



General Assembly

Sixty-eighth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
6 November 2013

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 13th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 16 October 2013, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Thórsson (Vice-Chair) (Iceland)

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In the absence of Mr. Tafrov (Bulgaria), Mr. Thórsson (Iceland), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

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

Agenda item 28: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/68/121)

(a) Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/68/38, A/68/178, A/68/179, A/68/184, A/68/340 and A/68/487)

(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (*continued*) (A/68/175)

1. **Ms. Abdulbaqi** (Saudi Arabia) said that in recent years Saudi women had made significant gains in exercising their rights. The Government had taken measures to increase women's access to education and had established university courses for women in media studies, politics, engineering and law. It had also quadrupled the number of scholarships for women to study abroad. It had launched an awareness-raising campaign to educate women about their rights and a national integrated plan to ensure their effective participation in commercial, literary, social service and sports associations.

2. With regard to women's participation in decision-making, 20 per cent of the members of the Shura Council were required by law to be women, and women were also allowed to sit on municipal councils. They were prominent in the diplomatic corps, economic activities, national dialogue, the media, culture and medicine and held leadership positions in the Government, civil rights institutions, academia and financial institutions, as well as international organizations.

3. In line with its commitment to granting women their full rights under sharia law, her Government had acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and had contributed \$2 million to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). It called upon the international community to act to prevent violence against women in conflict areas and to bring all perpetrators to justice.

4. **Ms. Semasinghe** (Sri Lanka) said that Sri Lankan society was largely egalitarian, with many couples preferring their first-born child to be a girl. Infant and

maternal mortality rates had been substantially reduced and there was near gender parity in education, with a literacy rate of 98.2 per cent among women aged 15 to 29. However, women were underrepresented in the labour force, especially in the non-agricultural sector, and in Parliament. The Government was promoting women's participation in local government in order to build a pool of female political leaders, seeking to increase the percentage of women in the workforce to 40 per cent by 2016, improving job opportunities for women with secondary and higher education and addressing the problem of professional men and women seeking work abroad.

5. At its forty-eighth session, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had noted that Sri Lanka was on track to achieve Millennium Development Goals 2, 4 and 5 by 2015 and had welcomed her Government's enactment of legislation on domestic violence, citizenship and trafficking in persons, establishment of a Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare, adoption of a labour migration policy that focused on the concerns of migrant women workers and commitment to formulating a national action plan for the promotion and protection of human rights that included a section on violence against women, women and the criminal justice system, female migrant workers and trafficking in women and children.

6. Almost 80 per cent of Sri Lanka's population was rural. To create greater opportunities for rural women and girls, the Government had exploited interactions between health care and basic education, improved water and sanitation and malaria control and had built rural infrastructure such as roads. Rural women's functional literacy and numeracy skills had enabled them to access financial services, including microcredit facilities, as well as agricultural, industrial and financial cooperatives. In the former conflict areas, women farmers had been given demined land, agricultural subsidies and tools, as well as access to extension services. Damaged irrigation tanks and canals had been repaired and overgrown farmland was being cleared. A fund to rebuild cooperatives in those areas had also been established. The Government was providing incentives to private investors to establish industrial, information and communications technology (ICT) and tourism enterprises in rural areas and was encouraging rural women to participate in those sectors. A Sri Lankan woman had won the Youth

Business International Start-up Entrepreneur of the Year award in 2013.

7. **Mr. Nduhuura** (Uganda) said that gender equality was guaranteed under Uganda's Constitution, which provided for women's participation in decision-making. The current Speaker of Parliament, 31 per cent of members of Parliament and 30 per cent of the Cabinet were women. Major steps had been taken towards the full observance of women's legal rights and the elimination of discrimination against them in all areas of life. In education, primary school enrolment had doubled between 1996 and 2006 and gender parity had almost been achieved. The introduction of universal secondary education in 2007 had improved access for girls, while affirmative action had increased female enrolment in higher education.

8. Although women provided 60 per cent of labour in rural areas, they received less than their fair share of income because land was traditionally inherited by men. To address that situation, the Government was extending microcredit to rural women and conducting awareness-raising campaigns on the rights of the girl child. With regard to health, it was providing antiretroviral drugs to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS. To address violence against women, it had adopted legislation against domestic violence and female genital mutilation, in addition to a national action plan on sexual violence against women. However, violence against women was aggravated by poverty and inadequate living conditions, which could be eradicated only through socioeconomic transformation.

9. **Ms. Kabua** (Marshall Islands), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Pacific Islands Forum, said that improved data capacity was essential to regional progress in women's advancement. At the Forum's 44th meeting, held in Majuro in September 2013, Forum leaders had called for accelerated efforts to implement the 2012 Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration, with a specific focus on supporting women with disabilities, improving women's access to employment and economic opportunities and improving sexual and reproductive health.

10. Although progress had been made towards gender parity in education, few Pacific Island States were on track to achieve Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment. Women's access to higher education had improved, but their job opportunities had not, and women's representation in

parliament was the lowest in the world. Limited progress had been made in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, although three countries had introduced temporary special quotas for women in government leadership positions and several others had quota legislation pending. The 2012 Declaration included commitments to providing essential services for women and girls who were survivors of violence and enacting legislation to protect women from violence and impose appropriate penalties for perpetrators. Many countries had made strong efforts to advance specific domestic violence legislation and protective measures, but greater efforts were needed. Regional civil society networks and other stakeholders had also worked to combat violence against women, and assistance in handling such violence had been provided to national police forces.

11. Progress in improving maternal health had been mixed, while a regional working group was overseeing the implementation of a regional action plan on women, peace and security. Regional climate change strategies should also address gender issues appropriately. An economic action plan had been adopted that contained specific priorities for women's empowerment.

12. The 5th meeting of Pacific Ministers for Women, to be held later that month, would focus on the intersections between the Millennium Development Goals, the 20-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the review of the Cairo Programme of Action, the post-2015 development agenda and the 2014 International Conference on Small Island Developing States and would address the lack of national data on gender issues. The United Nations system should support Pacific States in their efforts to collect data on women's empowerment and gender-based violence.

13. **Mr. Momen** (Bangladesh) said that his Government provided universal free primary and secondary education, including special stipends for girls. Bangladesh was a Member State Champion for the Global Education First Initiative and had established record numbers of vocational training institutes. The proportion of women in the labour force had increased from 7 per cent in the 1980s to 36 per cent in 2013.

14. His Government fostered women's enterprise through access to banking and credit, including collateral-free loans for women entrepreneurs. It had

also opened sales outlets for women's products. Ten per cent of spaces at State-owned industrial estates were reserved for women. Government-sponsored microcredits had helped over 3 million women to become micro-entrepreneurs in rural areas, while its programme targeting female-headed households had helped create thousands of women-led agricultural businesses. Many men chose to sign property deeds jointly with their wife or daughter because it was much easier for women to obtain loans.

15. Quotas for women of 10 per cent in the public service and nearly 65 per cent in primary school teaching had been introduced. Women held key decision-making positions in Parliament and the Cabinet and some 14,200 women had been elected to local government positions. The Global Gender Gap Report 2012 had ranked Bangladesh eighth in the world for political empowerment of women.

16. **Ms. Perceval** (Argentina) said that in order for gender equality to be achieved, women must have access to employment, political and social representation, social security coverage and health services, and gender-based violence must be eliminated. Women and men should be jointly responsible for childcare. Legislation adopted by Latin American Governments, including her own, to address all the forms of violence against women referred to in the Convention of Belém do Pará would be ineffective in the absence of the corresponding public policies and a culture of commitment to equal opportunities.

17. The global financial crisis had resulted in women's rights being neglected in favour of structural adjustment policies, yet gender-sensitive budgeting, positive discrimination for vulnerable groups and anti-poverty measures in fact offered the best solutions to such crises. The post-2015 development agenda should include indicators on women's advancement and mainstream a gender and human rights perspective.

18. Although her Government, which was led by a woman, had introduced quotas to promote women's broad participation in decision-making, women were underrepresented in local government. She urged the international community to foster women's political participation at all levels.

19. In the absence of secure jobs, increasing numbers of women in Argentina were being imprisoned for their involvement in organized crime and drug trafficking. Although the Government had adopted legislation on

the rights of rural workers, more needed to be done worldwide to ensure the full recognition of rural women's rights. Given the feminization of migration, the international community should also do more to uphold the rights of female migrant workers.

20. **Ms. Andelić** (Bosnia and Herzegovina) said that much remained to be done before the international targets for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment and combating violence against women could be met. Gender-sensitive humanitarian assistance must be provided to refugee and internally displaced women and girls and violence against women in conflict situations must be eliminated and its perpetrators punished. Her delegation fully supported the mandates of the Secretary-General's Special Representatives for Children and Armed Conflict and Sexual Violence in Conflict.

21. The root causes of violence against women, which included women's economic dependence on men, unequal access to education, and social and cultural practices, also needed to be addressed. Her Government had adopted a law on gender equality designed to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and had prohibited discrimination and gender-based violence in line with international standards. It had also adopted a Gender Action Plan, with its own funding mechanism, which focused on equality and women's empowerment.

22. Her Government had adopted educational, employment, housing and health-care action plans for Roma and was committed to the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015. It had incorporated the provisions of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women, peace and security into its Gender Action Plan, believing that women should be fully involved in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, early peacebuilding and post-conflict planning, as well as in decision-making processes. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in peacekeeping policy and advancing women's participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations were fundamental for more effective performance on the ground. To that end, her Government had adopted a policy requiring one third of its candidates for peacekeeping operations to be women.

23. **Ms. Alanezi** (Bahrain) said that her Government had made the advancement of women a priority, working to enable women to partner with men in

building the family, society and the State and ultimately reaching decision-making positions. As part of Bahrain's ongoing reform process, a Supreme Council for Women had been established, entrusted with formulating and putting in place national plans and policies for improving the situation of Bahraini women. Those included a draft national plan on the advancement of Bahraini women 2013-2022 that sought to integrate women's needs into development programmes, taking into account sustainability, family stability and equality of opportunities. The Council had also worked with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on a programme designed to empower women politically and tackle the obstacles faced by women candidates for public office at the parliamentary and municipal levels. A number of ministries and official institutions had established equal opportunity units and incorporated them into their organizational and administrative structures in both the public and private sectors.

24. With regard to women's economic empowerment, the Government had put in place programmes to reduce female unemployment rates, launched a series of training programmes, provided loans and facilitated financing services with a view to helping women become entrepreneurs.

25. As a State party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women since 2002, Bahrain had enacted anti-discrimination legislation that addressed a wide range of issues and provided for, inter alia, the establishment of a maintenance or alimony fund for the benefit of divorced women, the granting of citizenship to children of Bahraini women married to foreigners and the amendment of the existing law on evidence in order to simplify the procedures for women to prove that they had contributed to household expenditures. By executive decree, the needs of women had been accounted for in the public budget. Conditions had also been established for the conclusion of marriage contracts, so as to protect the rights of women, and a minimum age had been set for early marriage. Other relevant laws had increased the number of sharia courts and protected women's right to benefit from housing services.

26. **Ms. Romulus** (Haiti) said that economic hardship, natural disasters and violence against women made gender equality a pressing issue in Haiti. More than 50 per cent of Haitian women were economically

active, the highest rate in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Considerable efforts were being made to improve the situation of women. The Government had allocated US\$ 76 million to education, health, food aid, transport and other assistance for vulnerable groups, under which cash transfers had been made to 57,000 low-income mothers and 60,000 farming kits were to be delivered in rural areas.

27. The Haitian feminist movement was growing and various organizations were campaigning for the Constitution to be amended to bring women's issues to the fore. Although Haiti had established a Ministry for the Status of Women and Women's Rights in 1994 and had ratified the relevant international and regional instruments, much remained to be done and Haitian women must unite to demand respect for their rights and an end to violence and discrimination. Change was visible, nonetheless, and women, who headed half of Haitian households in the country, were participating in sociopolitical life and playing a key role in efforts to make communities more resilient.

28. **Ms. Swai** (Myanmar) said that her Government had taken measures to promote and protect the rights of women and children, including acceding to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Its adherence to those instruments had contributed significantly to institutional development and national activities in those areas. Complaints of violations against women or any other human rights abuses could be filed with the National Human Rights Commission. The rights of women in Myanmar were protected by tradition and by law, both of which upheld their equality with men. Discrimination, whether in terms of pay, retirement age, employment, voting rights or selection for public office, was virtually non-existent and prohibited by the Constitution.

29. Reform measures undertaken in the context of her country's peaceful democratic transition had created an environment even more conducive to the protection of vulnerable groups, including women and girls, with voices in parliamentary debates becoming louder on the issue of gender equality. The new National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women 2013-2022 would be implemented by the Government in cooperation with United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, civil society and private agencies. Women's participation in the

country's political process and in the business world, while still low, was on the rise. Several women had been appointed to ministerial positions.

30. **Mr. Tesfay** (Ethiopia) said that gender equality was enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution and was a critical consideration in enacting legislation and formulating policy. As a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other international and regional human rights instruments, his Government had been working tirelessly to address the various challenges faced by Ethiopian women. He thanked the East Africa Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for its technical assistance in the preparation of Ethiopia's periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and in capacity-building in general and recommended that serious consideration should be given to addressing the budgetary constraints faced by OHCHR.

31. Migrant women workers from developing countries such as Ethiopia were falling victim to illegal trafficking and were exposed to severe abuses, including physical and sexual assault, confinement, incarceration and murder. His Government had amended its criminal law to include a wide range of new provisions that penalized trafficking in women and children, in addition to launching a national awareness-raising campaign on human trafficking and concluding bilateral anti-trafficking agreements with Kenya, Djibouti, the Sudan, Yemen and Kuwait.

32. With over three quarters of the Ethiopian population living in rural areas and smallholder agriculture dominating the national economy, his Government's efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, particularly in reducing poverty and hunger, had focused mainly on agriculture and the welfare of rural women, who comprised a large part of the rural labour force. It had worked constantly to improve the lives of the poor in rural areas by improving access to land, water, improved agricultural and livestock technologies and financial resources, with the result that the rural poverty rate had declined by nearly 10 per cent between 2004 and 2011.

33. In order to promote women's participation in political life, his Government had taken measures such as allocating additional financial support for parties presenting women candidates. As a result, the

proportion of women in Parliament and regional and local government and in the judiciary had increased substantially. Those achievements remained modest, however, and obstacles to women's political participation persisted. He therefore called on the United Nations and other development partners to provide additional support in that regard. His delegation agreed that the post-2015 development agenda should include a gender goal and should mainstream gender issues.

34. **Mr. Tupouniua** (Tonga) welcomed the important work being done by the Secretariats of the Pacific Islands Forum and the Pacific Community in emphasizing women's human rights and empowerment. Although the social status of women in Tonga was the highest in the Pacific region, there was ample scope for increasing women's participation at all levels of decision-making. Their informal contribution to the economy also needed to be recognized.

35. His Government's 2012 National Policy on Gender and Development focused on: enabling a familial and social environment for gender equality; ensuring equitable access to economic assets and employment; increasing women's leadership and equitable political representation; creating equal conditions for natural disaster, environmental and climate change response; and creating an environment conducive to mainstreaming gender in government policies, programmes and services.

36. Access to adequate health-care services had resulted in low maternal death rates. The Government had prioritized maternal and child health programmes over the years and was currently working to improve transportation and social and basic services in order to eradicate hunger and reduce poverty. It had also introduced social welfare and social protection schemes to offset losses resulting from the decline in foreign remittances. In addition, a national campaign to reduce non-communicable diseases targeted the entire population, including women.

37. A family protection bill had recently been passed to provide protection to women and children in particular. Gender statistics would be integrated into the current review of national development statistics, in a joint effort between the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and his Government.

38. Gender inequality was recognized as a risk to the governance system of disaster risk management,

climate change and environmental management. In that regard, the UNDP four-year Pacific Risk Resilience Programme would work with Tongan Government counterparts to extend development efforts to the community level. The UNDP Tonga Governance Strengthening Programme would attempt to promote women's participation in electoral politics and decision-making, while the gender analysis and mainstreaming arm of the Women's Affairs Division would receive a new system, development tools, gender statistics and a monitoring and evaluation tool. Lastly, UN-Women's Ending Violence against Women programme was funding local non-governmental organizations to address the issue.

39. **Ms. Zografaska-Krsteska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that countries that hoped to make rapid development progress must rely on the potential of their female population and therefore had a duty to educate and empower their women and increase women's political participation at all levels. In the 2006 Electoral Code, her Government had established a minimum quota of 30 per cent for women candidates in parliamentary and municipal elections. That had resulted in an increase in representation, which had, in turn, led to the discussion of numerous issues in terms of gender equality and to an enhanced dialogue with the public. The rules of procedure of the national Assembly also embedded the principle of gender equality. The Assembly's Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and the Women Parliamentarians' Club constituted mechanisms for implementing a gender perspective within the Assembly, the country's highest policymaking body.

40. The representation of women at the local level was far lower, but recent elections had led to increases in the number of women mayors and municipal councillors, attesting to changes in the political culture at local level and to political parties' recognition of the need to put forward more women candidates. Greater progress could be expected. An analysis of the qualitative participation of women in public and political life at the local level, conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in 2011, had found that greater awareness-raising and training at the local level were needed, as well as more efficient enforcement mechanisms for the implementation of local action plans to eliminate gender disparities between urban and rural municipalities.

41. The Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, adopted in 2012, had brought domestic legislation into line with European and international standards, established a procedure for identifying unequal treatment of women and men and provided for the adoption of general and special measures to establish equal opportunities. Along with the Act on Prevention of and Protection against Discrimination, it laid the groundwork for the elimination of the various kinds of discrimination faced by women. The mainstreaming of a gender perspective had also been promoted by the recent adoption of strategies for gender equality and gender budgeting. The Government had also adopted a National Action Plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security and remained committed to promoting the role of women in peace and security and to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

42. **Mr. Msosa** (Malawi) said that although Malawi had been rated as one of Africa's 20 best-performing countries by the Millennium Development Goals Report 2013, it was not on track to achieve Goals 1, 2, 3 and 5, which had a feminine dimension. Since progress on gender equality and women's empowerment contributed to the achievement of other Goals, his Government had adopted a Millennium Development Goal Acceleration Framework action plan that focused on improving girls' school attendance and women's economic status, promoting women's participation in decision-making and reducing gender-based violence. Under its first woman President, it was investing heavily in gender equality and women's empowerment, which had both human rights and development dimensions. It had appointed over 100 women to senior positions since 2012 and would ensure that more women were elected to Parliament and local government in the 2014 elections.

43. **Ms. Calcinari Van Der Velde** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that gender inequality deepened overall inequalities in the world, the feminization of poverty being one manifestation of such disparities. Her Government recognized women as historical and social agents and had instituted a legal and institutional framework that guaranteed women's full inclusion in all aspects of the country's development. A gender approach had been mainstreamed in public policies, plans and programmes. The Bolivarian Constitution established

rights and safeguards for women and recognized domestic work as a source of added value, wealth and social welfare. As a result, a series of laws on equal opportunity, protection of women from violence, promotion and protection of breastfeeding and other pertinent issues had been enacted. Moreover, institutions such as the National Institute for Women and the Women's Development Bank were responsible for promoting the political, economic and social empowerment of women.

44. Women occupied 50 per cent of positions in the national Government and 60 per cent in community organizations. Other national mechanisms that had been established to promote and protect the rights of women included the National Office for the Defence of Women's Rights and the National Observatory for Gender Equality. Measures to meet the needs of women victims of violence included the establishment of national hotlines, specialized offices and courts and 46 prosecutor's offices competent to deal with cases of violence against women.

45. **Mr. Šćepanović** (Montenegro) said that ending all forms of violence against women and girls was a priority for his Government, which had endorsed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. Ending impunity and delivering justice to the victims and survivors of such violence remained crucial and efforts to eradicate it must be redoubled.

46. Since regaining its independence in 2006, his country had become a party to all major international instruments for the protection of women's human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Government was dedicated to improving the status of women, focusing on their political participation, economic empowerment and freedom from violence. Cooperation between the relevant State institutions and civil society had resulted in the development and adoption of a new Action Plan for the Achievement of Gender Equality 2013-2017. Gender equality had also been integrated into Montenegro's national agenda for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Despite positive trends in many areas, such as a declining female unemployment rate, considerable progress would be required in order to reach the Government's ambitious targets for 2015, especially those for women's political participation in decision-making. Challenges also remained for improving women's economic status, eliminating discrimination in the workplace, combating violence against women and encouraging women's

entrepreneurship. Stereotypes about the position and role of women in society also needed to be combated. His Government intended to tackle those challenges through a multisectoral approach, education and awareness-raising campaigns.

47. His Government was drafting an action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women, peace and security. It had also organized a regional seminar on the role of women in building integrity and promoting good practices in the defence and security sector, drawing upon experiences in South-Eastern Europe.

48. **Mr. Manongi** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his Government recognized that the advancement of women and gender equality were preconditions for social justice and economic development and that violence against women was a violation of human rights that had devastating effects on individuals, communities and societies. It was therefore firmly committed to mainstreaming in all government policies and programmes targets for achieving gender equality and ending gender-based violence. Its policies and strategies, including those on economic growth and poverty reduction, had an impact on women's economic empowerment by establishing funds and credit schemes that facilitated women entrepreneurs' access to credit.

49. Tanzania's Constitution encouraged women's participation in decision-making and political life and set minimum quotas for women's representation in government bodies. Since 2004, the number of women ministers and parliamentarians on the Tanzanian mainland had doubled, while 30 per cent of members of the Zanzibar House of Representatives were women. Women were also adequately represented in the commission tasked with leading the national consultative process for the review of the current Constitution.

50. In order to eliminate violence against women and girls, his Government had reviewed and amended discriminatory legislation and enacted new laws that targeted the issue specifically. It had also ratified a number of major international instruments that promoted gender equality and human rights. Violence against women and girls had been mainstreamed as a poverty indicator in the national poverty reduction strategy and national plans to prevent, respond to and ultimately eradicate violence against women and

children and female genital mutilation had been developed. A female network had been established within the National Police to assist police in dealing with alleged victims of gender-based violence, and a dedicated women's desk had been established in some police stations.

51. Lack of access to health centres with qualified midwives remained a serious impediment to maternal health. In order to guarantee women's access to health services and prevent maternal deaths, his Government had continued to expand primary health-care coverage and strengthen the provision of comprehensive and basic emergency obstetric and newborn care equipment nationwide. Funding from the international community would be needed to continue to improve access to health care.

52. Despite the progress made in mainstreaming gender policies and programmes, some areas needed work, such as capacity-building on gender analysis and the collection of gender-disaggregated data for planning and policy purposes. The Government was committed to persevering in its efforts to surmount those obstacles and was already on target to achieve Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender equality and empowerment of women.

53. **Ms. Sánchez** (Honduras) said that Honduras was making significant progress towards eliminating gender gaps. One major step had been the Government's adoption of a gender equality plan, under which a system of gender equality management had been established to promote and institutionalize gender-equality policies. The National Congress had recently passed legislation on part-time and hourly employment that would benefit women in particular. It was hoped that such legislation would guide efforts to guarantee women a life free from violence and equal access to education and technology, which they had previously been denied. Women's presence in education, science and technology was increasing and efforts were being made to complete the process of gender mainstreaming at all levels of education. The National Vocational Training Institute had set up courses for women in areas that had, until recently, been considered a male preserve and the Commission for Alternative Non-formal Education was providing training for rural women. Women's access to basic education had increased in recent years and the enrolment rate for girls aged 5 to 18 had surpassed that of boys. However, those improvements did not translate into greater

access to quality jobs or better pay and working conditions for women, who still earned 66 per cent of what men earned for the same work.

54. With regard to women's political participation, Decree No. 54-2012 had amended the Electoral Act and increased the quota for women candidates in all elections to 40 per cent; where only one seat was contested, the incumbent and the alternate must not be of the same sex. The Decree had also introduced an article providing for the application of gender parity from the 2016 elections. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal had been entrusted with regulating the principle of gender parity and implementing a system of alternating the names of men and women on lists of electoral candidates. Much remained to be done, however, to increase women's participation. Honduras remained committed to protecting all human rights and to working with United Nations entities in favour of women's rights.

55. **Mr. Ntwaagae** (Botswana) said that despite the standards set by international instruments, the international community still had a long way to go before women could be said to be enjoying fully their fundamental rights and freedoms and realizing their full potential. Botswana continued to strive to achieve the relevant development goals and commitments and national efforts continued to be made to mainstream the gender perspective in government policies and programmes, enhance education and training opportunities for women and girls and increase their participation in leadership and decision-making. Progress was being made in addressing gender disparities in areas such as educational attainment and the number of women in technical, professional and executive positions. The persistence of disparities across other sectors was cause for concern, however. The Government had implemented a number of initiatives to address those disparities, including establishing a Women's Economic Empowerment Programme under which a total of P 14.8 million had been disbursed to more than 1,200 beneficiaries to start income-generating activities, with a special dispensation for persons with disabilities.

56. His Government was committed to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and attached great importance to the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Despite Member States' commitment

to continuing efforts to prevent and address gender-based violence, including through the enactment or amendment of laws criminalizing violence against women and the strengthening of national legal and policy frameworks, gender-based violence, including violence against women with disabilities and women in conflict and post-conflict situations, remained a major impediment to the attainment of gender equality in many countries. Efforts to end such violence and the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators were crucial. His delegation endorsed the statement in the Secretary-General's report that concerted action, political will and commitment on the part of all stakeholders were needed to address the barriers to women's advancement.

57. **Ms. Barghouti** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that while there had been many significant achievements in the advancement and empowerment of women, many challenges and constraints continued to hinder the full implementation of the strategic objectives set forth in the Beijing Declaration. The status of Palestinian women, who had been living for too long in the unbearable situation created by Israeli military occupation, had been severely affected by the overall deterioration of political, economic and social conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. It was imperative that the international community, in particular the United Nations, take concrete measures under the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant resolutions to compel Israel to cease its breaches of international law and hold it accountable for its multiple violations of Palestinian rights. Those violations included the expansion of illegal settlements and the illegal annexation wall, severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods, widespread destruction of Palestinian property and agricultural lands and the imprisonment and detention of thousands of people, including children, women, heads of household and primary breadwinners. Israel's illegal policies continued to have a detrimental impact not only on Palestinian women's advancement and empowerment, but also on their basic survival and well-being. Furthermore, while no country was free of the scourge of violence against women, Palestinian women were also subject to the political violence caused by the occupying forces.

58. Despite that dire situation, Palestinian women were striving to implement the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women 2011-2019 drawn up

by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in cooperation with UN-Women, which aimed to create work training and empowerment programmes for women, provide social support and promote a legal framework to combat violence. The efforts of the many international organizations that continued to provide support and assistance to Palestinian women and their families were invaluable, but tended to address only emergency and short-term needs. Her delegation looked forward to the day when the international community would cease to tolerate Israel's continued denial of the most basic rights of the Palestinian people. That would bring Palestinian women closer to a normal life free from occupation, discrimination and violence.

59. **Ms. Boissiere** (Trinidad and Tobago) said that her country remained fully committed to promoting and protecting the rights of women, as evidenced by its ratification of the relevant international instruments and their translation into national legislation and policies. It continued to undertake a number of initiatives to that end, led by the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development and in cooperation with non-governmental organizations and other national, regional and international partners. Concrete measures included mainstreaming a gender perspective in State policies and programmes, conducting awareness-raising programmes, drafting a national gender policy and providing universal access to education for all citizens, as well as training opportunities for women. The legislative framework had also been amended to enhance protection of women's rights. The 2000 Occupational Health and Safety Act, for instance, required employers to provide specific facilities for women and the Government intended to enact legislation making it mandatory for all public and private offices to provide appropriate spaces for nursing mothers.

60. Other programmes addressed the impact of gang activity and armed violence on the lives of women in Trinidad and Tobago. The Government continued to work assiduously to address the fundamental challenges posed by violence and crime related to the use of small arms and light weapons. It was actively involved in addressing crime and security issues and therefore requested Member States' support for the establishment of the Arms Trade Treaty secretariat in Trinidad and Tobago.

61. In recognition of the critical importance of the family unit, her Government had implemented

programmes aimed, inter alia, at eliminating gender stereotypes and violence against women and assisting families so that all their members achieved their full potential. Work was also ongoing to ensure the full enjoyment of the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. To that end, the Government operated a network of hospitals and health centres throughout the country at no cost to citizens, supported by various grants including the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme.

62. Since non-communicable diseases had a significant impact on the country's productivity, financial and human resources and development, her Government looked forward to working with the international community to continue to implement the provisions of the 2011 Political Declaration on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases and to the inclusion of measures to address such diseases in the post-2015 development agenda. It also looked forward to the timely adoption by the General Assembly of an effective partnership mechanism to strengthen and facilitate multisectoral action to combat them and to aid national action. There was an urgent need to promote healthy habits, such as physical activity and healthy eating, and to curb tobacco and alcohol consumption in order to prevent the onset of such diseases and the resulting socioeconomic challenges.

63. **Ms. Deer** (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that ICRC was often witness to the grave and dehumanizing effects of sexual violence in armed conflict, the prevalence of which was vastly underestimated. With trained staff and clear and effective sanctions mechanisms, national justice systems could act as strong deterrents. Integrating the prohibition of sexual violence into the operational procedures and policies of armed and security forces also fostered preventive efforts and accountability. It was extremely important to ensure the security of victims and prevent further attacks. Victims must also have unimpeded access to timely and high-quality health care and psychosocial support, a challenge that was exacerbated by the destruction or unavailability of resources during conflicts. Victims of sexual violence often remained invisible because guilt or fear of retaliation made them reluctant to come forward. Educating communities was therefore vital for reducing the risks of exclusion or stigmatization and encouraging victims to seek help.

64. ICRC had taken a multidisciplinary approach to responding to sexual violence in armed conflict and other situations of violence, providing medical and psychosocial care and economic support to victims and seeking to minimize risk wherever possible. It worked with local structures in order to tailor its response to the specific context. It was determined to expand its programmes over the coming years to meet the needs of victims and strengthen its action to prevent sexual violence. It called on States to prevent, halt and prosecute such violations, in keeping with international human rights and humanitarian law.

65. **Mr. Motter** (Observer for the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)) said that the IPU strategy on women's political participation had four components: informing effective policymaking through research; empowering women parliamentarians; reforming parliaments to render them gender-sensitive; and advancing women's rights by eliminating discrimination and violence against them. Research was at the core of its work and IPU used the information gathered on women's participation in parliament, the good practice observed at international level and the analyses it conducted to provide support to parliaments in enhancing women's political participation, guidance on the adoption of positive measures as part of constitutional and electoral reform, capacity-building for women parliamentarians and assistance to parliaments in transforming how they functioned and in establishing family-friendly services.

66. IPU had been the principal source of data on women in parliament, providing regularly updated information on, inter alia, the number of women elected to, appointed in or presiding over parliament, parliamentary committees dealing with gender equality, and the adoption and implementation of temporary special measures. It also carried out annual analyses of progress and setbacks in women's participation in parliament. It therefore associated itself with the Secretary-General's call for sex-disaggregated data on women's political participation at the local level and in decision-making positions in the public administration.

67. Since the real changes brought about by recent progress in countries such as Saudi Arabia, where an unprecedented 20 per cent of parliamentary seats were held by women, and Rwanda, where women accounted for 64 per cent of members of the Chamber of Deputies, were often difficult to gauge, IPU would be adding new fields to its research, beginning in 2014. It would soon embark on a research project to ascertain

the impact of women's participation in parliament and investigate violence against women in parliament. Its research would continue to inform collective action and support for women's participation in politics and it would be tireless in its efforts to advance the cause of women until gender equality became a reality in politics and in society in general.

68. **Ms. Christensen** (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that in many emergencies, the risk of community tension and interpersonal violence was a major concern, but insufficient attention had been paid to violence occurring in situations of natural disaster. One of the hidden consequences of natural disasters was the devastating physical and mental impact and the socioeconomic repercussions of the gender-based violence that often followed. In partnership with the Canadian Red Cross, IFRC had been scaling up its own activities on that issue. It had been working to improve policies, tools and programmes and to build knowledge and capacities among its membership. One of the latest tools to be developed was a violence-prevention mobile application to assist disaster responders in integrating violence prevention and responding to violence, which would be finalized in 2014. IFRC called on all stakeholders engaged in emergency response to prioritize violence prevention, mitigation and response and to strengthen community-based support structures.

69. IFRC commended the leadership shown by Japan on gender equality and empowerment of women in natural disasters and welcomed the adoption at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women of the agreed conclusions on the elimination of violence against women and girls (E/2013/27), in particular, the incorporation of the specific needs of women and girls into disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance programmes. That was a positive step in the normative framework on the issue. In future, appropriate attention must be given in policy discussions and programme activities to the need to take strategic and practical action to mitigate the risk of violence in natural disaster settings, including by strengthening the collection and use of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data and by enhancing capacities to measure the effectiveness of interventions. Violence-prevention analysis must be included at the outset of humanitarian response.

70. As the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals approached, achievement of the

Goals that lagged furthest behind must be accelerated and the post-2015 development agenda must build on the lessons learned and ensure that addressing inequalities was at its core. Unless gender equality and discrimination and violence against women were explicitly addressed in the new framework, progress towards sustainable development would remain elusive. IFRC therefore joined the call for a stand-alone goal on gender equality and for the integration of gender-sensitive targets and indicators across all Goals. It also advocated the integration of values and skills-based education, including its institutionalization at the national level, in development discussions in order to transform discriminatory mindsets and behaviour into respect for women's diversity, equality and active social and political inclusion.

71. **Mr. Bleicher** (Observer for the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)), speaking also on behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), said that the importance of empowering women could not be overstated, particularly in rural areas where they accounted for a large percentage of the agricultural workforce and were also caregivers, entrepreneurs and investors. In that context, the Rome-based agencies remained committed to the implementation, in conjunction with UN-Women, of the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women, which drew on each agency's comparative advantages in seven countries. The national priority areas were: strengthening women's self-help organizations and cooperatives; training women smallholders to increase their productivity, including marketing and credit management; mobilizing and strengthening self-help groups, including the provision of services and inputs; enhancing capacity to facilitate poor women's access to savings and loan associations; supporting maternal, infant and child nutrition through the provision of supplementary food and the promotion of nutrition-sensitive gardening; strengthening rural women's leadership and entrepreneurship capacities; and enhancing gender-responsive delivery of agricultural services and support for rural women's groups. Accelerating the economic empowerment of rural women could not be achieved by those agencies alone, so collaboration with other partners would be welcome.

72. At the recent fifty-seventh session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination

against Women, the Rome-based agencies and UN-Women had supported the preparation of a general recommendation on article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Since the Convention's adoption, agriculture had become feminized in many places and rural women had an increasingly important role to play, but they still faced many obstacles. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women could help to overcome those challenges through achievements such as: the creation of an enabling environment to achieve equity between rural women and men, as well as boys and girls; rural women's equal access to land, inheritance and property; opportunities for decent rural employment, livelihood and training for women and girls; empowerment of women to participate in decision-making at all levels; and active participation of women in discussions with their rural communities on key issues. The discussion on rural women was not, however, limited to article 14 and the Rome-based agencies would further increase their collaboration with the Committee and continue to support States parties in implementing the Convention.

73. Addressing the persistent gender inequalities and discrimination experienced by rural women required eliminating structural factors that caused and reproduced those inequalities in the economic, social and political domains. The Rome-based agencies were committed to achieving a world of equity without hunger and hoped to achieve greater and more sustainable results through their partnership.

74. **Mr. Cassidy** (Observer for the International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General on violence against women migrant workers (A/68/178) were consistent with the relevant ILO conventions and with his Organization's primary goal of promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, security and human dignity. Women accounted for almost half of the total international migrant population and had become important income earners, contributing to the economies of both their countries of origin and destination. The agreed conclusions adopted at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/2013/27) reflected the call for greater protection of women at work. In that context, ILO advocated a migrant-centred and rights-based approach to labour migration,

involving gender-sensitive labour migration policies, effective institutions, and legislation and policies guided by the relevant international labour standards. Better harmonization of employment, social protection and labour migration policies with development planning was crucial to sustainable and inclusive development.

75. Particular attention should also be given to domestic workers, who faced many challenges that could be partly attributed to gaps in national labour and employment legislation and often reflected long-standing discrimination. Decisive action should likewise be taken to regulate recruitment agencies, which were part of an extremely lucrative and largely unregulated migration business involving a host of legal and illegal intermediaries who often took advantage of women's lack of access to information and legal protection. ILO Convention No. 181 on Private Employment Agencies offered an international framework for action. There should be no complacency for human trafficking and forced labour, which affected an estimated 900,000 persons per year, particularly women and girls who ended up in prostitution and sexual exploitation or other exploitative forms of employment, debt bondage or slavery. The agenda of the 2014 International Labour Conference would include a standard-setting process on forced labour that included human trafficking in its definition and would supplement the existing ILO Forced Labour Convention (No. 29).

76. Lastly, concerted action was required to stop gender-based violence in the world of work. Coherent and effective labour laws and enforcement mechanisms were needed so that proactive laws and individual complaint-based mechanisms dissuaded gender-based violence. There should be consistency between labour codes and other bodies of law and Governments must remove obstacles to women's access to justice. ILO would never tire in its efforts to eradicate workplace violence and sexual harassment and stood ready to assist its tripartite constituents and cooperate with the United Nations system as a whole in ensuring a world free from violence against women and girls.

Statements in exercise of the right of reply

77. **Ms. Bar-Sadeh** (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that if the Palestinians were truly interested in improving the situation of women, they would have addressed the factors that exacerbated

their plight. A recent Human Rights Watch report had found that the Palestinian Authority was failing to act diligently to prevent, investigate and punish violence against women and was denying victims their rights under international law. There was a clear connection between advancing peace and advancing equal rights for women. Her Government hoped that its current talks with the Palestinians would make progress and that all issues would be discussed and resolved. While no country was perfect, Israel stood alone in its unparalleled efforts to promote gender equality and empower women in a region where their subjugation was generalized.

78. **Ms. Rasheed** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that Israel could quote as many reports citing information taken completely out of context as it wished, but the fact remained that countless reports produced by the United Nations and other international organizations had identified occupation as the main obstacle to the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.