



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

Twenty-first session

Summary record of the 440th meeting

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Chairperson: Ms. González

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The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention *(continued)*

Second and third periodic reports of Ireland (CEDAW/C/IRL/2-3)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Ireland took seats at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. McDonagh** (Ireland), introducing his country's second and third periodic reports, said that while the fact that Ireland now had its second successive directly elected woman president and that four of the five candidates during the presidential election of 1997 had been women were remarkable achievements, there was no cause for complacency in the effort to ensure the greatest possible participation of women in all areas of economic, social and political decision-making. In that connection, the national Second Commission on the Status of Women had sought to encourage more participation at the grass-roots level by women and more active and rewarding participation at each level of party organization. It had addressed several recommendations aimed at increasing women's representation to Government as well as to individual political parties. According to the Commission, there were compelling structural and attitudinal reasons why women were not more involved in political life, including difficulties in reconciling family life, paid employment and political tasks and the reluctance of political parties to select women candidates. Political parties had an essential role to play since they constituted the primary link in the political process and often the first major obstacle for a woman.

3. In the context of the recent European and local elections, all the political parties had expressed a commitment to fielding the largest possible number of women candidates and to the idea of making party structures more family friendly. It was disappointing that the percentage of female candidates, at just over 19 per cent, had been lower than that in the previous European elections when women had accounted for over 23 per cent of the total candidates. However, women had won more seats, a little over 33 per cent, as compared to 26.8 per cent in 1994. Three of the 15 Government ministers were women, including the

Deputy Prime Minister, who was also leader of her party.

4. While the proportion of women in all the management grades of the civil service had increased since 1986, when the Equal Opportunities Policy and Guidelines for the Civil Service had been drawn up, women remained concentrated at the lower levels of the civil service and were under-represented in the senior management levels. The need for further development of the Equal Opportunities Policy had been articulated in "Delivering Better Government", a blueprint for reforming the civil service endorsed by the Government in 1996. A special committee established in that regard had commissioned independent research to look into the reasons for gender imbalance in the higher levels of the Irish civil service.

5. Complaints of sexual harassment might be pursued in accordance with the guidelines for dealing with sexual harassment in the civil service and, if upheld, might lead to disciplinary action. The Equal Opportunities Policy provided that no individual might be penalized or treated less favourably for pursuing rights under the equality legislation. Since 1998, the age-limit for most civil service competitions had been raised to 65 years.

6. As far as equal opportunities between women and men in the National Development Plan, 2000-2006 were concerned, work had commenced on giving effect to the requirement under European Union guidelines that equal opportunities between women and men should be mainstreamed into all areas of structural funds. Such work included the holding of conferences and the development of guidelines for equal opportunities for women and men in such funds. Women's participation in the labour force was approximately 40 per cent and rising. The economic boom in Ireland was itself a driving force in addressing the obstacles to women's participation in the labour force. Indeed, the need to ensure continued growth had made the employment and retention of women in employment not only an equality issue but also an economic one.

7. The Irish Government was consulting with employers and trade unions with a view to working out family friendly policies which would be advantageous to all. In addition to looking at ways to develop models of best practices for companies, the Government was

also taking a closer look at home working, which was expected to play an increasingly important role in the workforce of the future, and examining school curricula with a view to educating young people about the new labour force. There was also a need to re-educate senior managers and human resource managers in enterprises.

8. Childcare was an important way to reconcile work and family life and the Government was aware of problems in relation to the provision of childcare, particularly for employed parents. The problem had become more acute as greater female labour-force participation had increased demand; on the other hand, supply was contracting partly because childminders were opting for alternative employment in the formal economy. The Government had taken a number of initiatives to improve the situation. The 1998 Parental Leave Act provided a statutory entitlement for both parents to take up to 14 weeks unpaid leave to care for young children. Such leave could be taken in various combinations. Other new developments in that regard were term-time working, work-sharing and part-time work. A growing number of people were working part-time, particularly women. A European Union directive to prevent part-time workers from being treated less favourably than full-time workers, and to facilitate working on a part-time basis for those who so desired, would be implemented by the end of January 2000.

9. **Ms. Bohan** (Ireland) said that the Education Act of 1998 provided for equal access to all forms of education and courses of study and equal opportunities between female and male students and staff. The Act required inter alia, that schools must ensure that students had access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choice; and that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment would have the function of promoting equality of access to education generally and to instruction in any particular subjects between male and female students.

10. One of the key strategic functions of the Department of Education and Science was the promotion of equality of opportunity throughout the system. A Working Group in the Department, the Equality Committee, monitored and coordinated activities relating to equality of opportunity for girls and boys in education. The Committee received an annual budget, which was used to initiate specific positive actions, commission research and support positive actions undertaken by non-governmental

organizations. The Committee was currently involved in developing strategies for mainstreaming gender equality. A number of current measures were being undertaken by the Department to ensure that mainstreaming gender equality would become effective in the short term. They included a new initiative to develop the teaching of science subjects in second-level education, a revision of the primary school curriculum and a review of the effectiveness of the junior cycle curriculum.

11. Many of the initiatives organized in 1999 by the Equality Committee had been jointly funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. One such initiative had been the provision of child-care facilities for persons eligible to participate in the Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme, the Youthreach Scheme and the Traveller Training Scheme. The Department had included the Women's Education Initiative in its submission for funding under the next round of structural funds. It was currently reorganizing a number of its sections and it was proposed to establish an equality unit, which would have overall responsibility for mainstreaming gender equality throughout the educational system.

12. As far as education for life was concerned, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment was currently preparing for the introduction of a new subject into the curriculum: Social, Personal and Health Education. The Department of Education and Science implemented a range of programmes dealing with aspects of social, personal and health education, the most widely disseminated of which were the Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme, the Balance Programme and the Substance Misuse Prevention Programme. Civic, Social and Political Education, introduced in 1997, was compulsory in all post-primary schools at junior cycle.

13. The Equality Committee had addressed the issue of underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions in the education sector, particularly in the light of the increasing harmonization of the teaching profession. It had commissioned research on the current position of women in the management structure of schools and had followed such research with a series of pilot courses designed specifically for women who were interested in seeking promotion to decision-making positions. The number of women in decision-making positions in the Department had increased significantly in recent years. Gender equality would

continue to be expected in the appointment of primary school principals, teachers and Board of Management members.

14. **Mr. Quirke** (Ireland) said that the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, which had been launched in April 1997, set out to reduce poverty and social exclusion both in general terms and in a number of key policy areas: unemployment, income adequacy, educational disadvantage, disadvantaged urban areas and rural poverty. Implementation of the strategy was supported by the social partners through the current national agreement, Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness. The Government had adopted guidelines to ensure that all Government decisions took into account their impact on poverty. The global target of the Strategy aimed at considerably reducing the numbers of those who were “consistently poor” to less than 5 per cent to 10 per cent of the population over the 10-year period from 1997 to 2007. Recent published data showed that that target had been virtually achieved. In the light of progress made over the past two years as a result of Ireland’s vibrant economy and rapidly falling unemployment, the Government’s social inclusion targets had been reviewed to reduce consistent poverty to below 5 per cent by 2004, unemployment to below 5 per cent by 2002 and long-term unemployment to 2.5 per cent by 2002. Specific targets were also being considered for adult literacy and children living in poverty.

15. A key principle underlying the National Anti-Poverty Strategy was the reduction of inequalities, especially by addressing the gender dimensions of poverty. Thus, all Government departments had been instructed to review their main policy formulations in terms of their anti-poverty impact, with special attention to lone- and single-parent households. In order to ensure fair State support to households of all types while at the same time providing assistance for families at special risk, a working group was examining the tax and social-welfare treatment of married, cohabiting and one-parent households and would report to the Government shortly. Recognizing the particular problems of poor and marginalized women in both urban and rural areas, and the importance of action by women’s groups, all Government departments in their grant schemes favoured community-based and family-support initiatives targeting disadvantaged women.

16. **Ms. Kelly** (Ireland) said, with reference to the Government’s regular review of its reservations to the Convention, that it had decided to retain the reservation to article 11, paragraph 1, because of a limited number of exclusions that it still deemed necessary, in the interests either of efficient law enforcement in potentially violent situations or of privacy and decency, when it came to employment in the police and defence forces, in the prison services and in services of a personal nature such as care of the elderly or disabled. It should be noted, however, that the Employment Equality Act, 1998 had recently further restricted the scope of such gender-based derogations from the right to employment. Ireland was also maintaining its reservation to article 13 (a) because it wished for the time being to retain certain social security provisions favourable to women, namely the entitlement of mothers, rather than fathers, to the child benefit, and the transitional entitlement of deserted wives and lone parents formerly eligible for allowances that were no longer available under the current one-parent family payment scheme.

17. Its reservation to article 13 (b) and (c) would be withdrawn when the pending Equal Status Bill, prohibiting discrimination outside the workplace with specific regard to access to financial credit and recreational facilities, was enacted. Furthermore, on the advice of Ireland’s Attorney General, Government approval was being sought for withdrawal of Ireland’s reservation to article 15, paragraph 3, originally intended to protect the right of women to enter into contracts but now deemed legally unnecessary. On the other hand, the Government would maintain its reservation to article 16, paragraph 1 (d) and (f), because it planned to retain existing legislation regarding the guardianship of children born outside marriage that was more favourable to women, even though recent amendments had facilitated the recognition of the fathers as guardians.

18. Turning to the situation of vulnerable women, and of Traveller women in particular, she said that the 1995 report of a Government task force on the needs of Travellers had issued a number of recommendations specifically regarding Traveller women. In particular, it had recommended reviewing all current policies and practices to detect gender discrimination in the various fields such as housing, education and health, and monitoring all future initiatives in each area; making funds available for collecting data on Traveller women;

and making the advancement of Traveller women a priority in the move towards equality for all women.

19. Since Travellers did not avail themselves sufficiently of health services and their health was, as a result, substantially poorer, the Government's policy focused on establishing outreach services and on-site clinics for them. A promising 1994 project sponsored by the regional Health Board for the Dublin area in conjunction with one of the non-governmental organizations serving that itinerant group, which was now being replicated in four other regions, had involved training Traveller women in the delivery of primary health care, thus using them to bridge the gap between the health services and the Traveller community.

20. In 1998, the Department of Education and Science had established a Traveller education coordinating committee to draw up a comprehensive plan, with targets, for the implementation of the task force's recommendations. The Department's policy aimed at total integration of Traveller children in both primary and secondary schools, by means of the appointment of a national education officer for Traveller education, the use of visiting teachers and resource teachers for Travellers, and support for pre-school centres. The Department's mainstreaming policy would ensure that the gender perspective would be included in monitoring and reporting Traveller participation in education and training programmes.

21. With regard to another vulnerable category, disabled women, substantial progress had been made since the 1996 report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities in promoting equal opportunities for them. A Minister of State with special responsibility for disability and equality had been appointed, and State funding had been provided for the newly-established Irish Council of People with Disabilities and for six pilot projects aimed at empowering the disabled within their communities and facilitating user participation in service planning and delivery. Substantial investment had also been made in health and education services for the disabled. Indeed, Ireland had been cited in 1998 as the nation that had made the most noteworthy national progress towards the goal of full participation of citizens with disabilities.

22. As to the vulnerable category of refugees and asylum-seekers, the Refugee Act, 1996, went beyond

the definition given in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees by defining the term "membership of a particular social group" to include, *inter alia*, membership of a group of persons whose defining characteristic was their belonging to the female or the male sex. The various initiatives taken over the past year or so, which applied to all asylum-seekers, had included, in particular, comprehensive training by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) of all staff engaged in interviewing asylum-seekers; the establishment of a best-practice approach in dealing with vulnerable categories of refugees; and the establishment of a single centre housing the staff processing asylum applications, the medical screening units, the independent appeals authorities, the refugee legal service, a documentation research facility and translation services.

23. The regional Health Board for the Dublin area offered a comprehensive range of medical and social support services for refugees and asylum-seekers, and the Refugee Legal Service assisted asylum-seekers at all stages of the asylum process. Women constituted approximately 3 per cent of the prison population at any give time, and most had a history of drug and alcohol abuse and unstable relationships. A new women's prison would be replacing existing inadequate accommodations and provide education, work training, physical education facilities, a medically supervised detoxification programme and psychiatric counselling.

24. **Mr. Fitzgerald** (Ireland), speaking on health issues, said that the National Plan for Women's Health, 1997-1999, had four main objectives: to maximize the health and social gains of Irish women; to create a women-friendly health service; to increase consultation with women and their representation in health services; and to enhance the contribution of the health services to the promotion of women's health in the developing world. A Women's Health Council had been established in June 1997 pursuant to the Plan, in order to ensure participation by women in the policy-making process. Its main functions were to develop a centre of expertise on women's health, foster research into women's health, evaluate the success of the Plan in meeting its objectives, and advise the Minister for Health on the relevant issues. The Council included members of the National Women's Council of Ireland and representatives of other professions closely

involved with women's health, women in the labour force and service providers.

25. The eight regional Health Boards were all engaged in preparing and implementing regional plans in accordance with the national policy. The Government was committed to improving the health of Irish women and to do so through a health service that was sensitive to women's needs and reached all women. Among the steps taken had been the establishment of a phased National Breast Screening Programme to implement proposals under the National Cancer Strategy. Phase I, which would begin later in the year, would target 120,000 women aged 50 to 64, approximately 50 per cent of the national target population. A national steering committee had been established for the programme, and the Department of Health and Children had made almost £3 million available to meet the 1999 costs and facilitate the start of screening.

26. In addition, the National Cervical Screening Programme, set up under the National Cancer Strategy, was to provide screening for women aged 25 to 60 at least every five years, giving them the choice of service provider. Since the introduction of an organized screening programme was such a formidable task, it had been decided that it should be carried out on a phased basis. It was now expected that the screening of 67,000 women in the target group would begin in early 2000, with subsequent extension to women in other Health Board areas.

27. With regard to family planning, the sharp decline in the Irish birth rate — it had stood at below the population-replacement level of 2.1 since 1995 — indicated the extent to which women were controlling their fertility. Furthermore, Ireland had for some time enjoyed low maternal-mortality rates that were among the best worldwide — down from approximately 31 per 1,000 live births in 1970 to approximately 2 in 1996 — reflecting the excellent prenatal and obstetrics services available in the country. Since the International Conference on Population and Development, the Government had developed a family planning policy based on the principle that all individuals should have the freedom to decide the number and spacing of their children.

28. Each Health Board was required to ensure that an equitable, accessible and comprehensive family planning service was available in its area. Services

were generally provided through general medical practitioners, specialized family planning clinics, maternity hospitals or units, or a combination of those, and free choice of service provider was offered. The services were available free of charge to those who passed a means test. The sale of condoms had been deregulated a number of years earlier and they were widely available. Male and female sterilization were among the options available.

29. Despite those recent improvements, family planning services needed to be developed further outside the major urban areas, so that voluntary organizations, in addition to general medical practitioners, could become more involved in the provision of services, in the interest of greater choice. The Government had made additional funding available to develop counselling services in family planning and pregnancy. The strategies employed would need to be long-term in their approach, so that informed young people would take a responsible approach to relationships and so minimize the likelihood of unwanted pregnancy. To reach those who were no longer in full-time education would be the greater challenge.

30. Although the Department of Health and Children had always considered breastfeeding the preferred method of feeding babies, the means by which it carried out that policy had evolved along with advances in the areas of health promotion and education. The National Committee to Promote Breastfeeding had, in 1994, published a text entitled "A National Breastfeeding Policy for Ireland", which had defined its goals as increasing the percentage of mothers in all socio-economic groups who breastfed, and increasing the number of mothers who exclusively breastfed for the first four months and thereafter used a combination of breastfeeding and weaning foods. That text had guided breastfeeding policy in Ireland ever since.

31. The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative, a global campaign conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) with a view to encouraging hospitals and health workers to support mothers who breastfed their babies, had recently been launched in Ireland. The Department of Health and Children also supported the valuable work of such organizations as La Leche League of Ireland, the Irish Childbirth Trust and the Irish Association of Lactation Consultants. The

fundamental principle underlying the Government's policy was, however, a mother's right to make an informed choice about feeding her baby.

32. In keeping with its National Health Promotion Strategy, the Department of Health and Children had published a report entitled "Youth as a Resource — Promoting the Health of Young People at Risk", which was designed to prevent discrimination against young women. Its recommendations would be implemented by the various sectors that addressed the health needs of young people. Two surveys regarding the health-related behaviour of adults and school-going young people had been conducted in 1998 in order to assemble reliable data on a representative cross-section of the Irish population for the Department's future policies and programmes and establish a survey protocol which would reassess lifestyle factors with a view to setting out national and regional health priorities.

33. The surveys had measured seven key areas: general health, smoking, alcohol, food and nutrition, exercise, cholesterol and accidents. Some of those areas had been evaluated in relation to gender and socio-economic status for the first time. The statistical information gathered should enable the Department to target interventions for such specific audiences as young women.

34. Serious drug abuse was largely confined to parts of Dublin. Local drug task forces, which represented a partnership between the statutory, voluntary and community sectors, had been set up in the worst areas. The task forces, which had prepared action plans relating to treatment, rehabilitation, education, prevention and curbing local supply, had achieved significant successes, particularly through their emphasis on community participation in responding to local needs. The Young People's Facilities and Services Fund had been set up to establish youth facilities and support services in areas where drug problems existed or might arise.

35. **Mr. McDonagh** (Ireland) said that the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform was responsible for a range of measures, legislative and otherwise, which sought to promote equality of treatment for social groups that suffered from discrimination, disadvantage and disability through institutional, administrative and legal reforms and actions. Among them was the Employment Equality

Act, 1998 — a major step in the creation of a more equal society — which outlawed discrimination on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership in the Traveller community, and provided for the creation, in 1999, of the Equality Authority and the office of the Director of Equality Investigations.

36. A complement to the Act was the recently published revised Equal Status Bill, which provided protection against discrimination in the supply of goods and services, including accommodation, in non-workplace areas on the same nine grounds. Underlying all equality legislation was the basic principle that people should be judged on their merits as individuals rather than as members of a group.

37. In response to the 1997 Task Force Report on Violence Against Women, the Government, deeply concerned about that issue, had established the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women. The Committee, which represented a wide range of interests, was endeavouring to develop a cohesive and multidisciplinary national response. Its objectives included establishing regional and local structures, developing public awareness campaigns, coordinating the distribution of resources to the eight health-board regions, and developing policies on the provision of services and support as well as on the treatment of perpetrators and intervention by the criminal justice system. Regional committees on violence had been set up in the various health-board regions, and were seeking to provide a sympathetic and consolidated approach to the treatment of victims of violence.

38. In addition, the Department of Health and Children channelled funds to refuges and rape crisis centres through the health boards. The refuges were designed to provide safety, help and support to women and children who were victims of domestic violence and provide an environment which would empower women to make informed and independent choices. The rape crisis centres were designed to provide immediate support, advice and information to victims of rape and sexual abuse through telephone counselling and one-to-one counselling; they acted as a link with health boards, police, doctors and other agencies; provided long-term therapy to adult victims of child sexual abuse; trained professionals; and sponsored educational programmes on all aspects of sexual abuse.

39. An assistant police commissioner had been assigned to monitor all cases of violence against women. Furthermore, all members of the police were trained to investigate cases of domestic violence, rape and sexual assault; and psychologists, doctors, social workers and experts from non-governmental organizations participated in that effort. At the victim's request, every effort was made to assign a woman investigator to the case. Lastly, Ireland had supported the formulation of a strong optional protocol to the Convention, and hoped to ratify that instrument soon after it opened for signature.

40. **Ms. Kim Yung-chung** commended Ireland for the combined second and third periodic reports and the replies to the list of issues, which together provided a vast amount of information; in particular on legislative reform, policy development and its comprehensive health and education programmes. She would like more information, however, on efforts undertaken by the Government to protect women's human rights, in particular the human rights of women belonging to disadvantaged groups, especially the Travellers.

41. Ireland had entered more reservations to the Convention than most other States parties, some of which, according to the Government, were grounded in the idea that the national legislation provided greater protections than the Convention. She was aware that the Government had begun the process of withdrawing some of those reservations and urged it to set out a time frame for withdrawing them all. The Committee would like to know the real situation of Irish women under the Convention and the factors and difficulties that were impeding its full implementation.

42. She praised the Government for the current economic boom in that country, which permitted it to implement positive measures on behalf of women, and wondered how budgetary funds were allocated for women, and what the meaning of the term "structural fund" was. The Committee was interested in the real impact of governmental measures of disadvantaged groups, in particular Travellers and asylum-seekers. Did programmes in fact reach them? It would be useful to know what measures, if any, had been taken to integrate such groups into Irish society. Finally, no mention had been made of abortion, a matter of significant concern to women.

43. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** praised Ireland for the wealth of information that it had provided. First and

foremost, she requested the Government to provide information on the results of recent measures in its next periodic report. No statistics had been furnished on the impact of poverty on women or its causes. Nor had figures been provided on current childcare provisions. It would be useful to know how many childcare centres existed, what age groups they serviced, and who was responsible for running them. She was disturbed by the assertion that childcare was seen as the primary responsibility of parents. In modern society, it must be a social undertaking actively supported by Government.

44. The human rights commission currently being set up under the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 would apparently exclude the Convention from its terms of reference because it did not include instruments not enshrined in the national law. Since the Convention had not been incorporated into the national law, and the Constitution did not embrace all its provisions, she urged the Government of Ireland to include international human rights instruments in the new Commission's terms of reference. More information on that matter would also be welcome.

45. In its response to question 4 of the list of issues, the Government had made no mention of article 41 of the Constitution, which recognized women's role in the home. Although that role was deserving of praise, it should be shared by both sexes. It would be useful to know the Government's intentions with regard to the proposal to rescind that article, put forward by the Second National Commission on the Status of Women. It would also be interesting to know whether the Equal Status Bill, which posited that a person should be judged on individual merits rather than as a member of a group, ruled out the temporary special measures provided under article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention. How, moreover, did the Government intend to overcome centuries of discrimination if such measures were not taken?

46. Although the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act 1974 contained an interesting and valuable definition of equal pay for work of equal value, that concept was based on a comparison between the pay of men and women engaged in the same occupation. The labour market, however, was made up of occupations that were largely dominated by one or the other sex and therefore reflected a bias against work by women. She urged Ireland to contemplate adopting the notion of equal pay for work of comparable value, which

required a comparison between occupations of equal value. In addition, trade unions should be invited to participate in that endeavour.

47. She wondered whether the special measures envisaged in article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention could be invoked under the terms of the Employment Equality Act 1998, and whether the Government had considered setting out targets and timetables for achieving its goals. The report mentioned that work done by women in the home had begun to be recognized in the budget; more information would be welcome in that regard. She strongly urged the Government to make provisions for paid parental leave, since fathers would otherwise not be able to make use of it, and to ensure proper working conditions, including the provision of childcare, to women working at home. Lastly, she inquired whether Ireland had contemplated relying on national rather than European Union sources to fund its programmes and measures for women.

48. **Ms. Ouedraogo** said that the Government deserved congratulations for its efforts to eliminate gender stereotypes, particularly in the areas of advertising and education, although she would have liked to receive more specific information on their impact. Little information had been given about sexual harassment in the workplace, schools or prisons, which should also be considered violence and discrimination against women, and, along with domestic violence, arose from a general view of women as objects. She appreciated the frank discussion of the unequal division of family responsibilities, but would like to know if any measures other than parental leave for fathers had been taken to redress that imbalance. Concerning rural women, she would like to know more about the impact of legislative reform on land ownership. Perhaps the next report could provide statistics comparing the situations of rural and urban women.

49. **Ms. Manalo** asked whether the results of the pilot Women's Education Initiative had been positive and, if so, if there were any plans to make it a permanent programme. She would also like to know whether members of the legal profession were undergoing gender sensitivity training.

50. **Ms. Khan** said that she found it unacceptable that, in an advanced country such as Ireland, the Constitutional guarantee of equality did not extend to

the private sphere of life. The report and the oral presentation had described many innovative approaches to problems, but had not given a very clear sense of their impact. On the subject of women's participation in politics, she would like to know whether the executive power of Government lay with the President or the Prime Minister, and whether there had ever been a woman Prime Minister. She had noted that many women worked part-time but wondered if their marital status affected job stability and if childcare was available to them. The poverty programmes mentioned were a positive step, and she asked if they covered refugee and Traveller women and women migrant workers. Finally, she would be interested to know why the minimum wage provisions would not be implemented until mid-2000.

51. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that the discussion of family-friendly policies in the workplace and in political parties had left her with the impression that they actually reinforced the idea that women were responsible for the family. The Government should promote better understanding among both men and women of the importance of women's increased political participation and men's greater involvement with the family. Finally, she would like to see data on the impact of violence and sexual abuse on girls.

52. **Ms. Ferrer** said that more statistical information was needed on women in poverty to give an accurate picture of the nature and magnitude of the problem. Although refugee and migrant women were few in number, it would be interesting to know to what extent they had been able to enter the workforce. Given the general lack of infrastructure for childcare, Government efforts in that area would be important in promoting women's employment. Although there were no major problems with negative images of women in the mass media, she wondered if the media were being used positively to educate women about their rights. She would also like to know if the review of textbooks mentioned in the report had been completed. Finally, more information was needed on action in the Supreme Court to legalize abortion.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.