting gender equality and changing sexual stereotyping and traditional and stereotypical values.

334. The Committee commends the Government for passing legislation that provides residence permits to individuals who have a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of sexual orientation or gender, particularly in cases that involve discrimination against women.

335. The Committee commends the Government for its efforts to incorporate gender mainstreaming into its overall policy framework and at all stages of the policy-making processes, while at the same time implementing women-specific programmes to encourage gender equality.

336. The Committee commends the Government for its willingness to place objections to reservations entered by other States parties that it considers incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention.

337. The Committee also commends the Government for having accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention.

338. The Committee commends the Government for signing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and its Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

339. The Committee notes that there are no significant factors or difficulties that prevent the effective implementation of the Convention in Sweden.

Principal areas of concern and recommendations

340. While the Government has taken significant steps to address discrimination against women in the workplace through the passage of the Gender Equality Act and the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, the Committee expresses concern that the wage gap between women and men, in both the public and private sectors, has not narrowed during the past 10 years. The Committee is of the view that this disparity is linked to the persistence of gender segregation in the labour market.

341. The Committee urges the Government to adopt policies and active measures to accelerate the eradication of pay discrimination against women, including job evaluations, collection of data, further study of the underlying causes for the wage gap and provision of increased assistance to social partners in collective wage bargaining, in particular in determining wage structures in sectors dominated by women. The Committee requests the Government to provide more information in the next periodic report on its efforts to eradicate the wage gap.

342. The Committee expresses concern with the existence of gender-based segregation at all levels of the educational system, including the choice by girls and boys of traditional disciplines and the attitudes of teachers that perpetuate and reinforce stereotypical gender roles.

343. The Committee recommends that the Government strengthen its efforts to eliminate gender stereotypes in educational curricula and consistently integrate awareness and understanding of gender equality in teacher training. Given the clear correlation between the choice of field of study and placement in the labour market, the Committee recommends that the Government increase its efforts towards ending gender segregation in students' choice of field of education and encourage both women and men to choose non-traditional fields of education.

344. While the Committee commends the Government for the impressive advances made by women in terms of representation in decision-making in politics, it expresses concern that women's representation in executive and decision-making positions in the private economic sector, as well as on central governmental boards and boards of government-controlled companies, continues to be low. It also expresses concern about the low representation of women as chairs of local and municipal boards.

345. The Committee recommends that the Government take steps to facilitate the options insofar as employment of women in the private sector, inter alia, through the implementation of temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, wherever possible. The Committee urges the Government to take measures to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions in all sectors, including central governmental boards, county and municipal boards, particularly as chairs of those boards, and in government-controlled companies.

346. The Committee expresses concern about the low level of women's representation in the judiciary.

347. The Committee urges the Government to adopt a procedure that ensures that women are not discriminated against when appointments to the judiciary are made.

348. While noting the high number of women in the lower ranks of the foreign service, the Committee nevertheless expresses concern about the low level of representation of women in the higher echelons of the service, in particular in ambassadorial posts.

349. The Committee recommends that current policies to increase the representation of women in the foreign service, particularly as ambassadors, continue and that measures be taken to ensure that women in the foreign service are not disadvantaged in terms of posting to locations requiring senior staff.

350. The Committee expresses concern that, despite the high achievement of women in tertiary education, there are very few women professors in the universities. There also appears to be an imbalance in the access of women, as compared to men academics, to research grants and other resources.

351. The Committee urges the Government to facilitate, by means of its policies, an increase in the number of women in high-ranking posts at universities and to ensure that women professors are not discriminated against insofar as access to resources, including research grants.

352. The Committee notes that, despite the considerable efforts made with regard to combating violence against women, including in the family, the prevalence of violence against women demonstrates the persistent power imbalance between women and men.

353. The Committee urges the Government to collect more data on the nature and scope of violence against women, in particular within the family, and to continue its efforts to implement and strengthen current policies aimed at combating violence, with special attention given to women with disabilities and migrant and minority women.

354. While welcoming the criminalization of the purchase of sexual services, the Committee expresses concern that this might have increased the incidence of clandestine prostitution, thereby rendering prostitutes more vulnerable. It also expresses concern that Sweden has become a country of destination for trafficked women.

355. The Committee encourages the Government to evaluate the effect of the current policy of criminalizing the purchase of sexual services, especially in view of the complete lack of data on clandestine prostitution which may have incidental effects on the trafficking of women and girls. The Committee encourages action in Sweden and, through the Government of Sweden, continued efforts within the European Union to combat trafficking of women, including measures to prevent trafficking, the collection of data, the provision of services for trafficked women and measures to penalize those who facilitate such trafficking.

356. Taking note of the efforts of the Government to combat discrimination, the Committee expresses concern about the continuing discrimination against immigrant, refugee and minority women in Sweden, including in education and employment, and at the gender-based discrimination and violence that they face in their own communities. The Committee also expresses concern about discrimination against Sami and Roma women.

357. The Committee urges the Government to take effective measures to eliminate discrimination against immigrant, refugee and minority women and to strengthen its efforts to combat xenophobia and racism in Sweden. It also encourages the Government to be more proactive in its measures to prevent discrimination against immigrant, refugee and minority women, both within their communities and in society at large, to combat violence against them and to increase their awareness of the availability of social services and legal remedies.

358. Noting Sweden's support of the Optional Protocol to the Convention and its early signature to that instrument, the Committee encourages the Government to ratify the Optional Protocol as soon as possible.

359. The Committee requests the Government to respond to the concerns expressed in the present concluding comments in its next periodic report submitted under article 18 of the Convention. It also requests that future reports not make reference to previous reports but briefly summarize previously stated information.

360. The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Sweden of the present concluding comments in order to make the people of Sweden, in particular governmental administrators and politicians, aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure the de jure and de facto equality of women and of the further steps that are required in this regard. It requests the Government to continue to disseminate widely, in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention and its Optional Protocol, the Committee's general recommendations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the results of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".