



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

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Fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 50th MEETING

Held at the Vienna International Centre, Vienna,
on Wednesday, 23 January 1985 at 2.30 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BERNARD

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The meeting was called to order at 2.40 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES (continued)

Initial report of Bulgaria (CEDAW/C/5/Add.15)

1. Ms. EL-FETOUH said that she was struck by the very high percentage of eligible women voters reported as voting in elections. Was the percentage calculated for a specific year, as an average over a number of years, or by some other statistical method? How did the authorities persuade women to participate so massively in the electoral process? Many countries where the difficulty of making women aware of their political rights constituted a major obstacle to achieving the Convention's objectives would wish to benefit from Bulgaria's experience in that respect.

2. Referring to the information under article 8, she asked whether women were recruited to diplomatic posts by competitive examination or by direct appointment. How many women were actually serving in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? In what way were women involved in the decision-making process? Referring to article 16, she noted that one of the conditions for the annulment of a marriage was acceptance of payment for a bride by a parent or relative. Further information on that point would be helpful. Surely marriage was a contract like any other, and she found it difficult to see how it could be annulled by the State for reasons not directly involving the contracting parties.

3. Ms. GONZALEZ asked for further information on specific projects carried out by the Bulgarian Women's Movement. With regard to article 7, she noted that women accounted for 29.7 per cent of the membership of the Bulgarian Communist Party and 13.1 per cent of the Bulgarian Agricultural Popular Union (CEDAW/C/5/Add.15, p. 8). The latter figure seemed rather low considering the high proportion of women in Bulgaria's agricultural labour force. Some clarification would be welcome. Associating herself with questions already formulated in connection with article 8, she said that it would be interesting to hear in what particular areas women were employed as specialists in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Referring to article 9, she noted that Bulgarian women had equal rights with men in respect of the nationality of their children. Could a Bulgarian woman married to a foreigner transmit Bulgarian nationality to her children? If she took her husband's nationality, could she recover Bulgarian nationality after a divorce? With regard to article 11, she asked the criteria for establishing the various labour categories referred to on page 15 of the report. Under the same article, the report stated that women were excluded from a number of operative jobs in the mining, metallurgical, metal-working and chemical industries and some jobs in the printing, meat-processing and construction industries. Was there any special reason for such exclusion, or was it the result of traditional male attitudes? In that connection, she referred to an ILO Convention prescribing the exclusion of women from work in mines. That restriction had now been recognized as an idea belonging to the past.

4. Referring to the information provided under article 13 to the effect that women were eligible for State loans for housing purchase, she asked whether that right was also extended to single women and to Bulgarian women married to a foreigner. In connection with the statement under article 12 that married women were permitted to have abortions only if they already had two children, she wondered what happened if a married woman and her husband decided not to have children. Lastly, she commented upon the excellence of Bulgarian kindergartens, which she had had occasion to inspect on a recent visit to Sofia.

5. Ms. MONTENEGRO DE FLETCHER said that the report mentioned the legal provisions regarding the division of property in the event of divorce. She noted that, according to the information given under article 12 (CEDAW/C/5/Add.15, p. 18), the standard family in Bulgaria consisted of the parents and two children. What was the situation with regard to common law marriages? Was the protection available to married women extended to a single woman living with a man in such a union? She would also like clarification of the statement (page 19) that unmarried women were permitted to have abortions at will.

6. Ms. VELIZ DE VILLALVILLA asked to what extent forced marriages occurred in Bulgaria and what educational work was being done with a view to eradicating the practice. With regard to maternity leave, she asked whether women were obliged to stop work 45 days before confinement. What percentage of women returned to work after maternity leave? On the subject of education (article 10), she asked what percentage of Bulgarian women obtained degrees in higher education. Further information would also be welcome on the work done by the Bulgarian Communist Party, particularly through the use of the mass media, to change stereotype attitudes affecting women. What steps were taken to improve the proportion of women in responsible management posts and to lighten the burden of domestic duties? Lastly, noting that a question had already been asked about the participation of women in medical services, she requested that the reply should include information concerning women's participation in the medical services of Bulgaria's armed forces.

7. Ms. Lagadinova (Bulgaria) withdrew.

Initial report of Panama (CEDAW/C/5/Add.9)

8. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Koref (Panama) took a place at the Committee table.

9. Mr. KOREF (Panama), introducing the initial report of Panama (CEDAW/C/5/Add.9), said that Panamanian legislation provided equal rights for women in all respects and protection for them at all stages, including maternity. This protection might sometimes lead some employers to prefer to employ men rather than women, who might have to be absent from work because of maternity. Panamanian law prescribed equal pay for equal work, but unfortunately it was often possible to classify women's work a little differently and pay them less than men in similar positions.

10. In Panama there had for a long time been a migration of women to the towns, especially the capital, to seek better paid work. More than a third of the working population were women. The number of unemployed women in the provincial capitals, where there were 7 per cent more women than men (compared with only 89 women to 100 men in rural areas), was almost double the number of unemployed men.

11. In primary and secondary education in Panama girls were in the majority, and the illiteracy rate for women (11.6 per cent) was lower than for men (12.1 per cent). More than half the students at university were women. Careers chosen by women included such previously masculine occupations as engineering and geology.

12. Approximately one-third of the working women in Panama were in domestic service, the majority of the remainder being operatives. However, there was an impressive number of women in supervisory posts, many of them at management level in commerce, industry and especially government.

(Mr. Koref, Panama)

13. Under Panamanian law all women over 18 had the same right to vote as men and they could exercise all public functions. A "Code for the Family and the Minor" had been under preparation for some time, and it was hoped that that Code would soon become law, bringing greater benefits and security to women and children.

14. There were many highly qualified women in government offices, including one Minister. In the governmental technical assistance departments and in many Panamanian banks women were in the majority.

15. For more than 40 years Panama had had a very efficient social security system, providing free medical treatment to employees and their dependants. Pensions were paid to retired employees; men retired at 60 and women at 55. There was, of course, no discrimination in the payment of compensation for industrial accidents.

16. Panama had a relatively new Penal Code, containing many provisions favouring women. Particularly important, given the traditionally large number of abandoned families, failure to maintain the family had become a punishable offence, with the possibility of a prison sentence.

17. Panamanian law expressly stated that marriage was the legal basis of the family, based on equality between the spouses. Under certain circumstances de facto marriage was recognized. The Civil Code provided 11 grounds for divorce (CEDAW/C/5/Add.9, p. 25). With regard to establishment of domicile, the wife took the domicile of the husband unless there was express agreement to the contrary. Women had unrestricted rights to administer and dispose of their property. A married woman was not considered a merchant except when she was carrying on business separately from her husband.

18. Parental authority belonged to both progenitors, taking into account the interests of the children, and the children were obliged to obey them while they remained under their authority. There was a Minors' Guardianship Tribunal to decide on the best interests of the children where there were differences between the parents. The law had abolished all distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate children.

19. He wished to draw the Committee's attention to the Office for the Promotion and Training of Women, an organ of the National Directorate for the Child and the Family, a department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. This Office was promoting the socio-economic development and equality of women, in order to give them genuine access to new fields of activity with higher levels of remuneration and responsibility. It ran seminars and conferences and promoted small or domestic businesses. Free legal advice was offered to women. The Director of the Office was also co-ordinator for the National Commission for the Integration of Women in Development. This Commission, including representatives of several ministries and women in senior government positions, gave priority attention to unmarried mothers.

20. Panama, with two big ports and its canal, was naturally faced with the problem of traffic in women and prostitution. Pages 15-22 of the report quoted the main legislative provisions in that regard.

21. Ms. CARON said that the Government of Panama was to be congratulated on the setting up of the Office for the Promotion and Training of Women, which was indeed a most important achievement. Referring to the statement in the report to the effect that the number of women joining the work-force was increasing because wives felt a responsibility for lightening the economic load placed on the husband, she wondered whether the implication was that in Panama it was considered normal for the husband to bear full economic responsibility for the family. Referring to the statement that women had been more severely affected by unemployment than men, she asked whether any special measures were envisaged in that connection. Likewise, were any measures envisaged or applied with regard to violations of the principle of wage equality?

22. What was the total membership of the National Assembly, and what was the percentage of women deputies? What was the number of women ministers? On the subject of maternity leave, she asked whether the compulsory period of 14 weeks could be divided up differently from the manner specified. What happened in cases of premature confinement? Could the leave lost prior to confinement be added to the period of eight weeks following it? With regard to prostitution, she noted that Law No. 4 quoted on page 16 of the report appeared to suggest that only women were potential "subjects for rehabilitation". Some additional explanation would be appreciated. Similarly, article 3 of Decree No. 857 mentioned on page 16 did not make it clear whether the persons whom the police could detain if discovered in the act of carrying out libidinous activities might be men as well as women. With regard to the information on marriage (page 24), she asked why marriage was prohibited in the case of widows during the 301 days following the death of their husband. Further elucidation would also be welcome on the subject of the grounds for divorce listed on page 25. Lastly, she asked whether unmarried women in Panama had the right to adopt a child.

23. Ms. SINEGIORGIS asked whether the Office for the Promotion and Training of Women had branch offices operating in the interior of the country. Women in rural areas surely needed most to be awakened to their inherent political and civil rights. With regard to the right to equal remuneration for work of equal value, she noted that discrimination against women was practised in that respect despite the legal requirements. What measures were being taken to correct the situation? With regard to the constitutional provision that all Panamanians of more than 18 years of age were citizens of the Republic without distinction of sex, she wondered what the situation was for those under the age of 18. Referring to the statement on page 6 of the report to the effect that the proportion of women voting in elections, like that of women elected to public office, was not encouraging, she asked what was being done to stimulate women's participation in political affairs. Noting that a woman worker in a state of pregnancy could only be dismissed as a result of a justified cause (page 12), she asked what was considered to constitute a justified cause. Lastly, she asked whether the special protection extended to women public servants during pregnancy could not be extended to pregnant women employed in the private sector.

24. Ms. MACEDO DE SHEPPARD welcomed the information that in Panama there was less illiteracy among women than among men and that in certain liberal disciplines there were more female students than men. However, that did not mean that women enjoyed equitable employment opportunities. They were more subject to unemployment, received lower wages, in violation of article 62 of the Constitution, and had great difficulty in reaching decision-making levels. She did not therefore fully agree with the statement on page 9 of the report that the easiest route for establishing wage equality would consist in improving the vocational and institutional

(Ms. Macedo de Sheppard)

preparation of women. The real obstacle was traditional prejudice, which would call for a complete change of attitude. In that connection, the activities of the Office for Women could play a positive role.

25. With regard to the exercise of political rights, it would be useful to have statistics on the number of women voters and candidates so that progress could be judged in future reports. She would also like to know the number of women working in the public service.

26. With regard to working conditions, the prohibition in article 104 of the Labour Code concerning dangerous and unhealthy activities was based on Panama's ratification of ILO Convention No. 45. However, that organization had since suggested the revision of the Convention in view of the technological progress made in connection with such work; in fact such a prohibition unnecessarily restricted women's employment opportunities. She would like to know which version of article 105 of the Labour Code was correct, that given on page 9 or that given on page 12.

27. The first exception to the prohibition of the dismissal of a pregnant woman, namely for a justified cause, was too vague and dependent on the subjective judgement of the employer. Again, what was meant in Panamanian law by "compliance by writ" in the last paragraph of section C (h) on page 13? She also wondered what was meant by "mixed working" in section C (j); was the health service, which had a preponderance of women employees, really an exception to that prohibition? She would like further details of the resources available to female public servants to appeal against a negative decision on a claim submitted through administrative channels.

28. With regard to penal legislation, was the new Code already in force and if so could the Committee be informed of its provisions?

29. With regard to prostitution, she would like clarification of the powers of the police. She would also like to know the implications of the category "Subject for Rehabilitation" mentioned in Law No. 4, article 1 (CEDAW/C/5/Add.9, p. 16), and what body judged whether or not dramatic works presented matters contrary to morals under article 1290 of the Administrative Code (CEDAW/C/5/Add.9, p. 17). Two more expressions she would like defined were "women of known ill-repute" and "responsible persons" under article 3 of Decree 857 (CEDAW/C/5/Add.9, p. 19). It would also be interesting to know on what basis article 229 of the Penal Code applied to a girl "considerably younger than 12 years of age or a boy who has not reached 14" (page 22).

30. She did not understand why the last paragraph in section G (c) on page 25 referred to a discriminatory situation in relation to men. In fact there was discrimination against women, since any form of adultery by the wife was considered a ground for divorce whereas in the case of a man only flagrant concubinage was such a ground.

31. She wondered why, if the equivocal provisions in the Commercial Code were not applied in practice (section G (e), page 26), they had not been revoked.

32. She requested information concerning the situation of women in the health, social security and trade union sectors.

(Ms. Macedo de Sheppard)

33. She appreciated the steps already taken by the Government of Panama to improve the situation of women, including the provisions of article 53 of the Constitution concerning de facto marriage, and the equal rights given to illegitimate children.

34. Finally, she would like as full details as possible of the achievements of the programmes carried out by the Office for Women.

35. Ms. WADSTEIN said that the situation of women in Panama seemed to be critical in many respects. However, the establishment of the Office for Women provided hope for changes in the future. She would like to know if the resources provided for it were considered adequate and what efforts were being made to integrate women in society.

36. With regard to more specific questions, she would like to know the exact meaning of citizenship as opposed to nationality and majority and how women were treated as compared with men in that respect. The report also referred to the legal status of women. Was that different from that of men? Could women take action in court against discrimination and what remedies and sanctions existed in such cases?

37. Although no legal provisions restricted women's access to public functions, a discriminatory tendency seemed to exist in practice and she would like to know what was being done to encourage women and to eliminate resistance against their appointment by management.

38. She was pleased to hear that the situation with regard to discriminatory penal provisions had been improved, but further improvements could still be made.

39. In the part of the report devoted to prostitution, it was described as a chargeable behaviour pattern (page 16). Was the client or the prostitute chargeable, or both? What was meant by being of ill-repute and how did a woman become known to be of ill-repute? Could a man be so qualified, and if not, why not?

40. The tendency to excessive protection of women in employment might cause discrimination. She would like further comments on that matter and also to know why night work was considered more suitable for men than women.

41. Average life expectancy was given as a reason for a lower retirement age for women. That was surprising and she wondered if life expectancy for women was lower than for men in Panama.

42. Ms. EVATT expressed satisfaction that Panama had begun the lengthy task of transforming its society to ensure the independence of women in the economy and in society. Under civil law, which needed substantial review, the male was given the predominant role. However, important steps had already been taken to improve the situation.

43. With regard to the lack of work for women in rural areas and the population drift to the towns, great progress was being made under the working programmes of the Department for the Promotion and Training of Women described in the annex to the report, and especially through the National Commission for the Integration of Women in Development.

(Ms. Evatt)

44. Her first question was whether there had been any report on the progress of the Colon Project and if it had been successful and was being extended. Also, what was the population balance between the towns and the country and were any other steps being taken to ensure that women had opportunities for employment in rural areas in order to stop the drift to the towns? What was being done to ensure diversification of employment for women and how could the difference in earning levels described in the report be reconciled with the principle of equal pay set forth in article 62 of the Constitution? Were there provisions to enable women to challenge any refusal of employment or dismissal on discriminatory grounds before a court? With regard to education and training, did girls have access to vocational training and apprenticeship on the same terms as boys and what was the proportion of girls entering technical training? Was there a difference in actual school-leaving age between girls and boys? Were figures available to show what percentage of members of the legal profession, including judges, were women?

45. Since women in general had a longer life expectancy, their earlier retirement age was presumably based on their efficiency and capacity for working. She would like to know if it was women's efficiency which was being questioned or that of men.

46. She wondered if women resumed work after maternity leave on a full-time basis and if the State contributed to the cost of nursery or child-care facilities or if it was the responsibility of the employer.

47. Ms. BIRYUKOVA said that the Government of Panama was evidently anxious to overcome all existing obstacles to the complete elimination of discrimination against women. The establishment of an Office for the Promotion and Training of Women should be regarded as a highly positive factor. However, the report gave the impression that machinery for monitoring the implementation of the Convention was not yet sufficiently efficient. Referring to the statement that women were joining the work-force in increasing numbers because they wanted to lighten the economic load placed on the husband (page 1 of the report), she remarked that in her country women regarded themselves as individuals in their own right participating in economic, political and social life on an equal footing with men. Some further elucidation of the Government's view of the role of women in economic and political life was called for. Referring to the inequality of wages between men and women mentioned on page 3 of the report, she asked what the Government was doing to eliminate such discrimination. Lastly, referring to the statement on page 16 of the report that prostitution in Panama did not have the status of a criminal offence, she asked why, in that case, there were so many laws concerning prostitution.

48. Ms. LAIOU-ANTONIOU emphasized the importance of the establishment of the Office for Women in the Republic of Panama. Much remained to be done in that country to implement the Convention but, with real political will on the part of the Government, that Office, in co-operation with the competent ministries and other social organizations, could play a very positive role. Some of the information in the report showed that women were second-class citizens. For instance, page 3 of the report showed that women received lower salaries than men. According to the last paragraph on that page, differences in education in some cases favoured women. She would like to know what those differences were. Also, what steps were being taken to change professional orientation and abolish stereotypes.

(Ms. Laiou-Antoniou)

49. Although she considered the compulsory maternity leave provided for in article 67 of the Constitution an infringement of the rights of working women, the prohibition in the same article of dismissal for a mother less than one year after she returned to work was a positive measure. She would like, however, to know why women lost their benefits if they wanted to work until the last day of their pregnancy, and under what conditions a woman could have an abortion. She also wondered if the nursing breaks mentioned in section C (e) (page 11) were good for the health of the children and if they did not show a lack of social infrastructure in Panama. How was a pregnant woman protected when dismissed in cases of reduction of personnel? The prohibition of overtime and night work for pregnant women was also a discrimination, since pregnancy was not a disease and pregnant women should have freedom of choice, based on adequate health education.

50. With regard to prostitution, police seemed to interfere too much in the lives of disadvantaged people. On the other hand, in view of the extent of the problem, social programmes for rehabilitation and reintegration into society appeared inadequate. The sentence of six months to one year's imprisonment for perverting or corrupting a person between the ages of 12 to 15 seemed very light.

51. The Family Law regulations were the classic regulations of a patriarchal society which had existed in her own country before the amendments made to that Law by the Socialist Government in 1983. The experience of Greece showed the importance of the creation of a Family Court in order to implement progressive amendments introduced to the Family Code, the subtleties of which ordinary judges found difficult to understand. She was pleased that the Government of Panama had recognized that need and hoped that steps would soon be taken to improve the situation.

52. Ms. JAYASINGHE agreed with the preceding speaker that the establishment of the Office for Women in Panama was a very promising development. Currently, although article 67 of the Constitution provided for equal pay for equal work under identical conditions, the report showed that in actual practice women received substantially lower remuneration, even at the professional level. She would like to know what steps the Government had taken to eliminate that inequality and enforce compliance with the Constitution.

53. She also wondered what action the Government or the Office for Women were taking to increase the political participation of women, both as voters and as candidates.

54. With regard to education, she would like details of the school enrolment rates and achievements for girls and boys at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. She also requested an employment profile of women at the lower, middle and higher levels and information on the possibilities for women in non-traditional employment as well as their prospects of promotion.

55. Ms. GONZALEZ asked if there were any other guarantees of equality between men and women, such as a provision that they were equal before the law, in addition to article 118 of the Constitution. Also, was there any programme to awaken the interest of women and encourage their participation in political life as voters or candidates? Were there any programmes other than those contained in the annex concerning the Office for Women designed to train women and give them wider access to better and non-traditional employment? What legal instruments protected women

(Ms. Gonzalez)

in the public service? She endorsed Ms. Caron's questions about prostitution and would also like to know if a woman could remarry before the 300 days following the death of her husband. The legislation on the grounds for divorce was a clear violation of article 2 of the Convention. She would however like to know the definition of concubinage (CEDAW/C/5/Add.9, p. 25) in the Civil Code, because in Mexico it could not exist if one party was married and therefore could never become a cause for divorce. With regard to the seventh ground for divorce, what were a wife's duties as a spouse?

56. The last paragraph on page 29 referred to provisions in articles 149-157 of the Civil Code which were obsolete. She would like more details of those provisions and to know if the Government did not think that they should be amended if they were discriminatory.

57. The last question concerned the extent of participation of women in the public service. How many women were employed, in particular in the foreign service, at what level and in what branches?

58. Ms. ILIĆ asked whether there was any government department or social service organization responsible for making women aware of their right to establish their conjugal domicile by common agreement.

59. While welcoming the vocational training project described on page 39 of the Panamanian report (CEDAW/C/5/Add.9) in principle, she felt that a programme limited to the production of typical Panamanian foods could only represent a first step in the promotion of productive employment among women. Was the Panamanian Government contemplating the establishment of similar projects in other fields of economic activity?

60. She noted with concern that the minimum legal age for marriage was 12 in the case of girls and 14 in the case of boys. She wondered whether any steps were being taken to discourage marriage at such an early age, either in direct contact with the young people concerned or through their parents, and if so which government department was responsible.

61. Similarly, was there any institution in Panama concerned with encouraging prostitutes to take up productive employment and giving them the necessary vocational training?

62. In conclusion, she would like a statistical analysis of the number of children born out of wedlock in Panama, broken down with reference to sex and mothers' age and education, etc.

63. Ms. EVATT, referring to the subject of family maintenance, inquired whether the Government contributed towards the cost of child-care and nursery facilities. Did article 213 of the Penal Code on the penalties for failure to fulfil family maintenance duties apply to women as well as men? In her opinion, the penalty of imprisonment that could be imposed under that article was hardly a suitable way of ensuring that families were properly maintained. Did the Panamanian Government apply any other measures to ensure adequate support for dependants?

(Ms. Evatt)

64. Some of the grounds for divorce listed in article 114 of the Civil Code struck her as discriminatory. Moreover, she felt that the breakdown of a marriage should be included as a legitimate reason for divorce and hoped that it would be considered in the new Family Code. Similarly, some of the legal provisions quoted on page 27 of the report appeared to enshrine some measure of discrimination against women in the definition of parental authority and family maintenance duties despite the constitutional principle of joint parental authority. She hoped that that problem, too, would be addressed by the new Family Code. In conclusion, she inquired what were the legal penalties, if any, imposed on a woman who did not meet her legal obligation to follow her husband to his domicile.

65. Ms. CORTES said that the wealth of legislation on the subject of prostitution and protection of pregnant women mentioned in the report appeared to reflect the gravity of those problems in Panama. She therefore requested further statistical material that might enable the Committee to arrive at a fuller appreciation of those problems. It occurred to her that some of the legal provisions aimed at protecting pregnant women might turn out to be counter-productive in that they discouraged employers from hiring women. She was particularly struck by the provision for nursing breaks under article 114 of the Labour Code and wondered to what extent women actually availed themselves of that legal right.

66. It was her understanding that prostitution was not entirely prohibited in Panama but that it could be carried out in certain legally circumscribed conditions. Since article 6 of the Convention referred expressly to the exploitation of prostitution, the arrangements prevailing in Panama might conceivably be considered to be in compliance with the Convention.

67. With regard to the duty to receive education laid down in article 86 of the Panamanian Constitution, she inquired what sanctions were imposed on persons not complying with that duty.

68. In conclusion, she requested clarification concerning the last paragraph on page 29 of the report in which articles 149-157 of the Civil Code were described as obsolete.

69. Ms. MUKAYIRANGA thanked the Government of Panama and the representative of Panama for the information provided on the situation of women in that country. She felt, however, that more details could have been provided on the subjects of health care, the situation of rural women, the representation of women in political life and education at all levels.

70. She did not understand why women were excluded from agricultural work, as stated in the Panamanian report, since agriculture was practically the only productive sector in rural areas. Did women have any access at all to vocational training and modernization programmes in agriculture? In general, did women have the same opportunities to develop their professional skills as men?

71. The passage on literacy campaigns in the report referred only to the non-indigenous population. What was the illiteracy rate amongst indigenous women?

72. She was also puzzled by the report's explanation of the difference in retirement ages between men and women in terms of physiological factors, life expectancy and work efficiency. She was not aware that women had a shorter life expectancy than men in general and wondered why it should be so in Panama.

(Ms. Mukayiranga)

73. The legislation quoted in the report seemed to provide for comparatively long periods of maternity leave. In her own country, employers were frequently discouraged from employing women because of the additional cost involved in complying with labour code provisions of that kind, and she wondered whether it was not the case in Panama that employers either failed to comply with those provisions or preferred not to employ women.

74. With regard to the legislation on prostitution, she asked what exactly was meant by a woman of "ill-repute" and whether the same criteria were applied to men. In the case of violence in the family, was violence perpetrated against minor males viewed as a more serious offence than violence to females?

75. It was discriminatory, in her view, to regard adultery as sufficient grounds for divorce in the case of wives only.

76. Article 58, paragraph 2, of the Constitution provided for institutionalized education for the children of workers. What provisions were there for the children of persons who were not gainfully employed?

77. Finally, she expressed her surprise at the decline of the birth rate in Panama despite the Government's obvious efforts to encourage childbirth and the overpopulation problem of the third world in general.

78. Ms. GUAN MINQIAN thanked the representative of Panama for his lucid introduction to the Panamanian report. Her first request was for more information on the results achieved by the Office for Women established in 1979. In particular, she inquired whether its terms of reference included the promotion of women's participation in political life. Secondly, she was intrigued by the prohibition of renting living quarters to women of ill-repute. She wondered in what way that provision assisted the rehabilitation of prostitutes and, more generally, what the success of the rehabilitation programme for prostitutes had been.

79. Ms. OESER expressed her appreciation for the frank and informative presentation of the situation of women in Panama in the Government's report and in the representative of Panama's introductory statement. She particularly welcomed the establishment of the Office for Women.

80. With regard to the participation of women in political life, she wondered why women in Panama showed such a marked lack of interest in political affairs, given that they enjoyed the same political rights as men.

81. She was struck by the de facto inequality of men's and women's wages despite the constitutional principle of equal pay for equal work. Did that imbalance result from a higher proportion of women in lower-paid jobs, or did employers disregard the relevant legislation? Was the constitutional principle in fact followed through in lower-level legislation, and if so was it adequately enforced in the courts of law?

82. She was concerned by the relatively high illiteracy rate amongst Panamanian women. Would illiteracy be stamped out in the foreseeable future by the provision of free education by the State, or was it likely to be perpetuated by non-attendance of children at school?

(Ms. Oeser)

83. With regard to prostitution, she asked whether it was not in fact regarded as a normal aspect of everyday life in Panama. Did the Government have any plans for changing public attitudes to that phenomenon?

84. She also noted that no family code existed in Panama and that no divorce courts had been established. She therefore requested further information on the divorce procedures in operation in Panama and, in particular, on the defence of the wife's rights in divorce proceedings.

85. Ms. VELIZ DE VILLALVILLA commended the efforts undertaken by the Panamanian Government to improve the situation of women despite the grave economic situation in most countries of the third world, and in particular in Latin America. In that connection, she said that the unemployment figures for 1979 quoted in the Panamanian report did not reflect the more recent increases in unemployment in Latin American countries and wondered whether more up-to-date statistics on the development of male and female unemployment rates were available.

86. The report gave an interesting insight into the wealth of legislation on women's rights in Panama, but she wondered to what extent that legislation was applied in practice. She also requested further information on any non-governmental organizations active in the field of women's rights and on their relations with the Office for Women.

87. With regard to working conditions, she inquired whether women domestic workers had the same access to social security and trade unions as other workers. What was the position of private employers with regard to rural and indigenous women? What career prospects were there for the increased proportion of women enrolled in colleges and universities?

88. She noted with interest that the birth rate had been declining in Panama and wondered whether that was the result of any planned action on the part of the Government.

89. She would also welcome more information on the extent of the prostitution problem in Panama. Was it linked to a drug and alcohol problem, as in many other countries? What steps were being taken to prevent the propagation of an undignified image of women in the mass media?

90. In conclusion, she requested further details on any public campaigns aimed at informing women of their legal and political rights, on any special institutional arrangements for dealing with family law complaints, and on the economic consequences of divorce for women.

91. Ms. IDER said that Panama had developed an impressive system of constitutional and legal provisions which gave extensive consideration to the desirable role of women in public and economic as well as family life. Despite a number of obstacles in the way of full implementation of those provisions in practice, she was convinced of the Panamanian Government's commitment to the ideals of its Constitution and of the Convention.

92. Although the Panamanian report and the representative of Panama's introduction had been most informative, she nevertheless felt that a brief summary of the general economic, social and political situation in Panama would greatly facilitate

(Ms. Ider)

the Committee's understanding of the specific problems affecting women in that country. In particular, she would be interested to learn more about the historical development of the situation of women in Panama.

93. She echoed the requests of previous speakers for an explanation of the low participation of women in political life in Panama, and for further information on the activities and membership of national women's organizations and the provision of social security coverage to women domestic workers.

94. In conclusion, she inquired whether the paid maternity leave guaranteed by law was financed from private contributions or from the national budget, and, in the latter case, what proportion of the budget it accounted for.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.