



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

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

**Pre-session working group**

**Thirty-ninth session**

23 July-10 August 2007

**Responses to the list of issues and questions with regard  
to the consideration of the combined third and fourth  
periodic report**

**Belize**

**General**

1. Please provide information on the process of preparing the report, indicating, in particular, whether consultations were held with non-governmental organizations and women's groups and whether it was presented to Parliament or any designated high-level authority.

Two consultants were hired by the Ministry of Human Development to prepare the third and fourth periodic report. Interviews were conducted with focal points from Government ministries and non-governmental organizations. Women's groups were also consulted for final input in the report. Legal advice was sought to ensure verification of quoted legislation and to add recent changes to the law in favour of women.

The report was presented to the Cabinet and endorsed on 19 July 2005.

**Constitution, laws and national machinery**

2. In its previous concluding comments, the Committee urged the Government to ensure that the definition of discrimination is fully incorporated in Belize's legislation, and that women have effective remedies against direct and indirect discrimination. Please provide information on what steps the Government has taken in response to this recommendation, and the impact of such steps.

The issue of discrimination is already addressed in the Constitution. Our Constitution provides protection against discriminatory treatment and required State policies to eliminate economic and social privilege and disparity among citizens on grounds including sex.



The National Gender Policy approved by the Government of Belize in 2003 sets out to identify the inequalities experienced by both men and women and suggests actions for the correction of gender disparities as well as giving direction for the coordination and implementation of the policy. The critical areas identified in the policy are: health; wealth and employment generation; violence-producing conditions; education and skills training; power and decision-making. The National Gender Policy serves as a guide on which national projects and programmes on gender equity are based. This document assigns responsibility to the National Women's Commission to ensure that the commitments in the Policy are implemented in an effort to address the challenges faced by women in the areas of education, health, violence, decision-making and wealth and employment generation.

In addition, the Women's Agenda 2003-2008 covers three main areas: the legal status of women, sociopolitical issues affecting the development of Belizean women and the economic empowerment of women.

It is to be noted that the issue of discrimination was carefully examined in the case of the unmarried pregnant teacher and her right to non-discrimination upheld.

In 2005 the National Women's Commission, the Women's Department and the National Committee for Families and Children lobbied and advocated for female Belize Defence Force soldiers to not be discriminated against owing to pregnancy. In July 2005 the Cabinet directed that the Belize Defence Board be advised that the practice of taking disciplinary action against women soldiers because they were pregnant is discriminatory and should be discontinued.

**3. Please provide information about the impact of the case in which the Court of Appeal ruled in favour of the unmarried pregnant teacher who was dismissed.**

The impact has been extremely positive on a national level. This particular case of the unmarried pregnant teacher has set a very important precedent for the country, especially since the Ministry of Education took the stand that it was an act of discrimination. Since the Court of Appeal ruled in favour of the unmarried pregnant teacher who was dismissed, there has been no attempt since then of the Church management pursuing another termination. This case gained much public attention, making many more women aware of their right to no such discrimination.

**4. The report provides information on a number of laws that have been passed or amended since the submission of the last report, but states that women are not currently utilizing the laws (para. 25). Please provide specific information on any initiatives, including awareness-raising campaigns, being undertaken by the Government to ensure women's knowledge of their rights and existing legislation, as well as capacity to claim their rights.**

One of the most significant initiatives has been the Women's Department Violence Against Women Awareness and Advocacy Campaign funded by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) from 25 November 2005 to 23 March 2007. The project had three components: production of an audio-visual documentary on domestic violence; production of a women's handbook on domestic violence and a handbook on domestic violence and its effects on children; and capacity-building. On 1 June 2006 the Women's Department launched a documentary that captures the true stories of survivors of domestic violence and features interviews with key persons within our society who are playing an instrumental role in working towards eliminating domestic violence throughout our country as well as testimonials

from domestic violence survivors, perpetrators, legal prosecutors and social workers. Over a period of six months interviews were conducted countrywide with survivors of domestic violence, perpetrators and persons working within the area of domestic violence such as the police, magistrates, social workers, counsellors and key persons in Government responsible for this portfolio. The end result was the one-hour documentary entitled *Domestic Violence: The Belizean Reality*. The official launching of the documentary took place at the Bliss Centre for Performing Arts in Belize City. Over 400 persons attended that launching with representatives from the police, medical profession, schools, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Government, the Belize Defence Force and the community.

On 25 November, the Women's Department published the *Women's Handbook on Domestic Violence*, which focuses on clearly defining domestic violence and discussing key issues that relate to this problem that continues to affect the lives of so many women and children throughout our country. It offers practical information on the various types of domestic violence, the cycle of violence, myths about domestic violence, warning signs of abuse and the effects of domestic violence on children. Most importantly, the *Handbook* gives information on how women can keep themselves and their children safe. It provides important information on the legal system as it relates to getting protection and occupation orders, pressing charges and going to court. Also included is a list of important numbers that women can call to get help.

The Women's Department, through the assistance of a Challenges Worldwide volunteer who is an attorney, produced a legal training manual for its officers. The manual was developed to provide women development officers with the knowledge of pertinent legislation in an effort to equip them to offer comprehensive legal advice to their clients. The manual aims to increase officers' current knowledge on relevant legislation while training them in courtroom expectations and courtroom preparation and in ways to translate theory into accessible information.

Another significant initiative has been the introduction of an annual Women's Summit. The first Summit was held on 8 March 2006 on International Women's Day. Two hundred women gathered at Belize's first Women's Summit to discuss three priority areas: women's educational achievements and challenges; sexual and reproductive health; and women's voices in leadership and decision-making roles. The Summit provided an opportunity to dialogue not only with Belizean women but also with 17 women from the United States of America who came as a delegation headed by Attallah Shabazz, Goodwill International Cultural Affairs and Project Development Ambassador for Belize. The Summit provided a valuable opportunity for women to gain knowledge of their rights and existing legislation as well as capacity to claim their rights. Participants shared the need for there to be a common vision that encompasses a Belizean society in which each girl, woman, boy and man realizes his/her full potential and plays a meaningful and active role in development and enjoys all benefits. This vision it was emphasized must be one that encompasses the academic, personal and spiritual growth and it must be extended to all communities especially in rural areas where girls and women need us the most. Participants agreed that we must adopt a human rights-based approach which is so integral to the elimination of poverty and that we must recognize the need for special attention to human rights of women and children.

The second Women's Summit, held on 8 March 2007, spoke directly to the Belizean reality of domestic violence. Representatives from the judiciary, the police, the ombudsman's office, the church, the media, men's groups, community-based organizations, Government and non-governmental organizations were invited to speak about their role in helping to end violence against women. The Attorney General introduced the Domestic Violence Act 2007, which repeals the current Domestic Violence Act of 1992, and introduces a new act that increases the power and jurisdiction of the Family Court and provides more severe criminal penalties in respect to domestic violence offences.

The national machinery continued to collaborate with Government and non-governmental organizations to commemorate the International Day to Eliminate Violence Against Women as a part of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence (25 November-10 December 2006). Throughout the 16 days of activism the Women's Department, in partnership with other government departments, NGOs, schools, women's groups and other community-based organizations, invited the public to participate in candlelight vigils, rallies, forums and other activities held countrywide. All of those activities were aimed specifically at increasing public awareness about gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS as well as seeking to strengthen the human rights focus of violence against women, including their right to a life free of violence. In an attempt to reach children and adolescents at an early age before gendered identities and violence are internalized, specific emphasis was placed in 2006 on educational programmes for young persons.

**5. The report states that the Women's Department and the National Women's Commission are compromised in their efforts to evaluate the impact of laws and policies on the status of women, and by insufficient monitoring of the Convention (paras. 36 and 37). Please explain the measures the Government is taking to address these problems, including the technical training and enhancing the national machinery for the advancement of women with adequate decision-making capacity and financial and human resources.**

It must be noted that in relation to the Government's allocation of funds there has been an overall increase over a period of years in relation to capital expenditure. Those funds are complemented with external funds from international agencies.

To address this particular problem of being compromised in their efforts to evaluate the impact of laws and policies, the Government, through the national machinery, has been networking with international agencies such as Challenges Worldwide Volunteers, England, which sends trained volunteers to Belize to work on specific projects. Over the past three years three attorneys have been sent to the Women's Department. In 2005 an attorney was assigned specifically to review the Domestic Violence Act and make recommendations for amendment. A Challenges Worldwide volunteer assigned to the Department spearheaded the review of the Act. The six-month review process included interviews with pertinent government officials, representatives from the non-government community, women development officers and intake officers, survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence. On 29 June 2005 the Women's Department presented its findings in the form of a report to 44 key stakeholders. Final recommendations on the report on the review of the Act prepared by the Women's Department were made and submitted to the Attorney General's Ministry in October. The recommendations include such areas as the powers of the courts and the police, the creation of standardized counselling programmes for victims

and perpetrators and the modification of occupation orders and tenancy orders. It is to be noted that this review has led to the repeal of the Domestic Violence Act 1992 and the introduction of a new Domestic Violence Act 2007.

In relation to technical training and enhancing the national machinery, the Government continues to rely on funding from international agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) Gender Equity Fund, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO). One such initiative which focused on the strengthening of the national machinery and affiliated organizations came out of the Canada/Caribbean Gender Equality Programme funded by CIDA. That gender mainstreaming project within the Women's Department focused on the training and sensitization of senior public officers to become gender focal points within the Public Service in Belize. In addition, the project sought to identify sector-specific quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess gender disparities within the service. The process has involved the establishment of a gender mainstreaming committee and the sensitization of the members of the Cabinet. The project for the training of gender focal points contributed to the development of the national machinery in terms of its capacity to carry out its mandate as captured in the Department's mission — to promote gender equality and equity, thereby enabling women to be actively involved in and enjoy all benefits of development. The project contributed vastly to raising gender awareness through education and public awareness campaigns.

In addition, through funding from CIDA, training of National Women's Commission members has also taken place and a training manual has been developed that provides Commissioners with knowledge concerning their roles and responsibilities in advocacy and monitoring of the National Gender Policy and the Convention.

**6. In its previous concluding comments, the Committee recognized that the multi-ethnic and multicultural character of Belize presented a particular challenge to the Government for the achievement of equality for all women in Belize. Please explain how the Government has responded to this challenge, including the extent to which policies and programmes give targeted attention to women of different ethnic and cultural groups in areas such as education, health and employment, in line with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention which calls for temporary special measures to achieve the de facto equality for all women.**

The national machinery has women development officers stationed in each district to meet the cultural needs of women. In Belize District the predominant ethnic groups are Creole and Mestizo. In the northern districts of Orange Walk and Corozal, the predominant group is Mestizo; in the southern districts of Toledo and Stann Creek, the predominant groups are Garifuna, Mayan and East Indian. Each officer in each district conducts a biannual needs assessment based on the specific cultural groups they are working with. All programmes and projects implemented are based on the specific needs of the women within the area. As a result, each district has different programmes and projects that directly correspond to the cultural groups within that district.

In addition, the Ministry of Health has actively promoted a programme with midwives that provides recognition and training of midwives within Mayan communities. The Government has also been proactive in ensuring that educational

materials be translated into Spanish. A popular version of the Convention was prepared in Spanish. Brochures and ads have also been prepared in Spanish.

#### **Violence against women, and trafficking**

**7. The report points out that the pattern of increases for domestic violence is about 10 per cent per annum and that there is inadequate level of sensitivity to domestic violence in the judicial and social protection systems (paras. 201 and 209). Please provide information on the steps the Government is taking to ensure that the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act are utilized by women, and whether it has instituted training and awareness-raising for judges, social service providers and the general public. Also, are there any Government-funded shelters for victims of domestic violence?**

The review of the Domestic Violence Act 1992, chapter 178, spearheaded by the national machinery, resulted in the repeal of the Act and introduction of the Domestic Violence Act 2007 on 8 March 2007, International Women's Day. The Attorney General introduced the Act, which increases the power and jurisdiction of the Family Court in dealing with domestic violence cases; provides more severe criminal penalties in respect of domestic violence offences; enlarges the categories of people who may apply for orders against domestic violence; provides greater powers to the police; and increases the offences that constitute domestic violence. The introduction of the Act signifies the Government's commitment to sending a clear message that domestic violence is a crime and punishable as such.

Through the efforts of the Women's Department and the National Women's Commission, a multisectoral committee was established on 7 September 2005 to develop a renewed national plan of action to address gender-based violence. Twenty-one key stakeholders representing the Women's Department, the Human Services Department, the Community Rehabilitation Department, Family Court, the Women Issues Network-Belize, the Pan-American Health Organization/Regional Office of the World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the National AIDS Commission, the Police Department's Domestic Violence Unit, Haven House, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Youth Enhancement Service (YES), the United Women's Group, the Mental Health Association and the National Women's Commission agreed to develop an integrated multifaceted approach to all forms of violence against women and not just domestic violence. That integrated response will address law enforcement, health, judicial, education, housing and community advocacy.

In relation to training, social service providers have benefited the most. In 2005 training of women development officers took place in courtroom expectations and preparations. The Women's Department, through the assistance of a Challenges Worldwide volunteer, produced a legal training manual for its officers. The manual was developed to provide the officers with the knowledge of pertinent legislation in an effort to equip them to offer comprehensive legal advice to their clients. Officers participated in a comprehensive training aimed to increase their current knowledge on relevant legislation while training them on courtroom expectations, courtroom preparation and how to translate this theory into accessible information.

It is to be noted that the Police Training Academy now includes within its curriculum training sessions on domestic violence. The Police Department has also developed protocols for the management of family violence. Through PAHO technical cooperation, workshops and other informational and awareness-raising forums have

been held to sensitize social agents, police, the Belize Defence Force and other public officers.

For victims of domestic violence, the Government funds Haven House, which is a shelter for battered women with an annual grant of 25,000 Belize dollars (BZ\$). The Women's Department acts as the secretariat for Haven House and works closely with the Executive Director of Haven House and the board members.

In 2006 the Government collaborated with Haven House to secure two transition houses for victims of domestic violence. Presently the national machinery is spearheading a project to ensure that by the end of 2007, all districts throughout the country will have a Government-funded shelter for battered women. Shelters have already been donated by Government in the districts of Stann Creek (Dangriga) and Corozal. They will become operational in the latter part of 2007.

Furthermore, the Government, through the anti-trafficking committee, has acquired two shelters for use by alleged victims of trafficking, but owing to the small numbers of victims, it is also available for use by gender-based violence victims.

**8. The report provides no information on other forms of violence against women such as rape and sexual assault. Please provide statistical data about such forms of violence, and describe the steps that are being taken to develop a comprehensive strategy to address all forms of violence against women, including prevention, capacity-building and awareness-raising programmes for various groups, such as the police, lawyers, health and social workers and the judiciary, and the general public.**

Through efforts of the Women's Department and National Women's Commission, a multisectoral committee was established on 7 September 2005 to develop a renewed National Plan of Action (2007-2009) to address gender-based violence. Twenty-one key stakeholders representing the Women's Department, the Human Services Department, the Community Rehabilitation Department, the Family Court, the Women Issues Network of Belize, PAHO/WHO, the National AIDS Commission, the Police Department's Domestic Violence Unit, Haven House, the YWCA, YES, the United Women's Group, the Mental Health Association, and the National Women's Commission agreed to develop an integrated multifaceted approach to all forms of violence against women and not just domestic violence. This integrated response addresses law enforcement, health, judicial, educational, housing and community advocacy.

### Rape statistics

	<i>Belize</i>	<i>Corozal</i>	<i>Orange Walk</i>	<i>Cayo</i>	<i>Stann Creek</i>	<i>Toledo</i>
Mar-07	1	0	0	1	0	0
Feb-07	3	0	0	2	0	1
Jan-07	2	0	0	0	0	1
Dec-06	1	1	0	1	1	1
Nov-06	0	0	0	3	0	0
Oct-06	0	0	2	1	2	0
Sep-06	1	0	0	1	1	0
Aug-06	0	3	0	1	1	0
Jul-06	0	0	0	3	1	0

	<i>Belize</i>	<i>Corozal</i>	<i>Orange Walk</i>	<i>Cayo</i>	<i>Stann Creek</i>	<i>Toledo</i>
Jun-06	2	0	0	2	2	0
May-06	1	0	0	2	0	0
Apr-06	0	0	0	1	0	1
Mar-06	0	0	0	0	1	1
Feb-06	0	0	0	2	0	0
Jan-06	0	3	0	0	0	0
Dec-05	0	0	0	0	1	0
Nov-05	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oct-05	2	0	1	2	0	1
Sep-05	1	0	0	0	1	0
Aug-05	1	1	1	1	2	0
Jul-05	1	0	0	0	0	0
Jun-05	1	0	1	0	0	0
May-05	2	0	1	1	0	1
Apr-05	1	0	0	3	3	1
Mar-05	1	0	0	2	4	1
Feb-05	1	0	0	0	1	0
Jan-05	3	1	1	0	1	0
Sep-04	0	0	1	1	1	0
Aug-04	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Total per district</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10</b>

9. **The report states that Belize is a destination country for trafficking (para. 73). Please provide further details about trafficking of women, in particular, statistical data on women trafficked into Belize, traffickers prosecuted and punished, information about the rehabilitation and social services available to women and girl victims of trafficking, resources to support such services, as well as permits for women and girl victims of trafficking to stay in the country.**

An integral part of the Ministry of Human Development's collective effort is to help alleviate the problems generated from trafficking which impact women and children. Belize has passed a Trafficking in Persons Act to address growing concerns regarding the coerced labour or service imposed on persons as a result of their migration status or of being pregnant, disabled, addicted to alcohol or drugs or being a child. The corresponding protocol for suppressing trafficking in persons focuses explicitly on protecting the rights of women and children. The passing of the Act has resulted in the setting up of a Committee to implement and create public awareness in an effort to convict those persons who are involved in human trafficking. Women and young girls who are involved will now be seen as victims and afforded protection under the law. In the past, such women and girls were arrested and charged and the perpetrators were not.

The 2004 preliminary report funded by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and conducted by Juan Miguel Petit of the United Nations highlighted the fact that trafficking in persons is not a significant problem in Belize. However owing to certain vulnerabilities, if left unattended, it may become a major problem. Vulnerabilities include our long and open borders, limited coordination between and among relevant agencies and most importantly the fact that it was a new phenomenon for the authorities.



The following is statistical data on the number of cases as presented by the Police Department by year:<sup>1</sup>

2003 — 3

2004 — 14

2005 — 4

2006 — 2

**Total — 23**

Result of cases:

1 case still under investigation

4 cases resulted in convictions

18 cases dismissed

Reasons for dismissal:

10 — due to unavailability of victims

1 — lack of prosecution

7 — directive of the Director of Public Prosecution as they might have been smuggling cases rather than trafficking cases

Assistance available to victims:

Provide for the physical, psychological and social recovery of the victim, bearing in mind age, sex and special needs, including the following:

Appropriate housing

Counselling and information

Medical, psychological and material assistance

Employment, educational and training opportunities

Physical safety

Issue of temporary permits to remain in country for the proceedings

Facilitate application for residency or citizenship of person

Be repatriated if victim so desires.

Resources are made available through the government's recurrent budget as well as those of funding agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), IOM and the Organization of American States (OAS) among others.

**10. Please provide details on the Trafficking in Persons Study which was due to be conducted in 2004 (para. 76). In particular, please provide information on the purpose of the study, the implementation of policies resulting from the findings, and their impact on the elimination of trafficking.**

<sup>1</sup> Most cases were recorded in 2004 when authorities were just being introduced to the concept and therefore resulted in confusion between smuggling and trafficking.

The study, entitled “Trafficking of persons in Belize — preliminary report”, of November 2004, was funded by the International Organization for Migration and conducted by Juan Miguel Petit. The purpose of the study was to verify the existence of human trafficking in Belize, assess its magnitude and take into account its institutional and sociocultural frameworks and recommend the necessary measures to prevent and combat human trafficking. The study was conducted utilizing interviews with key sources, surveys of social interventions and field observations.

The study concluded that human trafficking is not a major problem but that Belize is subject to certain vulnerabilities that can increase the number of trafficking cases. Mainly our long and open borders on both land and sea, lack of coordination and weak public institutions were highlighted as possible contributors to enabling trafficking. The recommendations therefore were centred on institutional strengthening, conducting operations and providing victim assistance and protection.

As a result, the Government has strengthened the anti-trafficking in persons committee by including civil society and has developed a three-year strategic plan, 2007-2010, that focuses on prevention, prosecution and protection. It has also allocated resources for the operation of the Committee and several project proposals have now received funding that will assist with public awareness, capacity-building and victim protection. Belize also participates in regional activities in Central America and the Caribbean aimed at combating human trafficking. Funding partners include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), IOM, OAS, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United States Government.

#### **Temporary special measures**

**11. The report notes that there are no official policies aimed at accelerating the de facto equality of women. In the light of the Committee’s general recommendation 25 on article 4, paragraph 1 of the Convention, please indicate why quotas or targets are not used to increase the number of women in all spheres, and what, if any, steps the Government is taking to make use of the provision of article 4, paragraph 1.**

The Government, through the Women’s Agenda 2003-2008, has sought to ensure the advancement of women by placing a specific target figure to continue to promote gender balance in parliament by increasing women’s participation in electoral politics by 30 per cent. It also ensures women’s participation in decision-making positions to 30 per cent, to be reflected in the Cabinet, the Senate and the Boards.

The Belize Rural Development Programme, which aims at strengthening policies, institutions and communities, has a specific target to produce 300 to 600 development plans and projects. Of those, 10 per cent of rural families should benefit, and of that group at least 30 per cent should be women and youth.

The National Gender Policy is another attempt by Government to ensure women’s advancement by way of addressing the gender disparities that exist within the five key areas of the Policy: health, wealth and employment generation, violence-producing conditions, education and skills training and power and decision-making.

### **Stereotypes and education**

**12. The report provides no details on the strategy the Government is taking to address the prevalence of stereotypes which inhibit the full participation of women in society, or the efforts the Government has taken to eliminate stereotypes across all sectors and spheres, in accordance with article 5 (a) of the Convention. Please provide details on any actions aimed at the elimination of stereotypes and also on the impact of gender mainstreaming in all Government policies and programmes conducted by the Gender Integration Committee (para. 54).**

In 2006 the Gender Integration Committee began working on the development of a Gender Integration Action Plan for 2007-2009. A consultant was hired to carry out this process and the plan was completed in late 2006. The Women's Department chairs this Committee and has the following responsibilities: to assist in identifying, recruiting and training persons from governmental, non-governmental and community-based organizations, schools and businesses; to implement the 2007-2009 plan of action; to organize quarterly meetings of the gender focal points committee; and to report on all activities implemented by the committee. Four priority areas were identified and then expanded into specific goals, objectives and activities. The sensitization of policy and decision makers aims to increase support and participation of chief executive officers, heads of departments, administrative officers, supervisors, principals and directors of NGOs, community-based organizations and businesses in the gender integration programme. One of the objectives is that by December 2009, 75 per cent of all senior officials will be aware of and sensitized to the gender integration programme. That objective includes activities such as gender training for senior officials within ministries as well as for directors of community-based organizations.

On 5 and 6 September 2006 the Women's Department held its second in a series of workshops on gender integration aimed at identifying the inequities experienced by both men and women and suggesting actions for the correction of gender disparities as well as giving guidance on the coordination and implementation of the National Gender Policy. The two-day workshop, funded through the Canadian International Development Agency, focused specifically on participants, referred to as gender focal points, identifying gender needs within their ministry or organization and developing a strategic plan of action to integrate gender into their programmes, policies and plans.

The role and responsibilities of the gender focal points were addressed as well as support mechanisms to enable active collaboration between the Women's Department and the ministries and organizations. Priority areas of the National Gender Policy were also discussed and integrated into the one-year strategic plan of action that was initiated at the workshop. Participants in the workshop included representatives from the Ministries of Education, National Development and Human Development, the Police Department, the Social Investment Fund, the Jesuit volunteers, the Community Baboon Sanctuary Women's Group, Edward P. Yorke High School and the District Association of Village Councils.

In 2005 a gender integration training manual was developed based on three training modules: module I: gender awareness and sensitization; module II: gender analysis and planning; module III: accomplishing gender equality and equity in Belize. The gender focal point handbook was developed in 2007 to enhance the work of gender focal points. The handbook was developed to guide gender focal points

working in partnership with the Women's Department of Belize, Gender Integration Programme. It provides advice, inspiration and guidance as well as ideas and suggestions that can help enhance the impact of the gender focal points work within their ministries, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, schools and businesses. Each section of the handbook is self-contained. Section 1 provides basic information on the Women's Department Gender Integration Programme and the National Gender Policy. Sections 2, 3, 4 and 5 are more practical and action-oriented. They include lists of initiatives and actions that can be taken, and they respond to challenging aspects of gender work. They provide checklists as to how it is to best mainstream gender into projects and their expected results. Section 6 recommends key policy documents that may be of use to gender focal points.

**13. Please provide information about the portrayal of women in the media, including the Regional Project in which Belize participated to address sex role stereotyping in the media (para. 60). Please describe how the results of the project informed policy aimed at addressing sex role stereotyping.**

The Help-for Progress Project has led to far greater sensitivity on the part of the media in relation to sex role stereotyping. One specific outcome has been the manner of reporting child abuse cases: previously, children were shown on the media or names were called, and now this practice has changed to safeguard the identities of children. Another outcome has been in relation to rape victims and their anonymity.

At the second annual Women's Summit in 2007, the media played a critical role in examining its part in relation to the issue of sex role stereotyping and gender-based violence. Presentations were made by the three leading television station managers from Channel 5, R.S.V Media Centre and Channel 7. The only female newspaper editor in the country also made a presentation.

The media has also assisted in airing the documentary, *Domestic Violence: The Belizean Reality*, and some ads free of cost. Those efforts have contributed vastly to more public awareness countrywide.

**14. The report provides information about the guidebook for primary schoolteachers (para. 57). Please provide details about the impact of the guidebook at primary school level, and how the education system at all levels actively promotes gender equality and the eradication of gender-based stereotypes.**

The guidebook for primary schoolteachers, *Gender and Self-Esteem: Key Issues in Belizean Education*, has been distributed primarily through the Women's Department, which has developed a gender awareness safe school programme designed to specifically provide a framework for understanding the multiple dimensions of inequalities both outside and within the school. Through this programme the goal is to work with schools to set standards that will provide the foundation for more equitable relations between girls and boys in our society. In 2006 a total of 1,656 students countrywide benefited from this programme.

**15. The report notes that women are still concentrated in traditional careers such as nursing and teaching (para. 97). Please provide data on the number of women compared to men in traditional and non-traditional fields of study in tertiary institutions, and trends over time. Please describe what time-bound strategies and targets are in place for increasing the number of female students in non-traditional fields of study, and progress in achieving them.**

In 2002 the Government of Belize initiated the implementation of the Enhancement of Technical Vocation Education and Training project as part of its continuing effort at strengthening the development and delivery of technical and vocational education and training to support the socio-economic development of Belize. In addition, the recent Ministry of Education's Plan of Action 2005-2010 also included technical vocational education and training as one of its priority areas. In general what is envisaged is the re-engineering and realigning of the technical vocational education and training process and delivery mechanisms to keep pace with the country's economic development and skilled workforce demand. The Director of the Women's Department sits on the National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, allowing for active lobbying and advocacy of the creation of more opportunities for women in non-traditional fields of study. In all of the districts where institutes for technical vocational education and training are found, the Women's Department works closely with that centre to ensure that women are accessing the programmes offered such as electrical installation, plumbing, auto mechanics, food preparation, and air conditioning and refrigeration.

Recommendations coming out of the National Education Summit held in May 2004 have led to specific goals, one of which is to provide non-traditional skills training to women, with a specific target being 20 per cent women among the participants. The expected outcome is to increase the number of women in non-traditional programmes and increase quality of life for single female households and families.

Through the national machinery, emphasis has been placed on continuing non-traditional skills training in such areas as computer training and business management. In 2006, under programme area No. 1, family strengthening, a total of 445 persons participated in skills training and entrepreneurship development programmes which were developed and implemented countrywide. Those activities were conducted through networking with partner agencies and were offered to women of both urban and rural communities. The Women's Department, in collaboration with the National Women's Commission, also organized a four-month skills training programme for female inmates at Belize Central Prison. The objective was to provide female inmates with skills training in the areas of hospitality and arts and crafts in an effort to equip them with marketable skills to better facilitate their reintegration into society. A total of 15 women graduated from the two programmes held at the prison.

#### **Participation in public life**

**16. Please provide information on the steps the Government has taken to address the underrepresentation of women in political and public life, including the reluctance of women to offer themselves as candidates for public office, taking into account general recommendation 25 on article 4, paragraph 1 of the Convention, and general recommendation 23 on women in public life.**

In 2001 the National Women's Commission undertook to investigate some of the obstacles preventing women from participating in political leadership and offering themselves as candidates. The findings of the report were published by the Commission in a book entitled, "Women in politics: seeking opportunities for leadership in Belize". The report suggests that women are interested in political leadership but lack access to it because of family obligations, male impediments, lack of skills and lack of financing. Women's intentions in seeking power are to make

improvements in social systems. Recommendations that came out of that report have led to the inclusion of men on the National Women's Commission and representatives from the rural areas and from the church. It has also led to the women's political arm of the present Government, the United Women's Group, actively organizing women to participate in political campaigns and as politicians. It has also led to the development of the Women's Agenda, which outlines a plan of action for enriching the lives of Belizean women in three main areas: economic, sociopolitical and legal.

Also of note is the first Women's Summit, which focused on women and decision-making. Kathy Nealy, a civil rights activist; Doris Crenshaw, a youth worker with Mrs. Rosa Parks, preserver of annual civil rights history and President of the Women's Leadership and Development Institute; Ms. Shabazz, Goodwill International Cultural Affairs and Project Development Ambassador for Belize; Dolores Balderamos Garcia, Senator and Ambassador/Special Envoy for Children, Gender Affairs and HIV/AIDS; and Mryna Manzanares, National Kriol Council and Interim Director of Belize Centre for Human Rights Studies were the main presenters at the Summit. Presentations addressed questions such as the following: why are more women not supporting women in leadership roles? How can we ensure equal representation and participation of women in national and local Government? How do we make sure that women's needs and perspectives inform all policy and programmes? What role can we play as women in advocating for legislative change and reform? Presentations highlighted the urgent need for us to examine the way we are preparing our young girls for leadership roles and the kinds of messages that we are transmitting through our own political bodies.

The results of the 2006 municipal elections indicate that more women are putting themselves up for political office. A notable development has been the election of the first female mayor for Belize City, resulting in two female mayors in two of the nine municipalities.

### **Employment**

**17. In its previous concluding comments, the Committee expressed its concern about the low and falling labour force participation rate of women. The report points out that the labour force participation of women is relatively low at 43.2 per cent (para. 123). Please clarify what steps the Government has taken to improve women's labour force participation, and the impact of such measures. Also please provide information on programmes for women entrepreneurs, including to enhance their access and loans and credit.**

The Employment and Enterprise Development Unit of the Ministry of Labour assists job seekers to find employment and employers to recruit the person they need for employment. Services offered to job seekers are: training in job preparedness; identifying your skills; setting employment goals; résumé and cover letter; sitting an interview; keeping your job; managing your money; and customer service.

Through the Technical Vocational Education and Training project, the Government expects to improve women's labour force participation in non-traditional areas such as the technology and manufacturing industries, where there has been an increase in the demand for labourers. The role of the project is to equip women with the skills that will enable them to tap into job markets that have been dominated by men.

Programmes initiated through the national machinery in collaboration with partner agencies and business organizations continue to allow women to be informed about opportunities to gain access to credit and loans. Through the Belize Rural Development Programme, women's groups from throughout the country have had, and continue to have, access to funds to implement small-scale projects aimed at improving their productivity and financial independence.

**18. While there is legislation establishing one minimum wage in Belize, the report notes that male-dominated jobs continue to attract higher wage rates than female-dominated jobs (para. 137). The committee, in its previous concluding comments, urged the Government to assess the reasons for women's lower earnings with a view to adopting adequate measures to reverse this trend. Please provide information on the steps taken to implement the Committee's recommendation and the findings of any assessment carried out.**

In April 2002 the Wages Council and the Government made the minimum wage for domestic workers and shop assistants (mostly women) equal to the minimum wage for manual workers (mostly men). That ended the historical discrimination against female-dominated jobs and had a marked impact upon minimum wage employment for many women. On 9 January 2007 the Cabinet approved the recommendations of the final report of the Wages Council to increase the minimum wage for manual workers and agricultural workers. The increase will be from BZ\$ 2.00 to BZ\$ 2.50 in 2007; to BZ\$ 2.75 in 2009; and BZ\$ 3.00 in 2010. These are increases of 25 per cent, 10 per cent and 9 per cent respectively for those workers. The rate for domestic workers and shop assistants will increase to BZ\$ 3.00 in 2007 (33 per cent) and remain at that level, eventually leading to a single minimum wage for all categories of workers.

**19. Please describe what steps are being taken to expand benefit coverage for maternity leave so that more women can take leave in accordance with article 11, paragraph 2 (b) of the Convention.**

On 19 July 2005, the Cabinet amended the relevant legislation (the Labour Act) and regulations to provide for 14 weeks' maternity leave entitlement for women instead of 12 weeks on full pay and to ratify International Labour Organization Convention No. 183, the Convention concerning the revision of the Maternity Protection Convention (revised).

## **Health**

**20. In its previous concluding comments, the Committee expressed its concern at the high incidence of teenage pregnancies in Belize. The present report states that the Church's high level of influence over education presents a hindrance to the implementation of sexual and reproductive education for teenagers (para. 175). Please discuss steps taken, or plans of the Government to overcome this problem and ensure effective implementation of the policies for sexual and reproductive education for teenagers.**

The introduction of the national policy on health and family life education (HFLE) in 2004 by the Ministry of Education has sought to address this issue. The HFLE programme is a comprehensive life-skills based programme that educates children, youth and adults through guided experiences to become contributing and productive citizens. This programme also establishes life skills that emphasize effective interpersonal and informed sexual and reproductive choices as well as fosters

the development of skills, attitudes and knowledge that result in healthy social and family values and lifestyles.

The HFLE curriculum is incorporated into schools countrywide, giving youths an opportunity to acquire knowledge, skills, and values that will enable them to make healthy lifestyle choices. The success of the HFLE programme has been determined by the vibrant and sustainable active collaboration between the Ministries of Education, Health and Human Development. This multifaceted approach has resulted in maximizing of limited resources, human, technical and financial. It has also led to the execution of more effective programmes for young persons, including at-risk girls. The implementation of the HFLE policy has sought to provide an appropriate avenue to address the health and social ills affecting young people — one of those being teenage pregnancy.

**21. The report refers to the Government's commitments in the Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Policy, including in regard to reduction of maternal mortality rates (para. 180) and abortion. Regarding the latter, it also refers to the Government's commitments in the National Gender Policy (see para. 186). The report also notes (para. 181) that since the passing of SRH policy, only selected components of the Safe Motherhood Initiative were being implemented. Please provide information on the status of implementation of all the components of the SRH policy, and in particular those listed in paragraphs 180 and 187, and results achieved so far.**

In 2005 the Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy, which focuses on interventions to protect and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, was launched. The Policy addresses Millennium Development Goal No. 5, to improve maternal health, and outlines strategies to provide women with more access to reproductive health services. The primary components focus on safe motherhood; cervical cancer prevention and control; domestic violence; integrated management of childhood illnesses; and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. In regard to the reduction of maternal mortality, a maternal and perinatal mortality reduction plan was developed in 2005 through the efforts of the national mortality committee to develop a mechanism that will help to increase pregnancy spacing and reduce the number of children per woman; to increase the access to information on sexual and reproductive health rights and safe motherhood to people, particularly those in the rural area; and to put in place programmes for the empowerment of women in sexual and reproductive health issues.

Through the Ministry of Health, the Government initiated the Safe Motherhood Initiative to improve maternal and child health in the country. Since 2005 efforts have focused on strengthening Safe Motherhood Initiative planning and programming in Belize, by improving the collection of data and the analysis of information that will guide the improvement of maternal care and safe motherhood. Safe motherhood committees have been established at the regional and national levels, and surveillance of maternal mortality has improved significantly. Training has also taken place for 30 medical doctors and nurses from regional hospitals to ensure mandatory reporting of maternal deaths. Members of the safe motherhood committees have also received training and have been sensitized as to their roles and responsibilities. Statistics for 2004 indicated 97 per cent skilled birth attendants and 3 per cent untrained personnel.

The Ministry of Health has also developed family violence management protocols. Through that health information system, data on family violence is collected



by relevant agencies using a national gender-based violence registration form. The Ministry of Health manages the data collected, and annual reports are produced and disseminated, contributing to new policy and programme areas. On 25 May 2005, the National Gender-based Violence Committee reviewed the national gender-based violence registration form managed by the Ministry of Health's information system. This form has been updated to gather additional information. Staff throughout the country were retrained in October 2005 on the use of the form.

The Ministry of Human Development, the Ministry of Health and other key organizations such as the Women's Issues Network of Belize, the Alliance against AIDS and the National AIDS Commission continue to draw public awareness to the link between HIV/AIDS and domestic violence. In Belize, the age group reporting domestic violence is the same as that most infected with HIV/AIDS (ages 20-49). To address the epidemic a National AIDS Commission has been legally established to coordinate activities. An aggressive public awareness campaign has been developed and is being implemented with the support of the private sector. Of concern is the rapid increase in the number of women who are acquiring HIV. Efforts have centred on education and personal development for women. However, the issue of poverty is still a challenge, as well as the dependency of women on men, which leads to women not being able to negotiate safe sex. It has therefore become imperative to address the economic empowerment of women alongside HIV/AIDS and violence.

Abortion continues to be an area of concern. Efforts have concentrated more on public awareness and education. Through the Ministry of Health, information and services are provided for women who encounter complications during pregnancy, including those which result in the loss of the foetus.

The national plan for breastfeeding has been implemented on a national level, with efforts focused on community education to encourage women, as well as men about the importance of breastfeeding.

**22. The report states that gender-related issues would be addressed in the National AIDS Commission's Policy and Legislation Project which was due to be completed in 2004 (para. 198). Please provide the details of this Project, especially its gender dimensions, and any available information on its effectiveness in controlling the pandemic.**

The National AIDS Policy was launched in 2005. In 2002, the National AIDS Commission conducted a review of HIV/AIDS-related legislation with a view towards ensuring a human rights-based approach to policy development and legal reform. The review was accompanied by a survey of the perceptions of service providers in relation to HIV/AIDS policy and legal issues. The results of this phase (Phase I) of the HIV/AIDS Policy and Legislation Project formed the basis for the development of a National HIV/AIDS Policy for Belize (Phase II).

In early 2004, the National AIDS Commission became a statutory body making legal its mandate for coordination, monitoring, advocacy action and policy development in relation to HIV/AIDS in Belize. The National AIDS Commission immediately initiated Phase II of its Policy and Legislation Project. Phase II of the Project included countrywide consultations to get input into a National HIV/AIDS Policy that reflects the views, concerns and interests of the variety of stakeholders involved in the national HIV/AIDS response.

The National HIV/AIDS Policy is a synthesis of those invaluable local contributions with the principles and commitments outlined in the Constitution of Belize, the Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy, the Gender Policy and the Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy, and the proposed policy on HIV/AIDS and the world of work, as well as the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights, the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, and the International Labour Organization Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work. Within the framework of the capacity-building project for Mainstreaming Gender Analysis in HIV/AIDS Programming in the Caribbean, initiated by UNIFEM, workshops that were held in Belize from 21 to 23 March 2007. The primary objective of the workshops was to build the organizations' capacity to formulate policies and implement programmes that are gender sensitive by helping participants to develop basic skills in gender analysis and a knowledge of the linkages to HIV/AIDS. The National AIDS Commission spearheaded this initiative in collaboration with UNIFEM, the Women's Department and the Women's Issues Network. Representatives from the Government, non-governmental organizations, churches, community-based organizations and women's organizations participated in the three-day workshop.

In 2006 the Women's Department, with funding from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, conducted 20 workshops countrywide as a part of the project, entitled "Strengthening of Belize's Multisectoral response to HIV/AIDS". Participants of the workshops were mainly women living in urban and rural areas as well as the female inmates of the Belize Central Prison; a few men participated as well. There were a total of 676 participants in the sessions held throughout the country. The topics covered were as follows: assertiveness, negotiation, decision-making and the use of male and female condoms; sexual and reproductive health; social and health practitioners: interacting with persons living with HIV/AIDS; and HIV/AIDS capacity-building in workshop facilitation. In each session the subject of gender was integrated to advance gender mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS programmes and to strengthen an understanding of gender differentials in the formulation and implementation of HIV/AIDS programming.

**23. In its previous concluding comments, the Committee requested the Government to assess the mental health status of women in Belize. Please provide more information in this regard, including what steps have been taken to implement the National Gender Policy's commitments in this area.**

The Government has reviewed the existing conditions at the present national psychiatric hospital, and owing to the substandard conditions of the Rockview Hospital, the Government has embarked on the building of a new national psychiatric hospital which is presently being built in the capital, Belmopan. That institution will meet the needs of more patients and will provide upgraded services for patients, which it is hoped will vastly improve the overall perception of mental health. The policy of the treatment of the mentally ill that will be followed will be one of inclusion rather than exclusion from the community. Efforts in that area have also resulted in the establishment of an Acute Psychiatric Wing at the Belmopan Hospital.

Through the national machinery personal development sessions continued to be offered countrywide. The sessions are offered free of cost and range from topics such as stress management, gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS, child abuse, rape and sexual harassment. The sessions are intended to alleviate the pressures women face

within their environment that may contribute to mental instability. Counselling is also offered free of cost to women and if the need arises for women to seek psychiatric help, such assistance is sought through the Women's Department from the national psychiatric hospital. In 2006 a total of 1,721 persons participated in gender sensitization sessions; 2,258 participated in sessions on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections; 3,216 participated in gender-based violence sessions; and 3,962 persons participated in other sessions on such topics as stress management, conflict resolution, self-esteem, child abuse and sexual harassment.

The National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents in Belize 2004-2015 has specific objectives in relation to mental health services. The objectives focus on increasing the accessibility and affordability of mental health services to all children and adolescents and their families. The Plan provides for the development and implementation of comprehensive public awareness programmes on mental health issues affecting children and adolescents. It also looks at examining and revising mental health policies and legislation.

### **Rural women**

**24. Please elaborate on the National Gender Policy's approach to rural women, and in particular whether the policy covers specific issues faced by Mayan women described in the report.**

The National Gender Policy's approach to rural women continues to be one that encompasses all cultural groups. Although some attempt has been made through the national machinery to address the needs of Mayan women, there has not been specific attention in this area mainly because the needs of other ethnic groups such as Garifuna, Mestizo and Creole women remain very much the same in rural areas. Outreach programmes initiated by the national machinery in the districts of Toledo and Stann Creek, where most Mayan women reside, continue to be one of the primary modes of reaching these women. In Toledo the Women's Department is affiliated with 12 women's groups that are predominantly made up of Mayan women from the rural villages of Santa Cruz, San Antonio, Santa Anna, Forest Home, San Felipe, Barranco and San Pedro Columbia. In Dangriga (Stann Creek) the Department works closely with the women from Maya Centre, Maya Mopan and Red Bank Village.

In addition, through the Belize Rural Development Programme, which offers grants to rural women to develop microenterprises, Mayan women are also affected. The Women's Department's Global Fund project also integrated, as part of the activities for 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, a two-day women's craft expo. One hundred and sixty-one women from throughout the country participated in small business management training and hands-on craft training. Thirty per cent of the women who benefited from the women's expo were Mayan women. The national machinery has also recently embarked on a project with the Young Women's Christian Association that aims specifically at alleviating poverty among rural women, especially Mayan rural women. The project aims to empower rural women through skills training to achieve economic independence.

**25. Please describe what measures the Government has in place to enhance rural women's access to credit.**

Poverty reduction forms the centrepiece of the Government's development strategy. This strategy addresses rural poverty by developing appropriate financing and credit for

small producers, supportive services and incentives for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and microenterprises in rural areas, strengthening capacity in the rural areas and promoting small-scale agricultural and rural enterprises. To that end, the Government of Belize presented its country strategy and national indicative plan for the ninth European Development Fund under the Cotonou Agreement. In November 2005, the Government signed a financing agreement with the European Commission for the Belize Rural Development Programme (BEL/001/04), at a total budget of 10.675 million euros (€) to which the European Union committed €9 million. On 2 February 2006, the Minister of National Development of Belize and the European Commission signed a contract with ICON Institute to provide the technical assistance to the Belize Rural Development Programme and agreed on 1 March 2006 as the start-up date for the Programme.

The overall objective of the Programme is to support sustainable economic growth towards the alleviation of poverty in the rural areas. A specific target is for the Programme to increase average monthly rural income from BZ\$ 620 to BZ\$ 780 and to decrease unemployment from 9.4 per cent to 8.9 per cent per annum. One specific objective of the Programme is to facilitate development of efficient small and medium-sized enterprises and microenterprises at the community or village level; the target is to produce 300 to 600 development plans and projects accepted by the Project Management Unit, and 10 per cent of rural families should benefit from the Programme, of which at least 30 per cent should be women and youth.

Through the national machinery, women's groups throughout the rural areas of the country have been able to access funding from the Programme to initiate their own small business enterprises. Women development officers, staff members of the Women's Department, are representatives on Belize Rural Development Programme district committees and play a critical role in securing funding for rural women. Other initiatives are those of the Belize Enterprise for Sustainable Technology (BEST) and the Small Farmers and Business Bank, which both continue to play a crucial role in ensuring rural women's access to credit. It is to be noted, however, that rural men continue to receive more loans than rural women because they make more applications.

#### **Amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, and declarations**

#### **26. Please indicate what progress has been made towards acceptance of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1 of the Convention.**

Discussions have been initiated by the National Machinery and National Women's Commission in relation to article 20, paragraph 1 being amended, but no final decision has been made on the part of the Government.

#### **27. Please indicate what plans are in place towards withdrawing the declaration to articles 8 and 9 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention.**

No plans have been taken towards withdrawing the declaration to articles 8 and 9 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. This has been primarily because of our status as a sovereign nation which already allows for investigations into grave or systematic violations affecting our citizens. Our Constitution provides protection against discriminatory treatment and required State policies to eliminate economic and social privilege and disparity among citizens on grounds including sex. The State's role as the primary authority for the implementation of the Convention remains the general consensus, with the Committee playing a significant role in the process of investigation.