



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**  
Fifty-sixth session

**Summary record of the 1173rd meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 10 October 2013, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Jahan (Vice-Chairperson)

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(*continued*)

*Combined initial and second to fifth periodic reports of Seychelles*

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*In the absence of the Chairperson, Ms. Jahan (Vice-Chairperson) took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

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

*Combined initial and second to fifth periodic reports of Seychelles  
(CEDAW/C/SYC/1-5; CEDAW/C/SYC/Q/1-5 and Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Seychelles took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Mr. Meriton** (Seychelles), introducing the combined initial and second to fifth periodic reports of Seychelles (CEDAW/C/SYC/1-5), apologized for the 18-year delay in submitting the report to the Committee, which was due to heavy reporting obligations and limited human resources. Although it was a small island developing State, Seychelles had a high level of human development and enjoyed a decent standard of living. It was on target to achieving most Millennium Development Goals and was at the forefront in Africa with regard to gender equality and the advancement of women. However, it suffered from many of the challenges faced by other countries and its status as a high middle-income country and absence of abject poverty affected its ability to secure support from donors. Its history of putting people at the centre of development and of sustained investment in the social sector had left Seychelles one of the most highly-indebted countries in the world.
3. National gender priorities included combating gender-based violence, which remained one of the most common and pervasive forms of discrimination in Seychelles, and tackling the long delays in the justice system. Training was provided for the police and judiciary to try to address the negative social norms, beliefs and cultures that perpetuated and condoned gender-based violence.
4. Trafficking in women and girls was another priority area, with a draft bill and national strategy in the stages of validation. Seychelles was also working with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to tackle transnational organized crime through police training programmes and improved data collection, reporting mechanisms and public awareness-raising campaigns on trafficking in persons.
5. The promotion of gender parity and equality in decision-making was also a priority. Seychelles was ranked fifth in the world for the proportion of women in a national parliament and the number of women holding leadership positions in the Government, the judiciary and the public sector had increased substantially. However, women remained underrepresented in the private sector.
6. Teenage pregnancy was another issue of concern and the Government intended to harmonize the laws on age of access to medical treatment, including reproductive health services and HIV testing, with the age of sexual consent, which was 16 years.
7. The economic empowerment of women was recognized as a national economic necessity and a lever of change in improving the status of women. Progress had also been made in eradicating discrimination against women in the workplace, including measures to combat sexual harassment, support working mothers and to increase access to decent childcare.
8. Draft gender policy and action plans were under preparation to ensure gender mainstreaming and to improve the collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics. The vision was for all women and girls to be empowered to be able to choose their future and live their dreams free from fear of violence or other forms of inequality.

*Articles 1 to 3*

9. **Ms. Patten** asked whether the ministry intended to adopt a national action plan to implement the recommendations that would be contained in the Committee's concluding observations. She wondered whether the Government would consider enacting legislation to provide a definition of discrimination against women, or discrimination on grounds of sex, to ensure compliance with article 1 of the Convention. Had the Convention been incorporated into domestic legislation and could it be directly invoked? She enquired about training provided for the judiciary and the police on the Convention and the Optional Protocol, as well as on the Committee's general recommendations and jurisprudence, to ensure visibility.

10. **Ms. Šimonović** sought assurance that future reports would be submitted on time and that Seychelles was on track in implementing the Convention. She asked whether the provisions of the Optional Protocol were being applied at the national level and whether the Convention was directly applicable in the Constitutional Court. If so, could the delegation provide examples? She requested more information on the Government's cooperation with civil society and NGOs in implementing its women's rights agenda. Did it provide them with any funding and would it involve them in the implementation of the Committee's recommendations? She enquired about the National Assembly's involvement in the reporting process and whether it was aware that the delegation was presenting its report to the Committee in Geneva and that recommendations on the future implementation of the Convention would be made.

11. **Ms. Al-Jehani** wondered whether the frequent restructuring of ministries affected the implementation of the gender strategy and capacity-building in that area. Where was the Gender Secretariat positioned in the organizational structure of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Community Development and Sports and did it have the political power to influence gender policy and monitoring of the situation of women? As there were no gender units or focal points in other ministries, how did the Gender Secretariat ensure that the gender strategy was implemented by the Government? She was concerned at the high staff turnover in the Gender Secretariat and requested details of the length of service, expertise and background of its current staff members. Had the increased Gender Secretariat budget been spent on gender activities or staffing? She asked what impact the poor attendance by male participants at national committee meetings on gender issues and their tendency to see gender issues as concerning women only had on the capacity of the Gender Secretariat to advance gender equality.

12. **Ms. Neubauer** asked how gender mainstreaming had been supported and implemented since the development of the gender mainstreaming approach in 2005. What were the findings of the Gender Secretariat's overall monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the gender mainstreaming process? She requested updated information on the results of the first stage of a nationwide gender situational analysis. Had further stages of analysis been developed? She also asked for information on the results achieved in the implementation of the National Gender Plan of Action 2010–2011, the lessons learned and how the findings had helped to draft a national gender strategy and subsequent action plan. Why had their drafting been delayed?

13. **Mr. Meriton** (Seychelles) said that there was still a long road to travel to ensure effective gender mainstreaming at both government and societal level. Institutions must be strengthened at the highest level to ensure that gender mainstreaming became a cross-cutting issue nationwide. The political will was there, but resources and expert support were needed. He agreed that the Convention should be more visible and that people's mentalities needed to change towards the issue of gender. The report was long overdue and he assured the Committee that the State party would address all the gaps highlighted and include details of progress made in its next report.

14. **Mr. Vipin** (Seychelles) gave an example of a case that had come before the Supreme Court in which the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination had been invoked in support of a request to amend the provisions of the Constitution on discrimination. The Constitution referred to all citizens being free from all forms of discrimination in its preamble and in other clauses. Nevertheless, the State party would take on board the suggestion to create a law explicitly providing for discrimination against women.

15. **Mr. Meriton** (Seychelles) said that the partnership agreement with the Liaison Unit of Non-Governmental Organizations of Seychelles (LUNGOS) would end in 2013 and LUNGOS would become a platform. The Government would then re-examine its relationship with NGOs and define the responsibilities for each ministry, particularly looking at gender mainstreaming. NGOs were involved in the implementation of the gender strategy and the private sector, social partners and civil society organizations had an irreplaceable role to play in the development of Seychelles. They were partners with equal rights and received financial support through the national budget and from outside organizations.

16. The National Assembly was aware of the meeting with the Committee in Geneva; it was very much a partner and gender mainstreaming was often discussed during its weekly meetings. Nevertheless, efforts would be made to involve it more actively in efforts to implement the Convention. The Gender Secretariat could be strengthened to play a more proactive role in development issues and ensure that the gender machinery became more prominent. The process should start and end with the family, so that gender mainstreaming was understood and implemented from a tender age.

17. **Ms. William-Melanie** (Seychelles) said that one staff member of the Gender Secretariat had a master's degree in social development studies, which included gender studies, another had a degree in social development studies and gender and the third staff member had a degree in sociology. They had been in post for 11, 9 and 1 year respectively. A new member of staff had a degree in education and gender studies. The budget increase for the Gender Secretariat had been for programmes and the new member of staff. There were plans to strengthen the national gender machinery by creating a new senior-level position in the National Gender Management Team and gender focal points in other sectors. Efforts would continue to raise awareness of the importance of gender issues through the gender focal points to encourage more male participation in meetings

18. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that a committee had been appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to look into the monitoring, implementation and evaluation of all the human rights instruments to which the State party had acceded.

19. **Ms. Siu-Roberts** (Seychelles) said that an analysis had revealed that very few gender-disaggregated data were available, and that gender issues were only monitored in the fields of education and health. Unfortunately, the committee responsible for carrying out that analysis was no longer operational. However, a number of training programmes had been implemented involving members of the committee and partner organizations, including training on gender mainstreaming and policy planning.

20. The draft national gender policy and action plan were available on the Internet. The delays had been due to budgeting issues. The Government had also decided to delay finalizing the policy so that the Committee's concluding observations could be incorporated into the State party's first national gender policy.

21. **Ms. Patten** asked whether the national human rights commission had applied for official accreditation and was operational, what its caseload was and whether women were aware of its work. She asked about the current status of the Office of the Ombudsman, and progress made with regard to the implementation of new legislation. In the light of reports

of delays and case backlogs in the courts, she requested information on access to justice and the legal aid system, including eligibility criteria. Lastly, was regular training provided to the police and judiciary, including specific training on the Convention?

22. **Ms. Neubauer** requested clarification on the Government's approach to gender mainstreaming, expressing concern that it might be viewed as a goal in itself rather than one of a number of strategies to achieve gender equality in law and in practice.

23. **Ms. William-Melanie** (Seychelles) said that the human rights commission had three members, including the Ombudsman. Both the commission and the Office of the Ombudsman were operational, and women were aware of — and had access to — the Ombudsman's services.

24. **Mr. Vipin** (Seychelles) said that the case backlog in the courts had been reduced through the use of a fast-track procedure. All defendants had access to legal representation, including via a pool of legal aid lawyers, and were free to select a different lawyer if they were unhappy with the legal representation received. Certain eligibility criteria applied in civil cases, but there were no specific regulations for criminal proceedings. If a person could not afford a lawyer, legal representation was provided.

25. **Ms. Siu-Roberts** (Seychelles) said that regular training provided to the police and judiciary focused on the Convention and the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development.

26. **Mr. Meriton** (Seychelles) said that gender mainstreaming was viewed as both a goal and a process, and that the Government was using all means at its disposal to raise awareness of the fact that it was both a means and an end, and to make the progress possible, given the country's geographical position and limited resources, including human resources.

27. **Ms. Šimonović** said that the Convention stipulated that mainstreaming was a means of achieving substantive equality, which was both a goal and a process. She stressed that it was only if gender mainstreaming measures were tied to specific goals that real results could be achieved.

#### *Article 4*

28. **Ms. Hayashi** asked about the relationship between special measures as defined in the Convention and "positive discrimination" as defined in the Constitution, which also aimed to support disadvantaged groups. The State party had indicated that it did not currently have temporary quota or affirmative action measures in place, and that the introduction of such measures could provoke a political backlash. She stressed that temporary special measures did not merely refer to quotas, but a whole range of activities designed to promote equality, such as resource allocation and targeted recruitment. Had the Government adopted, or was it willing to adopt, various forms of special measures, besides quotas? She drew the State party's attention to the Committee's general recommendation relating to multiple discrimination, and asked what steps the Government had taken to raise public awareness of the need for special measures to support vulnerable groups of women, for example women with disabilities.

29. **Mr. Meriton** (Seychelles) said that the State party had avoided implementing a quota system owing to concerns of a backlash, and that the Government was of the opinion that measures should focus on other approaches to promoting gender equality.

30. **Ms. William-Melanie** (Seychelles) said that there were special measures in place to support the social and health needs of vulnerable groups, such as support for the elderly, disability allowances and maternity benefits, and that such an approach was considered to constitute positive discrimination.

*Articles 5 and 6*

31. **Ms. Gabr** stressed that quotas could help to eliminate the stereotypes blocking the path to progress. She asked about media campaigns on the role of women in society and awareness-raising efforts. She asked whether the Government had developed a comprehensive strategy on education, following its experience of work with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on training teachers. The report indicated that women over the age of 50 were absent from the employment market. She asked the delegation to comment on that matter.

32. **Ms. Acar** wondered why the State party was finding it so difficult to tackle violence against women, and asked whether the Government had made it a political priority. She asked whether the new crime, justice and security bulletin would include a countrywide survey on violence against women. Why was the scope of the domestic violence legislation introduced in 2000, which appeared to be still in force, and that of the new bill limited to the domestic sphere? What measures were being taken to tackle other types of violence against women? She also expressed concern that the new bill adopted a gender-neutral approach, focusing on the family unit as a whole, in spite of the fact that the overwhelming majority of victims of domestic violence were women. Were there plans to set up shelters for victims of violence?

33. With regard to the work of the family tribunals, she asked whether any mediation took place in cases of gender-based violence. There had been reports that in such cases the police and health-care staff failed to collect evidence that could be used in court. Did the Government have plans to address that problem? The State party had provided data on cases which had reached the Supreme Court, but she wished to know about the rest of the caseload, namely how many cases had been filed in total, and the case outcomes.

34. **Mr. Meriton** (Seychelles) said that the political will for progress certainly existed, and it was important to ensure that women played an active role in all spheres of activity. The National Social Renaissance Plan of Action 2012–2016 covered all sectors of society, and women had an important role to play therein. He regretted that no information was available on the training organized with support from UNESCO.

35. He stressed that women over the age of 50 were not absent from the labour market, adding that perhaps the report had suggested that few women of that age were entering the market. He assured the Committee that the Government focused on people-centred policies to ensure that women were not only beneficiaries but also active participants.

36. **Ms. William-Melanie** (Seychelles) said that once the Government's gender policy had been finalized, steps would be taken to harmonize all cross-sectoral programmes to tackle gender-based violence, as part of a comprehensive strategy. The political will to address the problem certainly existed, as reflected in the new domestic violence bill, which would criminalize such violence and provide victims with protection. Mediation was not used in cases involving domestic violence. However, agencies, probation services, NGOs and faith-based associations did provide mediation services. The relevant mediation structures did exist.

37. Family tribunals played a quasi-judicial role, and their rulings could be appealed in the Supreme Court. Domestic violence cases could be registered with family tribunals or the police and tried under the Penal Code; matters relating to protection were dealt with by family tribunals.

38. Support and shelter were traditionally provided by family members. However, with a view to ensuring compliance with the Convention, the Government had plans to establish a system of shelters in the near future, once the relevant funding had been secured.

39. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that the domestic violence strategy focused on the perpetrators.
40. **Ms. Siu-Roberts** (Seychelles) said that the new domestic violence bill contained a set of basic procedures, to be developed and expanded by the police services, and that the handbook on domestic violence provided comprehensive information. Efforts were being made to strengthen the capacity of the police to respond to domestic violence cases. The increase in such cases in recent years was viewed, in part, as a consequence of successful awareness-raising campaigns, which had encouraged people to seek help and obtain redress. The results of the 2006 study on the prevalence of domestic violence were no longer valid, and a new study was planned for the forthcoming year. Steps had been taken to improve the statistical data available on crime, through the National Statistics Bureau bulletins.
41. **Ms. Acar** stressed that, in the Committee's view, mediation was not an acceptable solution in cases of human rights violations and gender-based violence. Efforts to support families should not come at the expense of women's human rights, and mediation should not be used in cases involving gender-based violence, as it could discourage women from bringing complaints.
42. She asked whether the legislation on domestic violence criminalized domestic violence itself, or only protection order breaches. She warned that perpetrators' rights should not be protected at the expense of women's human rights.
43. **Ms. Gabr** said that the issue of stereotypes extended beyond the workplace and equal job opportunities. It was necessary to consider the image of women in society too. She requested clarification of the reference in the report to older women being "virtually non-existent", since the implications, especially for women over the age of 50, were extremely negative.
44. **Mr. Meriton** (Seychelles) said that the Government strove to improve the status and image of women, and was working together with all stakeholders to achieve that goal. The National Social Renaissance Plan of Action 2012–2016 aimed to empower women, and targeted not just the women themselves, but also their families and spouses, to ensure balanced gender roles. There were also efforts to include older persons in the scheme, to share their knowledge and experience. The Government wanted to involve all sectors of society in its efforts to ensure that it was in a position to tackle current global challenges, with women at the forefront of change.
45. **Ms. William-Melanie** (Seychelles) said that mediation in cases of gender-based violence was sometimes necessary to deal with the emotional consequences and to reconcile families after restraining orders had expired.
46. **Ms. Acar** asked whether domestic violence was criminalized.
47. **Ms. William-Melanie** (Seychelles) said that domestic violence would be criminalized under the proposed legislation on domestic violence. Perpetrators could also be charged with assault, for example.
48. **Ms. Gabr** asked about the victim protection measures contained in the bill on human trafficking and how the root causes of trafficking were addressed in the Plan of Action. The International Organization for Migration might be able to offer assistance. She asked whether shelters for trafficking victims were planned and requested information on victim protection, rehabilitation and referral mechanisms.
49. **Ms. Leinarte** asked for the findings and recommendations of the Social Development Department study on prostitution. She asked whether under paragraph 138 of the Penal Code, procuring a woman of immoral character over the age of 21 was a

misdemeanour and whether women over 21 who engaged in prostitution were fined. It was commendable that the need for special measures to assist women involved in prostitution had been acknowledged; she asked whether any assistance was planned for women who wanted to leave prostitution. She wished to know whether the Government recognized the importance of preventing Seychelles from becoming a country of destination for sex tourism and provided training for the police, and what measures were being taken to prevent young female drug users from being forced into prostitution.

50. **Ms. William-Melanie** (Seychelles) said that a bill on human trafficking was being drafted with help from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which contained various provisions for victim protection and rehabilitation; an action plan was being drawn up to raise awareness among the professionals involved. The International Organization for Migration had provided technical assistance.

51. **Ms. Siu-Roberts** (Seychelles) said that several studies on prostitution had been conducted that revealed a clear link between prostitution and drug use. The Government funded NGO-led skills programmes for young women vulnerable to prostitution. Access to health care was free for all, including sex workers, and rehabilitation and shelter for them and victims of trafficking were envisaged.

52. **Mr. Vipin** (Seychelles) said that the bill on human trafficking provided for shelter, witness protection and services such as medical and legal aid. Paragraph 138 (a) of the Penal Code referred specifically to girls under 21 while the rest of the paragraph referred to all women and girls.

53. **Mr. Meriton** (Seychelles) said that the high numbers of tourists in Seychelles meant that there was a risk it could become a destination for sex tourism, thus expert guidance on how to detect it was needed. Tourism was vital to the economy and training for officials was therefore important.

#### *Articles 7 to 9*

54. **Ms. Pires** said that gaps in gender equality persisted in Government and the courts, reflected by the fact that only 2 out of 10 ministers were women. The Seychelles Young Leaders Programme was commendable, although its participants were mainly men, suggesting a gender imbalance in future too. She asked whether a comprehensive study into the structural barriers to women's participation in public and political life had been conducted and, if not, what had formed the basis for the draft national gender policy and plan of action. She requested information on the plan's specific measures to achieve parity in elected and appointed positions and examples of where women's increased participation in decision-making had contributed to equality.

55. **Ms. Bareiro-Bobadilla** said that given its history of parity, Seychelles could be an example of equality in democracy. More women voted than men, they could take the lead. Equality should be an inherent part of democracy, incorporated into the electoral law, the electoral system, different levels of government and all decision-making, and manifesting itself in support for women's organizations. The dialogue with the Committee should remain open, but there was much room for optimism.

56. **Mr. Meriton** (Seychelles) said that efforts to increase women's representation in courts, political life and decision-making positions were under way. There were now three female ministers and the preparation of women for high-level positions was not limited to the Young Leaders Programme. A study into barriers to public and political life had not yet been conducted; the draft national gender policy had been based on other research. The study would be carried out and the policy changed if necessary. Seychellois women were appointed to international decision-making positions, representing both a source of pride and a loss for the country. Men and women had different strengths so both needed to be



involved in political life. The ministries of the gender-sensitive areas of education, health and employment were headed by women.

57. **Ms. Bareiro-Bobadilla** said that to achieve equality in political life, a study of specific barriers and goals was necessary.

58. **Ms. Pires** asked what measures were contained in the Plan of Action and what women's participation had contributed, especially in areas that were not traditionally the domain of women.

59. **Ms. Siu-Roberts** (Seychelles) said that the draft national gender policy contained a section on governance linked to the Southern African Development Community target of 50 per cent representation by 2015, where the Government set out its commitment to promoting good governance through gender-balanced leadership. Its objective was to balance representation and participation at all levels through a variety of measures, including capacity-building for women in high-level decision-making positions and the promotion of male participation in civil society initiatives.

60. **Ms. Bonne** (Seychelles) said that women increasingly participated in sectors such as aviation and carpentry.

#### *Articles 10 to 14*

61. **Ms. Gbedemah** said the Committee was concerned that girls were taught in female-oriented schools and fields and were underrepresented in technical and vocational subjects. Those who studied construction and engineering had fewer career opportunities because employers were reluctant to employ women. She asked what specific measures had been taken to address the root causes of the exclusion of girls in those fields, what the results of the training offered by the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs had been, and whether it was linked to the Ministry of Education. The excellent performance of girls in mathematics and science should be converted into the pursuit of corresponding careers through temporary special measures. She requested data on courses at the University of Seychelles disaggregated by sex. Very few girls who left school because of pregnancy returned; she requested up-to-date data on the reintegration rate and information on the current policies to address the problem. She enquired about education on sexuality and reproductive health. She asked what measures were being implemented to address the feminization of the teaching profession and whether temporary special measures were being considered. Lastly, she requested data on children with disabilities and their inclusion in the school system.

62. **Ms. Siu-Roberts** (Seychelles) said that although stereotypes persisted, some improvements in tertiary education had been made, for example, almost a quarter of students at the Maritime Training Centre were female. The National Institute of Health and Social Studies continued to be dominated by women. The Ministry of Labour and Human Resource Development was preparing draft legislation on employment providing for vulnerable groups, including women. Statistics on the University and the reintegration of students who left education because of pregnancy would be made available to the Committee.

63. **Ms. William-Melanie** (Seychelles) said that more information about measures planned to allow pregnant students to continue their education would be provided at a later time. However, those students could always attend evening classes.

64. **Mr. Meriton** (Seychelles) said that discussion was under way between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources to ensure that students had an education based on employment opportunities in the private sector. Moreover, employers must be sensitized to the needs of women.

65. **Ms. William-Melanie** (Seychelles) said that sex education was part of the curriculum and talks were often held with secondary students on sexuality. Children with disabilities were included in mainstream education as far as possible, although one special school and one school providing special classes for deaf children existed.

66. **Ms. Gbedemah** asked whether the temporary special measures would be considered to bridge the gap in education. She said that despite the fact that the sex education programme had been in existence since the 1990s, in 2002, half of school dropouts had been due to pregnancy; what was being done to address the matter? She requested statistics on children with disabilities and asked what courses women studied at the National Institute of Health and Social Studies.

67. **Ms. William-Melanie** (Seychelles) said that there was a wide range of courses at the National Institute of Health and Social Studies, including pharmacy and nursing. School dropouts owing to teenage pregnancies were a matter of concern and activities targeted at young girls were being stepped up to help them make good decisions concerning their sexuality.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*