

**46-th session of CEDAW**

**26 July 2010, New York**

**Consideration of the third periodic report submitted by Albania**

**Statement**

**by**

**the Head of Delegation of the Republic of Albania**

**Mrs. Filloreta Kodra, Deputy Minister of Labor,**

**Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities**

**on implementation of Convention on**

**the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in Albania**

Honorable Mrs. Chair,

Honorable Members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mrs. Chair, let me first avail the highest consideration of the Government of Albania to the honorable members of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and its persistent efforts to promote and protect women's rights on a global level.

The Government of Albania has permanently considered women's rights as an integral part of human rights and, in this context, it has ratified the most significant international documents with the aim of setting the standards of gender equality in accordance with the requirements and recommendations contained in these documents thereof.

Albania has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by Law No. 7767, as voted by the Parliament of Albania on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1993 in addition to the Additional Protocol in 2002. Following its ratification by the Parliament, this Convention, under Article 122 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, as an International Agreement *“constitutes part of the internal legal system, it is directly applicable and, it has priority over the laws of the country that are incompatible with it”*.

Gender equality legislation and more specifically, Law No. 9970 of 24<sup>th</sup> July 2008 “On gender equality in society” complies with CEDAW principles’ and with the Council of Europe Recommendations. The aim of the provisions set out in Law No. 9669 of 18<sup>th</sup> December 2006 “On measures against domestic violence” is to meet all standards as stipulated by the Convention on the status of women and young women, EU directives and by other UN recommendations on gender equality.

It is important to mention that the National Strategy on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence 2007-2010 relies on the recommendations and critical fields of Beijing Platform of Action as viewed from the Albanian perspective. In addition, it has taken into consideration the fulfillment of concrete recommendations provided for Albania by the CEDAW Committee in 2003 through concrete measures that is has envisaged.

Based on the recommendations as provided by the CEDAW Committee during its 28<sup>th</sup> session, the responsible Albanian institutions have conducted over the recent years a large awareness campaign in relation to dissemination and familiarization with the standards, which CEDAW defines. This effort has involved all central and local institutions in addition to informing the general public through publishing and distribution of the text of the Convention, drafting of explanatory guidebooks, training of a core team of experts for this Convention, specific training of the central and local representative structures, media debate and articles. In early September,

the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and UNIFEM (in coordination with the UN Country Team's Human Right's Advisor) is holding a training for Gender Equality Employee and Albanian NGOs on the Optional Protocol of the CEDAW, and how it can be applied at the national level.

Mrs. Chair,

The Government of the Republic of Albania has set the gender equality issue in the focus of its agenda by considering that economic and social development of the country may not make any sense unless there is concrete treatment and unless there are concrete achievements in this important direction.

As it is stressed out in the Government Program 2009-2013, Government of Albania is committed to promote gender equality principles and reinforce protective legal and institutional instruments to ensure gender policies across all governance levels (web-site: [www.km.gov.al](http://www.km.gov.al) ).

The Albanian institutions and the society have been actively involved over the recent years in the efforts concerning woman's role promotion. This has been also reflected during the preparation of the new legislation on gender equality and domestic violence, preparation and implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence, establishment and strengthening of central and local structures to achieve gender mainstreaming, training of central and local civil servants, publications and continuous media debates about these issues.

The National Strategy on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence is a good basis for gender mainstreaming in the daily work of the Government of Albania and establishment of institutions in addition to defining and setting the instruments to prevent and combat against domestic violence. Implementation and achievement of the objectives of this Strategy has enabled incorporation of gender issues in all levels. This has, therefore, ensured capacity building, empowerment of women through employment encouragement policies and programs, raising awareness of the public opinion on the gender issues and violence against women, supplementing the sublegal act concerning prevention and combat against domestic violence, establishing the structures and logistics, enhancement of participation in decision-making, taking measures to eliminate gender stereotypes in education, media, etc.

The National Strategy on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence will be concluded by end of this year. The Government of Albania, as supported by the 3-year Program "On gender equality in Albania", is in the stage of assessing and reviewing the Strategy to see the achievements, failures, challenges, as well as, to set priorities for the next four years.

Recommendations, which the Committee of the Convention is expected to provide, the will serve as additional guidance and suggestions for us when defining the concrete measures that will be

taken to further enhance gender issues and elimination of discrimination against women in Albania.

Law No. 9970 of 24 July 2008 “On gender equality in society” provides protection against discrimination due to gender and due to any form of behavior, which drives discrimination because of gender. The main purpose is to protect citizens against any discrimination, which is inflicted on gender basis, to provide equal opportunities for men and women and, to ensure growth and welfare for the entire society.

The Law stipulates the following:

- i) Application of new definitions including prevention of gender discrimination, definition of direct and indirect discrimination, gender mainstreaming, definition and prevention of harassment due to gender, definition of gender equality, definition of gender equal representation (30%), definition and recognition of special temporary measures as nondiscriminatory ones.
- ii) Establishment of new policymaking, executive and protection structures.
- iii) Contemplation of temporary special measures in political and public decision-making as laid down in the form of neutral quota of no less than 30%; introduction of special measures in the education system and in employment area.
- iv) Unpaid work;
- v) Obligation to collect gender statistics, etc.

Strong lobbying was carried out in the Parliament to pass this Law bearing in mind that the Law provides special measures, the aim of which was to establish gender balance in political and public decision-making via introducing the quota to the extent of no less than 30% concerning representation in legislative, executive and judicial power.

Another important achievement in terms of supplementing the legal framework about protection of women’s rights against domestic violence was marked with the adoption of Law No. 9669 of 18 December 2006 “On the measures against domestic violence”. The purpose of this Law is “to prevent and reduce all forms of domestic violence by means of appropriate legal measures, as well as, to provide protection through legal measures to family members who are victims of domestic violence, paying special attention to children, elderly people and to disabled”.

The Albanian legislation included, for the first time, a law on the prevention and reduction of domestic violence and protection of its victims. The protection, which this Law provides, does not cover only husband and wife relations, but also those of the family members.

Under this Law, civil courts may rule on protective measures for victims through a quick and affordable procedure and issue protection warrants for violence victims.

To implement this Law, the Government of Albania has worked and continues to work intensively and with precedence to draft the sublegal acts, as well as, to establish structures and procedures to coordinate with central and local public institutions providing a timely response to cases of domestic violence and protection for the victims.

Adoption by the Parliament of Albania of Law No. 10221 of 4<sup>th</sup> February 2010 “On protection against discrimination”, is another concrete step and a supplementing of the legal framework in the area of human rights protection considering the orientation of international and European documents. It is, at the same time, also another concrete step in terms of respecting and protection of human rights, as well as, another step closer to fulfilling the aspirations of Albanian citizens and of the Government of Albania concerning EU membership. The Law, which was drafted by the civil society and, which came as an initiative of a group of Members of Parliament, fills a legal gap concerning human rights protection.

The scope of the Law on protection against discrimination includes implementation and respecting of equality principle in relation to gender, race, color, ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, political, religious or philosophical views, economic, education or social status, pregnancy, parental belonging, parental responsibility, age, family or marital status, civil status, residence, health condition, genetic inclinations, disability, association with a special group, or in relation to any other cause.

The purpose of this law is to entitle every person to the following rights:

- a) Equity before the law and equal protection by the law;
- b) Equal opportunities and possibilities to exercise the rights, to enjoy freedoms and to participate in public life;
- c) Effective protection against discrimination and against any form of behavior that encourages discrimination.

The Law establishes the “Commissioner’s” institution as an independent one, which ensures protection against discrimination and, which has a binding power as imposed through sanctions for protection against discrimination, therefore filling also another gap of the Law on Gender Equality.

The Law ensures protection against discrimination because of sexual orientation and gender identity, as issues that are still taboos in the Albanian society, therefore preventing this category of people to state their personality openly. This is an important step ahead and it marks starting

of the work to implement in practice and to accomplish protection against any kind of discrimination.

The work to establish government structures of drafting policies and programs pursuant to this Law has started. With the support of international organizations, the ministry is working to provide information about this Law and to train policymaking structures and executive institutions, which are directly linked with its implementation.

Moreover, the Government of Albania has started cooperation also with NGOs, which protect the rights of groups, which may become subject to discrimination such as “Alliance for the Protection of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transsexuals” (LGBT), etc.

The Government has worked seriously and with precedence to establish the new structures and to strengthen the existing ones to protect and promote equal rights between man and woman by having permanent support of a large number of donors, among which we could highlight the important role of ONE UN Program “On gender equality in Albania”.

The Ministry of Labor Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities is the responsible authority for gender issues, it controls and coordinates the work about these issues with other institutions, as well as, it monitors implementation of relevant laws. The responsible structure within the Ministry is the Directorate of Equal Opportunities and Family Policies. Its mission is to draft policies and legislation on gender equality, protection of women and young women against violence including domestic violence, in addition to protection against discrimination due to sexual orientation, their monitoring and implementation and presenting of proposals to amend them.

The central and local institutional mechanism has been established and it has started to function pursuant to the Law on Gender Equality in Society:

1. In the Parliament level, the Health, Labor and Social Issues Committee addresses issues of gender equality and violence against women including also domestic violence.
2. In the central level, the National Council of Gender Equality has been established and it functions as a counseling body chaired by the Minister of Labor Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. This Council consists of representatives of central institutions and civil society. In addition to other assignments, this Council works on **ensuring gender mainstreaming** in all areas, especially in the political, social, economic and cultural ones.
3. In local level, Regional Councils have the obligation to address, *inter alia*, the issues of gender mainstreaming and fight against domestic violence, while municipalities and communes have the legal obligation to implement government policies in this field.

The network of gender employees is already established and functions in the ministries and local government units. These employees have continuously been trained on international standards of women's rights and gender equality and they have been particularly trained on the Law on Gender Equality, Law on Domestic Violence and CEDAW, as well as, on the concepts of gender affiliation, gender mainstreaming, budgeting, etc.

The ministry is continuing to work on the direction of improving the quality and sustainability of this network. The aim of training of the local administration on these issues (about 725 local administration employees have been trained until now) has consisted in local capacities building and preparation of strategies and regional development plans as viewed from the gender perspective.

On domestic violence: Pursuant to Law "On the measures against domestic violence", there is ongoing work to establish the institutional mechanism in order to coordinate the institutions responsible for prevention, remedying, protections and punishment to timely respond against cases of domestic violence, as well as, to punish and issue immediate protection warrants by the courts.

Government agencies dealing with domestic violence include: Ministry of Labor Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities as the main responsible authority, which has a coordinating, supporting and supervisory role concerning the implementation of the Law, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Education and Science, as well as, local government units, such as municipalities and communes.

Pursuant to the Law, the necessary sublegal acts have been adopted, among the most important, we could mention the **Cooperation Agreement** between responsible ministries as listed above. The Agreement is a joint commitment of the ministers that are assigned by the Law with the coordination of work and the responsibilities of all institutions as provided by the Law, as well as, it defines the manner of their reporting.

Sublegal acts, as adopted in 2 years period by the Ministry of Labor Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Ministry of Interior, State Police, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education aim at rigorous implementation of the Law and at the timely response to persons who are victims of domestic violence.

Some of the adopted sublegal acts include the following: a) Order No. 379 of 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2008 "On the measures to be taken by the State Police concerning prevention and reduction of domestic violence"; b) Order No. 981 of 31 October 2008 of the General Director of Police "On the measures to be taken by the State Police concerning prevention and reduction of domestic violence and treatment of domestic violence victims". The Guide of the Crimes Investigation Department and Order and Public Security Department "On the standard procedures to be pursued by the State Police officer when taking measures to prevent violence, to protect and to

care about domestic violence victims”, as adopted upon Order No. 1035 of 17 November 2008 of the General Director of Police.

c) Minister of Health Order No. 13 of 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2008 ”On providing of domestic violence victims with the relevant medical prescription”. d) Minister of Health Order No. 14 of 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2008 “On recording domestic violence cases in the register and individual card of domestic violence victims”. e) Minister of Health Order No. 15 of 24<sup>th</sup> January 2008 “On medical treatment in public health institutions of domestic violence victims”, the purpose of which is to provide medical and psychological care for domestic violence victims.

Pursuant to the work concerning rigorous implementation of the Law, first to continuously improve the work and refine the Law on the protection of domestic violence victims, Ministry of Labor Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities has proposed a number of amendments to the Law concerning the establishment of a national structure for the protection of domestic violence victims.

With the support of the Prime Minister of Albania, work has started to make a number of amendments to the Criminal Law to consider domestic violence as a criminal offence.

The sectors “On the minors’ protection and domestic violence” are established and function in the General Directorate of State Police and in the relevant sections in Regional Police Directorates. The function of these structures is to prevent and tackle domestic violence, violence against minors in addition to systematically collecting statistical data about this phenomenon.

The Ministry of Labor Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities is working on “The establishment of national referral system of domestic violence”, which is set out in Law No. 9669 of 18<sup>th</sup> December 2006 “On the measures against domestic violence”. Based on the successive experience of the organizations network against domestic violence as supported by UNDP, the sublegal acts have been drafted in a number of the Municipalities of the Country (draft decision of the Council of Ministers) concerning coordination of work against domestic violence in local level throughout the entire territory of the country.

The national referral mechanism aims at responding to cases of domestic violence in a concerted manner in a municipal level. The mechanism fulfills one of the purposes of Law No. 9669 of 18<sup>th</sup> December 2006 “On the measures against domestic violence”, which is the ensuring of protection by legal measures for family members, who are victims of domestic violence across the entire country”.

#### Shelters for domestic violence victims

The Ministry of Labor Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, in the capacity of the Responsible Authority for the implementation of Law No. 9669 of 18<sup>th</sup> December 2006 “On the measures against domestic violence” and, pursuant to Action Plan of the National Strategy on Gender and

Domestic Violence 2007- 2010, has worked with the financial assistance of UNDP to set up a national shelter for the domestic violence victims, which is now ready to receive the first domestic violence victims.

This shelter, which provides counseling and psychological and social services, rehab programs, medical and legal assistance, etc., in compliance with the Council of Europe standards, will serve, at the same time, as a specialized national training center for the persons who work in this field.

This shelter, which is the first state initiative regarding such services for domestic violence victims, will serve also as a model for the local government units throughout the entire country to set up such services.

Lack of statistical data has been a shortcoming, which has been faced in the daily work when conducting situation assessment and when taking the measures against domestic violence, but which has already become subject to gradual addressing and solution. This has been addressed to improve data collection on domestic violence by means of standard forms in central and local level, while work has been done and indicators about gender equality and women's status in Albania have been defined. These data are collected now in central and local level and they are an important source of information in terms of situation assessment and also in taking the measures, changing the policies both in the gender equality area and in the fight against domestic violence.

Collection and analyzing of statistical indicators on gender equality and women's status in Albania will serve as a tool to monitor the commitments of the Government of Albania concerning gender equality and women's human rights and drafting of real policies regarding the improvement and changing of situation in this field.

Serious commitment of the Government of Albania about human rights protection and ensuring of gender equality is clearly demonstrated in the improvement of institutional coordination, collection, analyzing and using of data to change women's status in Albanian Society.

The Minister of Labor Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities Instruction No. 1220 of 27 May 2010 *"On defining the indicators of monitoring and evaluation of gender equality and violence against women, including domestic violence, their supervision, and collection and processing"*, as published in the Official Gazette No. 78 of 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2010 serves this purpose.

Training of police officers, judges, prosecutors, school of magistrate staff, forensics, bailiffs and other specialists of education, health, social service, etc., has been carried out before and it continues nowadays.

Courts have judges who have received training on family issues and reviewing of requests concerning protection warrants. Meanwhile, the Ministry has drafted the proposal on amending the Law about provision of free legal assistance when defending domestic violence victims in the court processes. A lot of work is done to refine the information system on the rights of domestic violence victims and the procedural guarantees provided for them by the justice system. To this end, leaflets have been drafted containing the procedural rights and they have been placed and posted in places that can be accessed by the public such in the courts, police facilities, etc.

Progress has been made in the area of fighting against trafficking in human beings. The area of fighting against organized crime and illegal trafficking makes up one of the priority areas for the Government of Albania, as well as, it makes up a very important element in the frame of the integration of Albania into European Union.

The progress is linked not only with the supplementation of legal framework to fight trafficking, particularly in women and children for prostitution purposes, but also with the establishment of specialized structures and the referral system to respond to trafficking victims. It is worth mentioning that a trafficking victims' database, which contains data about the persons identified as potential victims or trafficking victims from the first moment of contact with them up to the victim's full integration, has become operational.

The Criminal Law of the Republic of Albania has defined Trafficking of Human Beings as criminal offence since 2001. Starting back in 2001 through to date, the Criminal Law has been subject to successive amendments in order to align our legislation with the international legislation. Legislation against trafficking in human beings has been subject to permanent improvement by making it compliant with the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, therefore considering trafficking in children and women as a criminal offence. Amendments to criminal legislation in 2008 provided for the punishment of the phenomenon of exploiting children for forced labor, begging and other forced services, as well as, punishment of minors pornography by setting even heavier sanctions for those crimes.

To support women and young women who are victims of trafficking, the Government of Albania has recently amended the Law "On economic aid and social services", therefore providing trafficking victims with economic aid up to the moment when they are employed. Moreover, support with budget funds is planned for 4 nonpublic centers, which provide services for this category. Employment encouragement programs, which have been applied by the Ministry of Labor Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, provide free training for this category, as well as, they employ them after completing the training courses.

Pursuant to Article 7 of CEDAW about enhancing women and young women decision-making role in political and public life, there is a qualitative and quantitative increase of the number of girls and women in political and public life. Provision of equal opportunities regarding

participation in politics is always considered as a part of human rights and an indication of the level of democracy. Additionally, increasing participation of women in public and political life has provided the opportunity that the women's interests are better reflected when taking initiatives to protect their rights. By stating its political will, the Government of Albania undertook over the 4 recent years a number of important actions, which had to do with drafting and adoption of the Law "On gender equality in society", which imposed setting a quota of no less than 30% in the list of candidates running for Members of Parliament of Albania.

The quota was well reflected also in the Elections Code. Therefore, during the electoral campaign for the 2009 parliamentary elections, 30% of the list of candidates running for Members of Parliament consisted of women. The values of candidate women and young women were promoted through the meetings, TV debates, etc. As a result of this, women hold 23 seats, which is 16,4%, of the seats of the Parliament that came out of June 2009 elections, and, if compared to the prior general elections, this figure is twice higher. One woman holds the position of minister in the existing government cabinet and this is 7,1% of the cabinet. There are 35 deputy ministers, 9 of which, or 25.7%, are women.

Albania will hold local elections in 2011. In this frame, the responsible government structures are working on gender equality also with the support of donors that operate in this field and civil society. Efforts are focused on conducting advocacy campaigns in community level, as well as, regional forums and discussions in focus groups about leadership and advocacy.

Public debates are planned to be conducted with women candidates in 2011 local elections. In addition, this will include conducting of TV and radio debates about women's rights and their participation in politics and decision-making, surveys on public perception concerning women's role in community, as well as, campaigns to eliminate family voting practices. Lobbying about enforcement of 30% quota laid down in the Elections Code for the local level is a joint action of all stakeholders, operation in this field.

**Pursuant to Article 11 of the Convention on Women's Employment**, the Ministry of Labor Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, the function of which is to encourage employment and vocational training of all citizens, has addressed women's employment as a priority. The Government of Albania has made several decisions on the implementation of employment encouragement programs for the unemployed women jobseekers. Women take up 80% of the overall number of trainees in these programs, the aim of which is provide vocational training and employment after completing the courses, and a part of this percentage consist of persons belonging to the groups in need such as Roma women, trafficked women, women with social problems, disabled, etc.

The Law "On gender equality in society" stipulates equality between men and women in labor relations. The Law sets out the employer's obligations to respect gender equality principles and

employee's rights, the measures to be taken in case of discrimination notifications, the tasks of the responsible authority about respecting gender equality in labor relations and those of other institutions, evaluation of unpaid labor, the measures about vocational education and training, sanctions when failing to obey the Law, etc. According to the law, the employer is subject to the obligation of providing equal and proper working conditions, equal opportunities concerning information, equal training of employees in the course of labor relations. In addition, the employer is obliged to take measures to prevent discrimination and sexual harassment against the employee. Implementation of the Law in this field is a challenge for the Government of Albania due to the high rate of unemployment (13%) and due to the existence of gender stereotypes regarding woman's position as a housewife.

In order to implement the Law in this field, a number of measures have been taken through raising the awareness of central and local representatives, employment offices, Trade Unions Representatives, State Inspectorate, etc. Issues regarding the implementation of this Law and gender equality principles have been raised also in the National Labor Council. In this context, employees have been invited to cooperate about its implementation, especially concerning stipulation in the collective contracts of provisions, which have to do with specific measures such as stipulation of flexible schedule for employees with household responsibilities, as well as, stipulation of specific rules concerning protection against sexual harassment at work.

**The Albanian legislation provides also special measures** to provide protection for women during pregnancy, during birth and for young mothers. The Constitution, Labor Legislation and Law No. 9970 of 24 July 2008 "On gender equity in society" provide special protection for pregnant women and young mothers. Recently, the adoption of the Law "On health and safety at work" brings a protection, which is better and closer to the standards, for this category against hazardous elements and difficult jobs.

**Economic aid sector** – Efforts are underway to make amendments to Law No. 9355 of 10 March 2005 "On social aid and services. The aim of these amendments is to ensure involvement and nondiscrimination of a number of vulnerable groups including lonely women, disabled persons, etc., and to change the existing stereotype, under which the woman is treated as a subject inside the family.

The new law, which is in the preparation stage, stipulates also support with economic aid in addition to various application procedures for families where couples are in a divorce process and the court has not made a final ruling on the divorce.

**In the education sector**, there have been good achievements concerning equal access for men and women. However, there are still cases where social and cultural reality supports the conclusion that girls abandon school more frequently and earlier than boys to provide their contribution to their households or, to get married in a very young age. Gender stereotypes are

faced in education also in relation to the position of women as kindergarten teachers and schoolteachers. When moving from the pre-school education level, in which almost all kindergarten teachers are women and young women, to the compulsory and secondary education level, women and young women hold only teacher's position and much less management positions.

In the Universities, the academic staff consists of 43,6% women versus 56,4% men. Meanwhile, there were 38% women (in 2008) with scientific degrees. None out of 10 university rectors is a woman, while there are 3, or 23%, vice rectors out of 10. In the case of faculty deans, women hold 11 such positions or 27% of this category.

Education is considered as an area, which plays a primary role in changing the mindset and mitigation of gender stereotypes. Measures taken in the frame of the National Strategy on gender Equality and Domestic Violence have included reviewing the curricula, improvement of schoolbooks by including the gender perspective, drafting of publications and brochures on gender issues and domestic violence in support of teachers, building the capacities of teaching staff, as well as, increasing the number of women and young women involved in the management of schools by means of appointing them in management positions.

Gender Institute, the purpose of which is also to carry out studies and research on gender issues, has been established and functions in the Faculty of Social Sciences of Tirana University in Albania.

*In higher education*, subjects on gender issues are provided in the curricula of Social Work, Psychology, Sociology, Journalism, Social Policies, etc., as well as, in the subjects of fiction, psychology, political sciences, philosophy and culture. A part of the faculties train students to be specialists of gender issues to work in the public sector, civil society, etc. The Department of Social Works in the Faculty of Social Sciences has been applying for three years in succession the Master Program "On gender and development". This is a Program, which is attended, although in a smaller number, also by males in addition to females.

In order to increase the number of women and young women involved in the management of schools through their appointment to management positions and, thorough other institutional arrangements, the Ministry of Education and Science has issued instructions for all Regional Education Directorates and District Education Offices to permanently take into consideration the need to increase the number of women and young women involved in the schools management. Meanwhile, Education Directorates, particularly in the Northern part of the country, have conducted door-to-door awareness campaigns and they have distributed leaflets on gender equality and against domestic violence.

**Elimination of gender stereotypes** – Although Albanian legislation is considered to comply with CEDAW requirements and other international standards, the gender stereotypes remain

generally strong in the Albanian society. In order to be able to overcome them and to raise awareness on gender issues in Albania, the National Conference “On addressing gender stereotypes” was organized in June of this year with the participation of many stakeholders. The Conference served to identify and exchange experiences in terms of gender stereotypes in central and local level, while participants made several suggestions and recommendations, which will be included in the new National Strategy on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence 2011-2014.

**In health area**, access to healthcare is equal for men and women in urban and rural areas. By drafting and implementing the legislation, the policies and programs in the area of reproductive health, the Government aims at responding to the gender differences and to the needs of men and women. Measures have been taken to build the capacities of healthcare information system of gender analysis and planning concerning issues of reproductive health. Priorities have included promotion, awareness, education of men and women about gender equality issues. The Ministry of Health, as one of the responsible authorities to prevent and tackle domestic violence, has worked not only on supplementing the sublegal framework of this area, but is has worked intensively also with the support of UNFPA to train and build the capacities of healthcare staff and assistant staff concerning prevention and handling of domestic violence. Until now, 1800 workers have been trained including about 800 medical doctors, nurses and midwives. The psychosocial and mental health service, which will additionally help with providing psychological assistance for domestic violence victims, has already been established in the Regional Health Directorates. Adoption of the Strategy on Reproductive Health and the Action Plan 2010-2015 aims at covering the areas of importance and priority for reproductive health, which includes also gender equality and domestic violence.

Media is an important stakeholder in terms of promoting gender equality issues and elimination of discrimination against women. Media has played an important role in promoting the women’s values, although it still preserves gender stereotypes and this does not happen only during the electoral campaigns, but almost permanently. Measures have been taken to train journalists of print and broadcast media on professional ethic issues, on gender equality and against domestic violence, as well as, on reducing the use of sexist language in media.

In addition, the Government of Albania has considered close cooperation with civil society when drafting legislation and policies, and, above all, their direct experience from the fieldwork with women and all other vulnerable categories as something of great importance and valuable. Civil society in Albania has special merits particularly about their initiatives concerning drafting the Law “On measures against domestic violence” and the Law “On protection against discrimination”, which have already been adopted by the Parliament. In this frame, the Government of Albania has adopted until now and it continues to adopt the bylaws and it is additionally involved in rigorous enforcement of benchmarks and obligations that they provide thereof.

In all its activities concerning gender equality and domestic violence, the Government of Albania has had the support of international organizations with expertise and financial resources, to mention here particularly ONE UN Program “On gender equality in Albania”, OSCE, the Project of the Austrian Government “On enhancing the role of women in governance”, etc. This has enabled a considerable progress as mentioned in the achievements of the Government of Albania and in the achievement of a number of Millennium Development Goals – MDG.

Honorable Mrs. Chair,

Honorable members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Government of Albania and on behalf of the Authority responsible for gender issues and domestic violence, I hereby express the commitment that the Government of Albania will continue to work with persistence to empower women by providing them with larger access to the labor market and to the accomplishment of their professional career in politics and business.

Elimination of violence against women and young women and their exploitation for prostitution or for any other denigrating purposes will continue to be a priority of the Program of the Government of Albania. Programs in the future will also be oriented in the direction of policies and measures concerning prevention of violence against women and family crime, and the implementation of these programs will involve all levels of the government.

The recommendations of this Committee will be another professional drive to improve the exciting situation and to enhance the economic, social and political position of women in Albanian society.

Thank you!