



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Thirty-eighth session

Summary record of the 777th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 17 May 2007, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Šimonović

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*Combined initial, second, third, fourth and fifth periodic report of
Sierra Leone*

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

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

Combined initial, second, third, fourth and fifth periodic report of Sierra Leone (CEDAW/C/SLE/5, CEDAW/C/SLE/Q/5 and CEDAW/C/SLE/Q/5/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Sierra Leone took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Koroma** (Sierra Leone), introducing the combined initial, second, third, fourth and fifth periodic report of Sierra Leone (CEDAW/C/SLE/5), said that the situation of women in Sierra Leone must be viewed in the context of a country emerging from a civil war and facing the daunting challenge of rebuilding its economic and social infrastructure. She expressed her gratitude to the Division for the Advancement of Women for the substantial support it had given to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs in preparing its report, and to the United Nations country team in Sierra Leone for its technical and financial assistance. Her Ministry had conducted broad consultations to bridge the dearth of data needed to prepare the report.

3. Committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Convention, which it had ratified in 1988, her Government had set up a Women's Bureau to coordinate issues relating to women's development and, in 1983, a Gender Desk in the office of the Chairman and Head of State of the National Provisional Ruling Council. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, formed in 1998, had developed a National Policy on Gender Mainstreaming and a National Policy on the Advancement of Women, both adopted by Parliament in 2000. The Ministry had also conducted sensitization workshops and collaborated with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the International Rescue Committee and the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights.

4. Her Ministry had collaborated with the Law Reform Commission to produce the 2003 women's law reform agenda that was included in the Commission's 2004-2005 workplan, and had worked with the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights to hold consultations on Convention provisions concerning

marriage, divorce, inheritance and property rights. Draft bills on registration of customary marriage, on intestate succession and on domestic violence had been prepared. In an effort to strengthen women's empowerment in peacebuilding, her Ministry, in collaboration with UNIFEM, had organized a national women's consultation to enhance women's involvement in the Peacebuilding Commission and ensure that women's perspectives were maintained in the Peacebuilding Fund for Sierra Leone.

5. The National Policy on Gender Mainstreaming, integral to the overall development process, treated gender as a cross-cutting element and stressed gender-responsive development. It complemented sectoral policies and programmes; defined key target areas to ensure that gender concerns were routinely addressed in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of activities; and set an institutional framework. The Policy called on the Government to explore possibilities for harmonizing laws to ensure that economic, social and cultural development proceeded at a pace commensurate with national goals and aspirations. Her Ministry was charged with the responsibility of spearheading and coordinating gender-responsive development.

6. The guiding principles of the National Policy on the Advancement of Women were to uphold the constitutional guarantees of equal rights for men and women; to implement the provisions of the Convention; to reorient educational, political and social institutions with a view to ensuring equity, social justice and well-being through sustainable development; and to treat women's rights as human rights and development issues. The Policy reaffirmed women's right to work at any level of Government, hold positions of authority and participate in all levels of decision-making. It emphasized the importance of equal opportunities for women and men with respect to pay, promotion, appointment and training, as well as women's right to receive an education (technical or academic) at all levels and to choose any field of specialization; to demand and have access to primary health care, family planning, and other services; to receive short-term Government assistance if they were disabled, displaced or became heads of household as a consequence of war and man-made disasters; and to be fairly represented in all national, regional and international committees or commissions. The efforts of line ministries had resulted in greater participation

of women in the public sector; greater gender parity in education; more women in decisions-making positions; and increasing opportunities for economic empowerment.

7. The 1991 Sierra Leone Constitution enshrined equal rights for all citizens, both women and men, and, subject to subsections 4, 5 and 7, prohibited laws that discriminated in themselves or in their effects. However, section 27 (4), an entrenched provision inherited from the Constitution of 1961, placed limitations on protection from discrimination with respect to adoption, marriage, divorce, burial and devolution of property on the husband's death, in effect discriminating against women in those matters, which had been largely determined by customary law under colonial rule.

8. The Constitutional Review Commission had sought to address such objectionable constitutional provisions and a revised draft Constitution, which expunged article 27 (4) (d) had been developed. The Commission had made significant headway in reviewing laws relevant to women's rights. Draft bills before the Attorney-General included the three "gender bills" on Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce, Devolution of Estate, and Domestic Violence (to be submitted to Parliament by a Certificate of Urgency and enacted by August 2007) and legislation entitled Sexual Offences, Citizenship; the Christian Marriage (Amendment) Act, the Muslim Marriage (Amendment) Act, the Civil Marriage (Amendment) Act and the Family Law.

9. To ensure that school-age girls were not married off against their will, the Customary Marriage Act provided that such marriages were not valid unless both parties were at least 18 years old and had freely consented to the marriage, and at least one of them was governed by an applicable customary law. The Act sought to legitimize cohabiting partners age 18 or older who had lived together at least five years; if their personal law was customary law, they would be deemed married under that law. Additionally, a woman who had registered her marriage or who was divorced under the new legislation was entitled to seek maintenance for herself and her children. Either party could apply to the Local Council for registration, and each spouse had the right to acquire moveable and immoveable property. Under the Act, gifts or payments made in contemplation of marriage were not

refundable, alleviating the pressure to remain in an unhappy marriage due to inability to repay the dowry.

10. The Devolution of Estate Bill provided for inheritance by children born to the deceased prior to the marriage and children born to the deceased and his or her lawful spouse during the marriage and was elastic enough to include illegitimate children. Likewise, the definition of "spouse" encompassed persons legally married to the deceased as well as those who had cohabited with the deceased as if married for at least ten years. Under the Bill, the deceased's household chattel would go to the surviving spouse and children.

11. Domestic violence was considered legal and normal up to a point in most communities in Sierra Leone. Under customary law, a husband had the right to "administer a reasonable chastisement" to his wife, short of wounding her. Extremely serious domestic violence could in theory be prosecuted under general common law but police and law enforcement agencies had until recently been reluctant to investigate and prosecute such incidents. Domestic violence was in practice surrounded by a culture of silence.

12. The new, comprehensive definition provided in the Domestic Violence Bill included physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, psychological and economic abuse as well as intimidation, harassment, stalking, damage to property, entry into the complainant's residence without consent, confrontation or abusive or threatening behaviour. The new definition also covered the elderly and those living in public care institutions. The Bill was gender-neutral and would provide an array of tools for dealing with domestic violence, including mediation, criminal penalties and civil remedies, while allowing amicable settlements with court approval for cases short of aggravated assault. The Sierra Leone Parliament had enacted the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, 2005, which set out a broad definition of trafficking that encompassed exploitation of women through prostitution and providing for compensation to victims.

13. Women in Sierra Leone had made modest gains in decision-making. There were 18 women in its 124-member Parliament, the Deputy Speaker was a woman and women headed important parliamentary committees. Of 21 Cabinet members, 3 were women and women held 3 out of 10 Deputy Ministers posts. Of 19 chairpersons of councils under the Local

Government Act (2004), one was female, and 52 out of 425 councillors were female. Ward Development Committees established under that Act had an even number of men and women. Women headed important commissions and departments dealing with such issues as elections, immigration, war-affected children, media, human rights, development and the judiciary, and held senior positions in the civil service, police and army.

14. Sierra Leone's Education Act 2004 made education for all children compulsory. Government intervention had begun in 1999 with payment of fees for pupils in the first to third grades; its subsequent extension to the fourth, fifth and sixth grades had prompted a rapid rise in enrolment. The Girl-Child Support Education Programme subsidized materials and school fees, boosting female enrolment. Numerous initiatives by the Ministry of Education to encourage female education and create opportunities for girls and mothers to go back to school had also increased female school attendance and retention.

15. The Ministry of Health pursued a variety of initiatives aimed at reproductive health, child survival, retention of health professionals, training of health personnel, management of drugs, health centres, reduction of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF), provision of mosquito nets, and tetanus.

16. Sierra Leone's National Policy and Action Plan on Integrated Rural Development incorporated gender perspectives and helped support rural women's access to health, economic development, credit and employment. At least 5 out of 10 members of Local Councils and Ward Development Committees had to be women.

17. Sierra Leone was still predominately a male-dominated society and challenges remained. Only 1 per cent of the national budget was earmarked for the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, which therefore depended largely on donor support. The Gender and Children's Affairs Division was understaffed. Capacity to use gender analysis tools was limited; cultural and traditional factors still gave priority to boys; and women still faced prejudice in workplace management. And rural women, though in the majority, remained disadvantaged in terms of their access to justice, education and health services.

18. **The Chairperson**, welcoming Sierra Leone's signing of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, expressed the hope that ratification would take place as soon as possible.

Articles 1 and 2

19. **Ms. Begum** asked what time frame was envisaged for the adoption of the three "gender bills", given that Parliament was due to be dissolved before elections took place in August 2007. Noting that the customary laws applicable in many of the country's districts were unwritten and subject to interpretation by male chiefs and that they often discriminated against women, she asked whether there was any plan to codify those laws and bring them into line with the Convention. Lastly, she wished to know whether the Government planned to incorporate the Convention into the Constitution.

20. **Ms. Saiga** requested more information about the outcome of the work of the Constitutional Review Commission, in particular whether or not the Commission had recommended amendments to section 27 (4) (d) of the Constitution, which contained provisions that were incompatible with the Convention. She also asked whether such recommended amendments would be covered in the referendum scheduled for July 2007. Noting that the three gender bills were designated for priority adoption pursuant to a Certificate of Urgency, she asked what timetable was envisaged for the adoption of the other six bills mentioned in the State party's opening statement.

21. **Ms. Dairiam**, noting that the Law Reform Commission had not yet completed its work on all the laws which needed to be brought into line with the Convention, asked whether all remaining proposed amendments, particularly those relating to customary law, would be submitted to Parliament for adoption. She also requested more information about which specific aspects of life were governed by customary law. It was her understanding that different customary laws applied to different ethnic groups. She wished to know whether there were any plans to unify such laws, since discrepancies were likely to give rise to discrimination. The State party should also indicate whether the Devolution of Estate Bill and the Domestic Violence Bill, once adopted, would override the relevant customary laws in the event of any conflict. Lastly, she had heard that chiefs sometimes adjudicated on matters that did not usually fall within the purview

of customary law, such as rape and sexual assault. She wished to know what action was being taken to monitor and deal with cases in which the jurisdiction of customary law was exceeded.

22. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** asked whether the Constitutional Review Commission and the Law Reform Commission were separate bodies, what the precise function of each was and what proportion of men and women sat on each. Noting that the three gender bills had already been submitted to the Cabinet for discussion, she asked whether the Law Reform Commission was continuing to review the other six bills that had been mentioned. She also wished to know whether the country's religious and customary laws existed in written form and, if not, whether there were plans to codify them and any amendments to them. Lastly, she requested more information on the jurisdiction of religious and customary courts and whether women were represented in them.

23. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that States parties were obliged, under article 2 of the Convention, to take steps "without delay" to eliminate discrimination, including the full incorporation of the Convention into domestic law. She asked whether the definition of discrimination set out in the Convention was contained in the Constitution. Although the Constitution embodied the principle of equality, certain provisions remained that were incompatible with the Convention. Since the latter was a legally binding human rights instrument, it could be used as a tool to argue in Parliament for the amendments needed to bring domestic law into line with its provisions.

24. She welcomed the participation of NGOs in the preparation of the report and requested more information on the Government's cooperation with NGOs in general.

25. **Ms. Koroma** (Sierra Leone) said that NGOs had been involved at all stages of the preparation of the report, including the collection of data. The Government cooperated closely with NGOs, which were highly valued because their work complemented that of the Government.

26. **Mr. Sesay** (Sierra Leone) said that customary law was applicable in 12 of the 14 districts in Sierra Leone. General law, comprising the law inherited from the United Kingdom and Sierra Leone's own laws and acts of Parliament, was applicable in the other two districts.

A pilot project on the codification of customary law had been carried out in one district with the support of the United Kingdom Department for International Development and was due to be extended to other districts. Human rights, including the rights enshrined in the Convention, would be fully respected in the newly codified laws. It should be noted, however, that a 1963 law already provided that any customary law found to be inconsistent with the Constitution, an act of Parliament or the principles of natural justice should be declared null and void. Each of the 12 districts mentioned had local courts which applied the customary laws and whose decisions could be challenged in the local appeals court of the relevant district. The customary laws, with the exception of those relating to property distribution and marriage, were not written down. Therefore, uncertainties sometimes arose as to their interpretation, and there was a heavy reliance on precedent in forming judgements.

27. Civil customary law covered every area of life, including marriage, land tenure and contractual relations. Criminal customary law applied only to petty crimes punishable by imprisonment for a term of less than six months. Since serious offences, including domestic violence and sexual offences, were subject to much more severe penalties, local courts had no jurisdiction over them. Perpetrators of such offences were tried in the formal courts. Chiefs administered customary law on an informal basis but were not involved in adjudication in the courts. Any person not satisfied with the intervention of a chief could lodge a complaint with a local court and pursue it through all the levels of the judicial system up to the Supreme Court.

28. NGOs and civil society as a whole had lobbied for particularly speedy enactment of the three gender bills because they covered most of the aspects of women's rights that were affected by customary laws. It was expected that they would be enacted before Parliament was dissolved for the upcoming elections. When they came into force, they would, of course, override the relevant customary laws.

29. The definition of discrimination in the Constitution was almost identical to the definition in the Convention. The Constitutional Review Commission had issued a report recommending the abolition of section 27 (4) of the Constitution. It was to be hoped that the Government would demonstrate its

commitment to amending the Constitution by putting the issue to a referendum in the near future.

30. The Constitutional Review Commission and the Law Reform Commission were two separate bodies. The latter had been established by an act of Parliament and was mandated to review all national laws with a view to bringing them into line with the country's international obligations and principles of human rights and democratic governance. The Constitutional Review Commission had been set up at the initiative of the President and was of a more political nature than the Law Reform Commission. It had a broader mandate to review matters affecting every aspect of society, and its membership included representatives of Government departments, civil society and NGOs. As part of its review of section 27 (4) of the Constitution, it had held consultations around the country to seek input from the general public.

Article 3

31. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez**, noting that 61 per cent of the population lived in rural areas, requested more information about how the national machinery for women cooperated in practice with the local structures responsible for implementing gender equality policy. Given that the national machinery was short of resources, she wished to know whether it had a specific mandate to follow up on policy implementation at the local level or whether such cooperation was effected on a purely voluntary basis. With regard to national policy for the advancement of women, she asked how the national machinery ensured that the needs of women were taken into account in all projects relating to social and economic development. Lastly, she wished to know whether specific policies were in place to assist vulnerable groups of women, such as those who had been displaced or disabled or had become heads of household as a result of the war in Sierra Leone.

32. **Ms. Neubauer** expressed disappointment at the lack of progress in the implementation of policies for the advancement of women and gender equality. Given that the national machinery for women lacked the necessary capacity to carry out its work effectively, she would like to know whether the Government had reported to Parliament on the obstacles faced in that regard, since Parliament presumably had a say in the allocation of budget resources. She also asked whether the State party had considered setting up a parliamentary working body with responsibility for the

advancement of women and gender equality. Such a body could help to ensure that Parliament gave the rights of women adequate attention.

33. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** welcomed the progress made by the State party in many areas, but said that much work remained to be done. She requested clarification of the statement in the report that competing Government priorities had impeded the implementation of the plan of action for the advancement of women (CEDAW/C/SLE/5, para. 10.6.5). That statement gave the impression that gender equality was not a core Government commitment, when in fact it should be viewed as a prerequisite for development and democracy. She asked what the Government planned to do to give gender equality the priority status it deserved.

34. **Ms. Gaspard** acknowledged the problems arising from a lack of resources. It was, however, of the utmost importance that strong and effective gender equality mechanisms, with clear goals and subject to regular evaluation, should be in place in each ministry and throughout the country. That could not be achieved without sustained political will. She wondered whether the process of preparation of the State party's report had been instructive for the stakeholders and had led to wider knowledge of the Convention.

35. **Ms. Koroma** (Sierra Leone) said that the establishment of Local Councils had been one of the measures taken to make up for the lack of resources at the ministerial level. Local Council were required to cooperate with the line ministries and their activities were monitored and evaluated. Security and the replacement of infrastructure were still overriding concerns in the country in the wake of the civil war. Her Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, was not working with the Peacebuilding Committee, which had been entrusted with the issue of the reparation of war victims, including women heads of household who had lost their husbands, but rather was responsible for carrying out the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programme. It had only a small budget which it was seeking to increase, with the support of the parliamentary Oversight Committee, and relied largely on the contributions of donors and development partners. It benefited from the collaboration of other ministries, through their gender focal points; however, unfortunately, the administrative staff comprising them were not always in a position to influence budget allocation and policymaking. The

relevant ministries had been requested to designate professionals for that purpose, and some had begun to do so. A meeting planned with line ministers to discuss the implications of the Convention had been deferred, but the Committee's recommendations would be brought to the ministers' attention before the forthcoming elections and special emphasis would be placed on the cross-cutting nature of women's issues. While the Government did not consider gender to be a policy area, it was anxious to promote those issues and, despite constraints, had done much to raise public awareness of them. It would continue its action, in collaboration with NGOs and civil society, and could be expected to achieve further progress.

36. **Mr. Vandi** (Sierra Leone) said that the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs was in charge of gender mainstreaming and that implementation of the Convention was among its goals. In its efforts on behalf of rural women, it worked with the Decentralization Secretariat and was planning to establish an all-embracing gender management system. The Government was committed to the achievement of gender equality, which it recognized to be in the national interest.

Article 4

37. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, highlighted the importance of temporary special measures and referred the State party to the Committee's general recommendation No. 25, aimed at accelerating the advancement of women. She asked whether such measures could be introduced under the Constitution or other legislation, since, the Convention was not directly applicable in Sierra Leone.

38. **Mr. Sesay** (Sierra Leone) said that, while the principle of non-discrimination was emphasized in the Constitution, the Convention had not been incorporated into domestic law. Legislative reforms had been undertaken to bring domestic law into line with its provisions; once they were completed, the rest could be expected to follow.

Article 5

39. **Ms. Simms** commended the State party for its efforts on behalf of women, notwithstanding the legacy of civil turmoil. She expressed disappointment, however, that no mention had been made of the consequences of female genital mutilation in any of the initiatives taken to assert women's rights. The

Committee wished to know when the Government of Sierra Leone would eliminate that odious practice, which was a blatant violation of the physical integrity of women.

40. **Ms. Pimentel**, referring to the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences and to the Committee's general recommendation No. 19, said that customary law reinforced the tendency to treat women as inferior and to commit violence against them. The Committee would appreciate information about the measures taken by the State party to combat domestic violence and to ensure justice for victims. She asked whether there was any plan to collect data on the magnitude of the phenomenon; how the Government was intending to combat custom; and what it was doing to encourage women to report violence against them and seek legal recourse. Did it plan to draw up a specific law on the subject?

41. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that the State party had not adequately responded to the request made in the list of issues and questions for information about a comprehensive strategy to create an environment conducive to gender equality (CEDAW/C/SLE/Q/5, question 10). Perhaps a fresh approach in the education system, publishing and the media would help to eliminate stereotyping. According to information from the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone, there had been an increase in the incidence of rape and violence against women in the post-conflict situation and considerable underreporting of such cases. She wished to know whether that persisted and what was being done to encourage women to seek legal recourse against such acts and to put an end to impunity for their perpetrators.

42. **Ms. Shin** recalled that the State party's periodic report recognized that female genital mutilation was an economic issue, since it constituted the livelihood of its initiators (CEDAW/C/SLE/5, para. 12.5.8). The Government should offer them an alternative source of income, but it also needed to change men's understanding of sexuality since men did not wish to marry women who had not undergone genital mutilation. She also wished to know what had been done to provide much-needed rehabilitation and psychological counselling to female victims of rape and sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

43. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** said that sometimes Governments used the weight of traditions and customs as an excuse for not addressing the unequal treatment of women. However, tradition was dynamic; customs could change. It was only when they concerned women that they were regarded as immutable. She called on the State party to be proactive and resolute, stressing that development would suffer if women, who accounted for half the population, remained in the background. She asked what was being done to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations for the psychological and social support of victims of violence.

44. **Mr. Sesay** (Sierra Leone), in response to the question about the measures taken to combat rape and domestic violence, said that the most immediate problem facing the Government after the war had been the lack of judicial personnel and prosecutors. With the help of the country's development partners, the courts were now functioning again and new prosecutors had been appointed; the issue of salaries and working conditions was being resolved under the justice development programme; and police were being trained to assist prosecutors. The very stiff penalties applicable for rape, including life imprisonment in some cases, were a real deterrent. The problem was that victims were reluctant to testify as women were required to describe exactly what they had suffered; they did not wish to relive the trauma and they feared the possible stigma attached to it. To address that problem, evidence could be submitted in camera in pretrial proceedings and, in cases involving girls under 15 years of age, the plea of consent was not accepted as a defence.

45. **Ms. Koroma** (Sierra Leone) said that family support units and women's help lines had been established to help women to cope with domestic and sexual violence and to deal, as needed, with doctors, the police and the courts. With regard to female genital mutilation, she noted that the practice was deeply rooted and would require time to eliminate. One sign of progress was that it was now acceptable to talk, hold meetings and publish articles about the subject. Non-governmental organizations were active, working with the "initiators" of the practice to find alternative professions and sources of income for them. A new bill in Parliament sought to raise the minimum age for initiation to 18 years, which was another small step on the road to complete elimination of the practice.

46. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, pointed out that the Committee could not be satisfied with a law that simply imposed a minimum age on a practice that was completely unacceptable under the Convention.

Article 6

47. **Ms. Chutikul** asked whether the Anti-Human Trafficking Act had been effective, in particular whether punishments had been set and imposed, whether compensation had been paid and by whom, and whether the police had been trained to implement the provisions of the Act. She asked for more information about the Inter-Ministerial Committee and the National Task Force. She urged the Government to request assistance from international organizations to carry out a study on human trafficking in the country. That would assist the Task Force in implementing effective measures. She also requested more information about the plan of activities developed by the Inter-Ministerial Committee.

48. **Mr. Sesay** (Sierra Leone) said that the Act had provisions covering most of the issues raised by the experts. He added that State employees had no immunity and could be prosecuted under the Act. Compensation to victims was paid by convicted traffickers, who were usually people and groups with assets.

49. **Ms. Koroma** said that the police were being trained to combat human trafficking. She agreed that a study of human trafficking would be valuable and would raise the issue with the Government. The plan of activities was still in Parliament and it would be best to postpone an answer to those questions until the plan had been adopted.

Articles 7 and 8

50. **Ms. Zou Xiaqiao** asked what the Government was doing to overcome the impact of traditional values and low self-esteem among women and to promote their participation in decision-making and their representation in Government. She urged the Government to mobilize advocacy campaigns in the mass media and training seminars for women to change people's thinking.

51. **Ms. Neubauer**, noting that the number of women participating in Parliament and other decision-making bodies was rising but still low, asked whether

temporary special measures had been tried in line with Committee recommendation No. 25. There seemed to be little evidence that the Government had a policy to overcome the marginalization of women. She asked what measures had been adopted to strengthen women's participation in decision-making, including special temporary measures.

52. **Ms. Shin** asked whether the Government had organized sensitization campaigns to promote the greater participation of women in conflict resolution in line with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Had the Government of Sierra Leone issued a formal apology to women for the destruction and harm caused them by the conflict, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had recommended? She would appreciate an account of overall progress in implementing the Commission's recommendations.

53. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** said that Sierra Leone had, like many African countries, long suffered the cruel impact of colonialism, which explained the legacy of tensions and civil wars in the post-colonial period. Former colonial Powers should provide support for rehabilitation and reconstruction to repair the damage they had caused. She urged Sierra Leone to demand assistance from donors and international organizations to rebuild the country and train women to assume their rightful active role in society.

54. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** asked whether political parties in Sierra Leone included gender issues in their platforms and whether they supported special temporary measures to benefit women. Noting the growing number of women in public office, she asked whether female officials tended to be concentrated in specific geographical areas, levels of government or ministries. She requested more information about the functions and importance of Ward Development Committees. Noting that a few of the Paramount Chiefs were women, she asked who could be nominated for chieftdom and by whom. She urged the Government to use the authority conveyed by Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and articles 4, paragraph 1, and 7 of the Convention to adopt special temporary measures aimed at increasing the participation of women in peace and reconciliation bodies.

55. **Mr. Pemagbi** (Sierra Leone) assured Committee members that women were adequately represented on the National Task Force charged with implementing the recommendations of the Peacebuilding Commission.

As for the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, some had been implemented, in some cases by NGOs. The crucial factor in achieving equality for women in decision-making bodies was to strengthen their education so that they would be ready and able to assume such functions.

56. **Mr. Sesay** (Sierra Leone) said that the position of Paramount Chief was an aspect of local governance provided for in the Constitution. Chiefs were elected for life from among candidates belonging to ruling families after nomination by a committee of elders. The Ward Development Committees were the smallest administrative units in local governance and they belonged to districts.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.