



**Convention on the Elimination
of all Forms of Discrimination
Against Women**

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART (PUBLIC)* OF THE 117th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 24 February 1988, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BERNARD

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Convention (continued)

* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as
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consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the
session.

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE
CONVENTION (continued)

Initial report of Mali (CEDAW/C.5/Add.43)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Diakite (Mali) took a place at the Committee table.
2. Mr. DIAKITE (Mali) said that the fact that the last-minute supplement to his country's report had been issued only in French should not be misconstrued as a lack of interest in the work of the Committee.
3. The situation of Malian women must be understood within the larger context of a country whose territory was two thirds desert, whose population was 80 per cent rural, and which had been drought-stricken for 10 years. Women in Mali slightly outnumbered men; 83 per cent of the female population was rural.
4. Equality of the sexes had been guaranteed by Malian law ever since the first Constitution. The most recent Constitution, of 1974, provided for equal employment opportunities and equal voting rights. The country's Labour Code did not distinguish between men and women with regard to working conditions, job qualifications, salary or status in the civil service. Such principles were in the spirit of many international labour conventions which his country had ratified, including conventions on job discrimination and on night work for women, which was prohibited in Mali.
5. Women who became pregnant could resign from their jobs on 24 hours' notice, without penalty. During their 14-week maternity leave, women were entitled to free medical care. When they returned to the work place, they were allowed one hour a day to nurse their babies. The retirement age was lowered by one year for each dependent child in the case of women civil servants.
6. Long before it had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Mali had provided for the equality of women in its Marriage Code. Under the Code, the woman's consent was a requirement for marriage, spouses' rights were fairly equal, parental authority was balanced, and repudiation of a wife was prohibited. Mali's Nationality Code was consistent with article 9 of the Convention. Prostitution was an offence under the Penal Code.
7. Women had always been prominent in Malian politics. They had taken part in the struggle for independence and were represented in all of the national political bodies, such as the National Council, the Government and the National Assembly. The Malian National Women's Union was integrated into the ruling political party. Women were consulted in the national decision-making process and represented in all bodies of the Malian National Labour Union.

(Mr. Diakite, Mali)

8. Co-education was encouraged at all levels of education. Primary education was secular, compulsory and co-educational. Boys and girls enjoyed the same opportunities to attend school, where they received the same education. Girls could participate in all school activities, with the exception of certain violent sports.

9. Women and girls had been accorded particular attention in Malian educational reform. A Women's Advancement Division within the Government's literacy programme was preparing women for greater participation in the process of development. Making extensive use of audio-visual aids and particularly videos, the Division had provided instruction to women in reading, writing, crafts and daily problem-solving. Literacy centres had been opened in 87 villages in the regions of Koulikoro, Sikasso, Ségou and Mopti.

10. Men and women in Mali had equal access to vocational training in the work place. Information on the country's policy of non-discrimination in employment was widely circulated at workers' gatherings, and by shop stewards at work.

11. A disease-ridden country, Mali had limited health resources and a population bound by tradition. It was particularly alarming that the most vulnerable population groups were also the largest - the rural population and children under 14. In collaboration with other countries, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations, the Government had designed a programme to improve national health. The main objectives were to reduce the burden of child-bearing on Malian women, who had seven children on average; reduce child morbidity, which was, to some extent, linked to inadequate health facilities; and strengthen the national health system through, inter alia, the establishment of a primary health care network. The programme would provide maternal and child care, including pre-natal and post-natal supervision, health and nutrition education, vaccinations, and day-care centres and kindergartens for the children of working mothers and vocational training for women. The Division of Family Health, established in 1980, was responsible for such activities. Special attention was given to handicapped, elderly and indigent women and to those displaced as a result of the drought.

12. Women employed in the National Directorate of Co-operatives took part in the same missions as men, both inside and outside the country, and received the same salary and benefits. The participation of women in the co-operative movement was encouraged through the Directorate's "Women's Advancement" section, established in 1975. In rural areas, women engaged in farm work, performed other complex tasks and could obtain farm credit for projects. The five-year goals of the Directorate's programme for the social and economic advancement of rural women were to increase women's co-operatives, to increase women's participation in the development process and to raise women's incomes. To that end, the Directorate was organizing activities related to production, processing of agricultural products, farm animals, credit and savings, hygiene and primary health care, and training and education. Certain co-operatives would also be eligible for grants of working capital, equipment and premises. The Malian co-operative movement was the ideal setting in which to work for the advancement of women.

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(Mr. Diakite, Mali)

13. In the defence forces, women served in the army, mainly in technical and administrative departments, in the air force and on the police force. Captain was the highest rank attained by female soldiers.

14. In conclusion, he wished to reiterate that Mali had ratified the Convention in 1985 and was committed to establishing full equality between its men and women, despite the weight of tradition and other social obstacles.

15. Ms. TALLAWY said that the introduction just given, together with the supplement in French, partially compensated for the insufficiency of Mali's report. Even the supplement, which was far better than the report itself, was incomplete. For example, the report did not contain any reference to certain provisions of the Convention or to a section on Mali in a recent International Labour Organisation report. Neither did it mention Malian women in Government, although the Minister of Health, the Minister of Information and Communications and the General Director of the Department of Education were all women. In future, Mali should take CEDAW's reporting guidelines into account.

16. In 1987, the Committee had almost rejected the reports of Mali and Sri Lanka, a matter on which she personally had been very strict. In the case of Mali, the Committee would take into consideration the lengthy introductory statement, the supplement in French and, above all, the critical economic situation and severe drought affecting the country.

17. She wondered whether information had been omitted because of poorly co-ordinated reporting machinery, a problem common to developing countries. If that was the case, the CEDAW secretariat or the Commission on the Status of Women might consider assisting developing countries with their reports, perhaps by formulating a model report.

18. According to the final paragraph of Mali's report, women required their husbands' agreement before setting up in trade. In primitive African communities, buying and selling at the marketplace had been one of the woman's basic roles. It was curious that the development process had reversed the situation. She would appreciate an explanation. In conclusion, if Committee members felt that Mali had not provided sufficient information, discussion of the report could be deferred for another year.

19. Ms. SINEGIORGIS said that, although the initial report of Mali was very short, the introductory statement had thrown light on some points. While she appreciated the difficulties experienced by countries such as Mali, she agreed that the report should have been prepared in accordance with the Committee's guidelines and with the Convention, and hoped that the Malian Government would follow that course in preparing its second report. The Malian Government's ratification of the Convention demonstrated its commitment to the advancement of women in Mali. She was aware that there was a well-established national women's organization in Mali which played an important role in political and economic life, and wondered whether that body had been consulted or involved in the preparation of the initial report.

(Ms. Sinegiorgis)

20. She asked what measures were planned to eliminate the discriminatory practice whereby in a working married couple, the woman was taxed more highly than the man on the pretext that the man was the provider. She also asked whether there had been a review of domestic laws since the ratification of the Convention, in order to determine whether they met the requirements of the Convention. She asked what the customs were which remained deeply rooted in tradition (p. 3 of the report). It was noted in the supplementary report that certain legal texts were under consideration; she asked what measures had been taken by the Government to expedite the adoption of those texts and expressed the hope that a list of the texts adopted would be provided. She also asked what measures had been taken by the Malian Government to publicize the Convention.

21. Ms. UKEJE said that it was clear that the report did not comply with the Committee's guidelines for the preparation of reports; moreover, the supplementary report had not been provided in the working languages. The initial report did not portray the status of women in Mali, although Malian women's organizations participated actively in all meetings of women in the West African region. It appeared that in preparing the report the Malian Government had faced technical and infrastructural problems common to all developing countries, as well as problems of co-ordination and liaison with women's organizations. The Committee should recognize the political will shown by the Government in ratifying the Convention, becoming a member of the Committee and submitting a report. It was to be hoped that the second periodic report would better portray the active role of women in Mali.

22. Ms. PILATAXI DE ARENAS said that insufficient information had been provided by the Malian Government, particularly since the supplementary report had not been provided in the working languages. She was therefore unable to comment on the report. She hoped that the Committee's rules would be enforced so that departures from those rules did not become a practice.

23. Ms. MONTENEGRO DE FLETCHER said that the report of Mali did not portray the real situation of women there. States must be required to comply with their obligation to submit proper reports, as in other specialized bodies of the United Nations. Members would have to await the second report of Mali before they could make informed comments about the situation of women there.

24. Ms. NOVIKOVA said that the introductory statement had dealt with new aspects of the situation of women in Mali. It was regrettable that the detailed information in the supplementary report was available only in French. While expressing the wish that the Malian Government should follow the reporting guidelines more closely, the Committee should at the same time seek additional information and gain a fuller picture of the state of affairs in Mali. There was an energetic women's movement in Mali which did much for the advancement of women. It could be seen clearly that in Mali the situation of women was linked with social, economic and political conditions. The prolonged drought had been a great burden to women, and should be taken into account. It was not easy to overcome old traditions and change social attitudes, but more efforts were needed. She asked

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(Ms. Novikova)

what the representative of Mali had meant in noting that there were serious social and economic obstacles to improving the situation of women in Mali; that question was very important since social and economic processes largely determined the status of women. It was impressive that despite all the difficulties the Malian Government had acceded to the Convention, thereby demonstrating its intention to work for the advancement of women.

25. Ms. CARON welcomed the additional information provided, and commended the Malian Government on its ratification of the Convention and submission of its initial report. Although additional information had been provided, it was impossible to comment on a report which had not been provided in all working languages. She would not ask questions on the supplementary report in solidarity with her colleagues as a protest to the Malian Government, which had failed to take into account requests made long ago for additional information, and because she did not wish the practice of departing from the rules to become a norm, since the value of the Committee's work would then be greatly diminished.

26. Ms. GONZALEZ MARTINEZ said that she was unable to ask questions about a report which had recently been provided, in French only. She hoped that detailed information on the implementation of the Convention would be provided in the second report of Mali. She welcomed the Malian Government's ratification of the Convention and its submission of the report within the time-limit and hoped that it would continue its efforts. She wondered whether the Malian Government had submitted equally brief reports on the implementation of other conventions.

27. Ms. LAIOU-ANTONIOU said that she welcomed Mali's ratification of the Convention. The report did not provide much information about the actual situation of women in Mali. For example, there was no information about the use of names; whether women had to leave their jobs if they became pregnant; whether there was paternity leave; whether men helped in domestic work; whether there was a right to abortion; whether women worked mainly in "female" jobs; whether rural women received any pensions for themselves; and whether mutually agreed divorce was available. Although Malian women were active in many international bodies, no statistics or details were provided. She asked whether any steps had been taken to establish a special body to promote equality between men and women in Mali and, if so, whether it had a budget. It was possible that the initial report was short because scant attention was paid to the issue of equality of women in Mali; she hoped that the Malian Government would demonstrate political will and that it would soon provide more concrete information and details about the progress made.

28. Ms. EVATT commended the Malian Government on its ratification of the Convention and submission of its initial report within the required time-limit. Although at its previous session the Committee had decided to invite Mali to send additional information, that information had been provided very late, and was available only in French. Thus the Committee did not have enough information to be able to fulfil its function under the Convention. Although Mali lacked resources and faced serious economic problems, it had provided considerable information about the employment conditions of women in Mali in documents submitted to the

(Ms. Evatt)

International Labour Organisation. She requested information about the serious difficulties faced by Malian women because of the high birth rate and high rates of infant and maternal mortality. She also requested more information about the National Union of Malian Women and its involvement in policy-making and in Government and legislation; that body did not appear to have made any contribution to the preparation of the initial report. She hoped that the Committee would invite the Malian Government to submit its second report earlier than usual so that a proper evaluation could be made.

29. Ms. CORTI said that it was regrettable that the Malian report was unsatisfactory. Italy and Mali had many contacts, and Malian women had participated in various bodies with great competence, yet there was no reference to those efforts in the report. She was aware of the serious economic difficulties faced by Mali, and the problems resulting from the drought; a fuller report would have enabled the Committee to better understand not only the women of Mali, but also African women in general. The Malian Government had demonstrated political will in ratifying the Convention, but it was not clear why it had not enlisted the help of the Women's Advancement Division in preparing the report. Italy, and no doubt other countries and organizations, had financed many programmes for the advancement of women in Mali which were not mentioned in the report. She asked what work was done by the Women's Advancement Division and what level it operated at. She requested more details about literacy, and about efforts to combat tropical diseases. She asked what law regulated the status of women in Mali, a secular, multi-religious State, and what heritage of old customs persisted. She hoped that the second report of Mali would be comparable to the reports prepared by the Malian Government for other international bodies.

30. Ms. GUAN Mingqian expressed disappointment at the brief initial report submitted by Mali, which failed to provide meaningful information on the situation of women in that country and their role in national development and political activities. She was aware that Mali was facing many difficulties and that it was not easy to draw up a comprehensive report for consideration by the Committee.

31. The members of CEDAW were in a difficult position because there was little substance in the initial report and the supplement provided by the reporting State was in French only. In its next report the Government of Mali should provide comprehensive information on the administrative and legislative measures taken to implement the Convention and describe at length the situation of women in Mali, particularly with regard to women's organizations and their activities.

32. Ms. ESCOBAR expressed amazement at the brevity of the initial report submitted by Mali. She hoped that the next report would provide comprehensive information on the struggle of women in Mali.

33. Ms. WADSTEIN said that, according to the report, Law 62-17/AN-RM reflected the efforts made by the legislator to ensure a proper balance between the rights and duties of each spouse. She inquired whether the phrase "a proper balance" meant equality with regard to rights and duties or reflected a traditional view of the different roles of men and women in marriage.

34. The CHAIRPERSON commended the Government of Mali for ratifying the Convention and submitting its initial report promptly. It had not, however, followed the guidelines laid down for the preparation of initial reports and future reports should be submitted in time to allow for translation. The supplement was not very useful to the Committee because it was in French only. She hoped that the next report would give a full picture of the situation of women in Mali.

35. Mr. DIAKITE (Mali) said that he appreciated all the comments made by the members of the Committee. His Government had submitted additional information in a supplement because it had felt that the initial report was too brief. Frustration was felt by both the Committee and his Government in view of the difficulty of drafting a comprehensive report. He reaffirmed his country's commitment to the valuable work carried out by CEDAW and co-operation between the Committee and Mali. The next report would take due account of the comments made by the experts and would provide ample information on the situation of women in his country.

36. Mr. Diakite (Mali) withdrew.

The public meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.