



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Twenty-third session

Summary record of the 480th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 22 June 2000, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gonzalez

later: Ms. Acar (Rapporteur)

later: Ms. Gonzalez (Chairperson)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

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

Initial and second reports of Lithuania (CEDAW/C/LTU/1 and 2) (continued)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Lithuania took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Šerkšnys** (Lithuania), responding to questions raised by the Committee, said that since its ratification, the Convention had acquired the power of law, joining other international agreements as an integral part of the Lithuanian legal system. Among the channels used by the Government to disseminate information on the provisions of the Convention were mandatory university courses analysing the content of human rights instruments; the establishment of a post for an Equal Opportunities Ombudsman; the publication of the Convention in a compendium of human rights instruments and on the Parliament's web site, and public information campaigns through the mass media. All the internal legal procedures for the accession of Lithuania to the Optional Protocol had been completed, and his Government would also ratify the amendments to article 20 of the Convention.

3. Turning to the question regarding the impact of privatization on the situation of women, he said that the transition to a market economy had created a number of distortions and difficulties. Morbidity, mortality, and the drop-out rate at the level of basic education, and unemployment among women had risen, and the "grey market" had grown, while wage levels in jobs typically held by women had declined. In order to tackle those problems, the Government had introduced a wide range of measures whose socio-economic effects were expected to be far-reaching.

4. **Ms. Burneikienė**, with reference to article 2 of the Convention, said that Parliament had passed the Law on Equal Opportunities in December 1998 and the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman had been established shortly thereafter. The definition of discrimination laid down in the Law not only corresponded to the definition stipulated under article 1 of the Convention, but it also dealt with the violation of equal opportunities for men. The concept of "positive discrimination", also introduced in that Law, did not

preclude the adoption of temporary measures in other domestic laws and regulations because the main purpose of the Law was the implementation of obligations under international human rights instruments.

5. According to the Law, administrative sanctions could be imposed on both private and public persons and institutions, and the decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman was mandatory, with allowance for the right of appeal. She gave a detailed description of the role and duties of the Ombudsman and a brief summary of investigations into the complaints of discrimination in employment, education and sexual harassment which had been registered to date. The activities of the Office of the Ombudsman were financed by the State budget. High priority had been accorded to increasing public awareness of the role of the Ombudsman in safeguarding the rights of women and men, and major attention had been focused on cooperation with non-governmental and public organizations. However, cooperation with the media had proved problematic.

6. Article 3 of the Law on Equal Opportunities specifically stated that all State, government and administrative institutions should elaborate and implement programmes aimed at changing public attitudes about the superiority of one sex over the other. Likewise, article 4 provided that school curricula and textbooks should not promote discrimination. She acknowledged that legislation alone could not guarantee equal opportunity: fruitful cooperation between State institutions and civil society was also crucial. Nevertheless, the legal system must be recognized for playing a key role in enhancing mutual respect on the part of women and men.

7. **Ms. Šliužienė**, responding to the request for clarification on mechanisms for promoting equality within the context of article 3 of the Convention, said the State Counsellor in the office of the Prime Minister was responsible for work with non-governmental organizations and equality issues and also monitored the activities of the Interministerial Commission for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, comprised of representatives of 14 ministries, the Office of the Ombudsman and non-governmental organizations. The Parliamentary Women's Group, which discussed draft laws and codes dealing with women and family issues, was another mechanism in place. The Group sought to

arrive at common positions to prioritize the interests of women over those of political parties.

8. With regard to legislative initiatives, she said that although Parliament, the President and the Government held the right of legislative initiative, groups of citizens who had the right to vote could also submit draft laws to Parliament for consideration. The representatives of non-governmental organizations and other interest groups also had a right to forward proposals during discussions on draft laws in parliamentary committees. The Lithuanian Women's Party, established in 1995, had failed to receive the required 5 per cent of votes during the 1996 parliamentary elections and none of its members had been elected. The party had changed its name to New Democracy/Women's Party in 1998, attracting a minority of male members. In addition, the five major political parties had women's groups which were actively advocating women's issues.

9. The Programme for the Advancement of Women had been established in line with the key elements of the Beijing Platform for Action. Two National Action Plans had been developed to set firm objectives and take measures to implement the Programme. Almost all the measures outlined in the report on the Plan of Activities for 1998-2000 had been implemented, primarily through the cooperation of governmental and non-governmental organizations. The most successful aspects of the Plan to date had been those pertaining to law, environment and education.

10. Responding to the query on the situation of elderly women, she pointed out that a programme had been developed within the context of the International Year of Older Persons to find solutions to specific economic, social, health-care and psychological problems confronting the elderly. Municipalities had been encouraged to promote joint activities for older men and women, develop infrastructure for services, and establish councils for pensioners in towns and districts in order to better address their concerns. Care for elderly women was provided through social services and social workers, whose work was regulated through the Law on Social Services (1996). However, she wished to point out that the social work profession was relatively new, and official training in that area had begun only in 1992.

11. With reference to violence against elderly women, she apologized that there were no separate statistics on violence affecting elderly women in

particular. The total number of victims over 60 years of age in 1998 was 116. On the subject of social pensions, she said that the 1994-1995 pension reform supported mothers of large families particularly through pension guarantees, irrespective of work records. The amount granted was equivalent to the basic pension and was paid out of the State budget.

12. **Ms. Dovyðienė** (Lithuania) said that Decree No. R-28 issued by the Rector of Vilnius University on special temporary measures would remain in force until the targets were achieved. In that connection, as a result of the introduction of a new course on women's studies into the curricula of certain universities, some women had already been awarded academic degrees for research on women's issues. Moreover, Vilnius University had established a centre for women's studies that offered courses focusing on women's problems and on their status in contemporary society as well as throughout history.

13. As far as the participation of women in political parties was concerned, the laws of Lithuania had not established quotas for women on election lists. Currently, only one political party — the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party — had introduced quotas to ensure that no more than two thirds of the persons on an election list would be of the same sex. The Government also tried to encourage the participation of women in the decision-making process. One of the main objectives of the Lithuanian Women's Advancement Programme was to empower women to participate in politics and administration.

14. **Mr. Bliznikas** (Lithuania), responding to questions on stereotypes, said that Lithuania participated in the European Union medium-term programme on equal opportunities for men and women 1996-2000. Within that programme, Lithuania took part in the project "Women's political education for equal opportunities", which would continue until 2001. The aim of the project was to encourage women to participate in policy decision-making through training seminars and the dissemination of information on good practices. Lithuania, which would participate in the project for three years, contributed \$26,000 per year to it. The basic legal principles relating to the place and role of the Catholic Church and other religious organizations in Lithuanian society were set out in articles 25, 27 and 43 of the Constitution.

15. Concerning the role of the mass media with respect to gender stereotypes, he noted that the country's legal system provided for general and specific rules in that area and created machinery for their implementation. The Law on Equal Opportunities also stipulated the duty of the Government and administrative institutions to implement programmes aimed at changing public attitudes about stereotypes. Moreover, Lithuania had a Journalists' and Publishers' Ethics Commission and a Journalists' Ethics Inspector to implement the provisions of the Lithuanian Journalists' and Publishers' Ethics Code. The Inspector was responsible for investigating and taking action on complaints by individuals about the dissemination of misinformation offending their honour and dignity. The Parliament of Lithuania currently had before it a draft code on advertising ethics.

16. Turning to violence against women, he noted that article 118 of the Criminal Code defined and penalized rape. In 1998, 166 cases of rape had been recorded, while 225 cases had been recorded in 1999. Article 239 of the Criminal Code established criminal liability for procuring persons for prostitution. That article also provided for more severe punishment for procuring underaged persons or forcing people to engage in prostitution through blackmail or deception. Although the criminal laws did not establish a punishment for prostitution, the Code on Violations on Administrative Order stipulated that prostitution had the characteristics of an administrative violation.

17. In 1998, there had been 54 registered cases of procuring for prostitution and 16 cases in 1999. In the near future, the Government would launch a national programme to control and prevent prostitution and trafficking in human beings. The programme would be implemented by a number of ministries, governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations. On 2 July 1998, Parliament had adopted an amendment to the Criminal Code which provided for terms of imprisonment ranging from four to eight years for trafficking in human beings.

18. Eleven crisis centres had recently been established in Lithuania to provide assistance to female victims of violence and their children. Fourteen confidential telephone lines had been set up to provide advice and assistance to battered women. Most of the centres and telephone lines had been set up on the initiative of non-governmental organizations. Moreover, in 1999, a project to train police officers on

how to deal with family conflicts had been launched by the Lithuanian Centre for Preventing Conflicts and the Centre for Preventing Criminality in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme.

19. *Ms. Acar (Rapporteur) took the Chair.*

20. **Ms. Dovydėnienė** (Lithuania), responding to queries about the Government's financial support for non-governmental organizations, said that since 1995, the Government had been allocating financial resources to support the activities of women's non-governmental organizations, whose main source of income was membership fees. However, those funds, which were provided under the budget of the Ministry of Culture, had declined in recent years. Some other ministries also provided funding for some non-governmental organizations, as did municipalities.

21. While she could not provide exact figures as to which and how many women's organizations received financial support, she wished to assure the Committee that the Government would endeavour to provide significant financial support to women's non-governmental organizations as soon as the country's economic and financial situation improved. In that regard, the Government was considering a draft law on income tax and property declaration which should enhance the financial situation of such organizations, since it contained a provision that would allow permanent residents of Lithuania to have up to 2 per cent of their income tax payments transferred to legal entities, including non-governmental organizations.

22. As far as the participation of women in politics was concerned, most women's organizations had been formed between 1992 and 1996, during which time women's sections had also been established within all the major political parties. During the 1996 parliamentary elections, women candidates had made up 20.7 per cent of all nominees for Parliament. They had also accounted for 31 per cent of candidates in local elections. Only about 17.6 per cent of all elected members of local councils were women. Parliamentary elections would be held again in October 2000.

23. Since the official campaign had not yet started, it was difficult to predict how many women would be enrolled on the electoral lists of political parties. Nevertheless, women were taking an increasingly active role in most of the main political parties. Although only two parties had elected women as chairpersons, all the major political parties had elected

women as vice-chairpersons or women were represented on their internal elected bodies. She therefore hoped that more women would be elected to the new Parliament in the autumn.

24. *Ms. Gonzalez (Chairperson) resumed the Chair.*

25. **Ms. Šliužienė** (Lithuania), responding to questions concerning the situation of women in the workplace, said that one of the national confederations of trade unions, the Workers' Union, was led by a woman. All the confederations had established special women's centres whose main goal was to ensure proper working conditions for women in the labour market. The Government had also made efforts to increase salaries in the most feminized sectors of the labour market. Usually, there were more women working in education and medical and social care, and their salaries were generally lower than those of industrial workers, who were usually men. Particular interest was being paid to efforts to boost the salaries of teachers. During the last three years, those salaries had increased by between 15 and 30 per cent.

26. Turning to the issue of women entrepreneurs, she noted that according to current statistics, approximately 30 per cent of all founders and managers of businesses were women. Specifically, women had created 60 per cent of businesses in the restaurant sector, 50 per cent of businesses in construction and 47 per cent of businesses in the services sector. As far as entering the labour market was concerned, increasing numbers of the unemployed were given jobs by the Labour Exchange Office. In 1999, 907 posts had been established and 1,271 unemployed people had been given jobs. In that regard, the bulk of the people employed were women with children. The apparent differences in unemployment figures were due to the fact that the data were taken from different sources — the official unemployment rate provided by the State Labour Exchange Office and data from the Department of Statistical Survey. However, those discrepancies were being addressed.

27. The expression long-term unemployment related to unemployed people registered with the Labour Exchange for more than 12 months. On 1 January 1999, 58 per cent of all long-term unemployed had been women, and that figure had decreased slightly to 55 per cent in 2000. Fifty-five per cent of those who had participated in active labour market programmes had been long-term unemployed women, and 7 per cent

of them had not attained the retirement age. Increased efforts were also made to support the unemployed or to help them find new jobs as quickly as possible. A national Employment Fund had been set up to help individuals who were unable to find permanent jobs after vocational training.

28. Unemployment benefits were granted to unemployed persons in accordance with the procedure established by the Labour Exchange. In the course of 12 months, benefits were payable over a period not exceeding six months, commencing on the eighth day of registration. Unemployed persons who had not been employed for 24 months or more during a period of three years, and who had employment insurance, were entitled to receive monthly payments. In any case, unemployment benefits could not be lower than the income security established according to the procedure provided for in the law on income security, and could not exceed a level that was double the indexed minimum living standard. Social benefit payments, the main form of cash assistance to low-income families, were made on the basis of the law on guaranteed income and were paid to families whose per capita income was lower than the State-supported income approved by the Government.

29. **Ms. Plepytė** (Lithuania), responding to questions on article 12, said that the Government had made women's reproductive health a priority. In 1995 a family planning programme, expected to last until 2001, had been established. Its priorities were sex education for women, the establishment of gynaecological centres for girls, the introduction of new treatments for infertility, reproductive and contraceptive services for families, and the treatment of post-menopausal illnesses. Services under the programme were provided in rooms set aside in primary health-care centres. A great deal of information on contraception and family planning had also been provided to schoolchildren. Since 1998, the general economic downturn had greatly reduced financial support for that programme but it was hoped that as the economy recovered, funding would increase.

30. Much had been done recently to increase public awareness of women-specific diseases such as breast cancer or those related to menopause. The priority was preventive care, such as yearly examinations, and medical offices had been provided with advanced diagnostic equipment. Those services and all medication for treating women's cancer were provided

and paid for by the cancer control programme set up by the Ministry of Health in 1998. In the area of AIDS prevention, leaflets and booklets were distributed to medical institutions, schools and prostitutes, and the AIDS Centre provided condoms free of charge to high-risk groups. A special medical office had been established in Vilnius to provide prostitutes with free medical care, and similar offices were planned for other cities and rural areas.

31. With regard to health care for women in rural areas, although high-quality medical assistance was somewhat less available than in urban areas, there was no evidence that women in rural areas were in poorer health than women living in cities. Rural areas lacked large medical centres with advanced equipment, but there were 453 clinics in smaller towns as well as 1,011 medical offices providing competent primary health care and pregnancy and childcare-related services. With regard to social guarantees for pregnant working women or women raising children, she referred the Committee to the report as well as to the additional documentation distributed that day on article 12.

32. **Ms. Dovyđienė** (Lithuania), responding to questions with regard to article 14, noted that there were 67,000 private farms and that 60 per cent of farmers were 60 years of age or older. The Rural Support Fund provided 20 to 50 per cent of the cost of agricultural investment programmes. In 1999, the Fund had provided 30 million talonas for the establishment of private farms, and had provided 5 million talonas in 1997, 17 million in 1998 and 9 million in 1999 for the purchase of agricultural machinery. An agreement between the Government of Lithuania and the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) signed in early 2000 to support small and medium-sized enterprises run by women provided up to 33,000 United States dollars of the necessary financing. The results of that programme had not yet been evaluated.

33. As of 1 October 1999, 515 children had not been attending secondary school, but there were no gender-disaggregated statistics available on school attendance in urban and rural areas. A poverty study initiated in 1997 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to collect data for the preparation of a national poverty fighting strategy had revealed no major differences between men and women, and therefore no special measures had been targeted at reducing women's poverty. Measures had, however, been instituted to target mothers because the study had

shown that single mothers, whether unmarried, divorced or widows, and pregnant women often lived in poverty. The poverty line in 1999 was 274 talonas per month and nearly 16 per cent of the population was found to be living below that line.

34. With regard to social insurance for farmers and family members, she said that State social insurance covered farmers and their adult family members working on the farm. Each year, the farmer paid 50 per cent of the State social insurance base pension, currently only 69 talonas, for himself and adult family members employed on the farm. For poorly performing farms, the Government provided 30 per cent of the contribution. At the end of 1999, approximately 77 per cent of farmers were exempt from paying social insurance contributions and 10 per cent were paying contributions.

35. With regard to political activity, she noted that women's political consciousness was growing, and increasing numbers participated in the political life of the country. Women seemed to favour the larger political parties, implicitly rejecting the fragmentation of Lithuanian politics, with its nearly 40 parties. They accounted for 54 per cent of voters, and, if they voted in a block, could determine the results of the elections. She hoped that women's participation in both non-governmental organizations and the political life of the country would continue to increase.

36. **Mr. Šerkšnys** (Lithuania) pointed out for the Committee's information that the current approximate exchange rate for Lithuanian currency was four talonas to one United States dollar. He thanked the members of the Committee for their questions, which had contributed to his delegation's understanding of the provisions of the Convention, and said that Lithuania would continue to work towards its full implementation.

37. **The Chairperson** expressed satisfaction that Lithuania intended to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention as well as the amendment to article 20. She noted the important work being done in the areas of protection of older women, equality of opportunity and treatment for women and men in the labour market, the fight against violence against women and trafficking in women and girls, and the promotion of women's sexual and reproductive health. With regard to the latter issue, she stressed the importance of strengthening family planning programmes, in part to

reduce the number of abortions, and of educating men about the responsibilities.

38. Cooperation between non-governmental organizations and national and governmental mechanisms and institutions working to ensure women's rights should be reinforced, and women should play an increasingly important political role in the country. To that end, she urged the delegation to widely disseminate information about the Committee's work with a view to promoting women's rights as set out in the Convention.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.