



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

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

Summary record of the 571st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 7 August 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Abaka

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

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

Second periodic report of Armenia
(CEDAW/C/ARM/2;
CEDAW/PSWG/2002/EXC/CRP.1/Add.2 and
CEDAW/PSWG/2002/EXC/CRP.2)

1. *At the invitation on the Chairperson, Mr. Abelian, Ms. Ayyazian and Ms. Hakobyan (Armenia) took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Abelian** (Armenia) introduced the members of his delegation and said that the dramatic improvement in the Committee's methods of work had made it far easier for States to fulfil their reporting obligations. In considering the second periodic report, he asked members to bear in mind that Armenia had been an independent State for only 10 years.

3. **Ms. Hakobyan** (Armenia) said that implementation of the Committee's recommendations concerning the initial report of Armenia was taking longer than anticipated owing to problems related to the country's transition to a market economy, a devastating earthquake and a blockade on goods, services and energy imposed by neighbouring countries.

4. In response to the Committee's concern at the absence of a specific national machinery for the advancement of women, she announced that a post of Deputy Minister for Women's Issues, which she currently held, had been created in the Ministry of Social Security in May 2002. In that capacity she headed a Department of Women's Affairs, which consisted of six specialists in women's and gender issues and was authorized to coordinate women-related activities of other ministries, ensure cooperation with women's NGOs and enforce compliance with the Convention.

5. During the past three months, two governmental commissions for women's issues had been established. The first commission included deputy ministers and heads of departments from the Ministries of Health, Education, Foreign Affairs and Culture, Youth Affairs and Sport, a member of the National Assembly and the Presidents of four women's NGOs. Its function was to develop a national programme and plan of action for

the improvement of women's status and the enhancement of their role in society and to create mechanisms for their implementation. The second commission was developing a plan of action to combat trafficking in women.

6. The Ministry of Social Security cooperated closely with women's NGOs; for example, through the Cradle Programme, which provided support for vulnerable pregnant women and newborn children, which was implemented jointly by several NGOs and the Ministry. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Security were also planning projects to improve conditions in maternity wards since Armenia's maternal mortality rate was up to five times greater than those of Western European countries.

7. A small number of women managed to run for National Assembly elections; in order to encourage greater participation, the Government needed to create an atmosphere of fairness and transparency, provide adequate financial resources and eliminate social, cultural and psychological barriers. The new Department of Women's Affairs, in cooperation with women's organizations, was working to increase women's involvement in areas such as political life, environmental protection, women's rights education and women's health and employment.

8. Although there were no quotas for women candidates, more women were expected to run in the upcoming regional and municipal elections than in previous years. NGOs provided seminars and training for those candidates and promoted open, transparent and fair elections. The Ministry of Social Security and the Department of Women's Issues cooperated with NGOs by organizing discussions between government bodies and NGOs, which were disseminated to the public by the media.

9. The Ministry of Social Security planned to create new employment opportunities through no-interest microcredit programmes to support women entrepreneurs and to increase funding for State-operated daycare facilities. Those measures were intended to help working mothers develop their professional potential and to counter gender-based employment discrimination, which had become a serious problem owing to the widening gap between rich and poor.

10. The Government greatly appreciated the assistance received from international organizations. A

poverty reduction strategy had been submitted to the public for discussion and should lead to closer cooperation between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Armenia and the ministries and agencies dealing with women's issues.

11. **Ms. Ayyazian** (Armenia) said that Armenia was a party to over 40 international human rights instruments, many of which were designed to protect women's rights and to improve their situation in society. Additionally, Armenia planned to ratify the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its two Protocols and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court during the autumn session of the National Assembly.

12. On 25 January 2001, Armenia had become a full member of the Council of Europe, which constituted recognition that it had made considerable progress in establishing a pluralistic political system and the rule of law and guaranteeing respect for human rights. A working group had been established to make recommendations on the harmonization of domestic legislation with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, including constitutional amendments which, once adopted by the National Assembly, would be submitted to a referendum.

13. Domestic legislation applied to the extent that it was not contrary to the Constitution. Draft legislation on amendments to the Criminal Code, the Marriage and Family Code, the Pension Fund and the Labour Code and on the Office of the Ombudsman was pending before the National Assembly. Consideration was also being given to giving ordinary citizens access to the Constitutional Court. Article 44 of the Constitution stated that the fundamental human and civil rights and freedoms set forth in the Constitution were not exhaustive and should not be construed to exclude other universally accepted human and civil rights and freedoms. There were no reported court cases involving discrimination, equality of opportunity or other gender issues.

14. Armenian law did not establish any specific procedure for bringing it into line with the Convention and other human rights instruments. Once ratified, international treaties became an integral part of the legal system and took precedence over domestic law. However, treaties not in compliance with the Constitution could be ratified only after the

Constitution had been amended to justify ratification. The Constitutional Court established whether treaties, National Assembly and other government resolutions and presidential decrees complied with the Constitution. Legislation which contradicted the Constitution had no force of law; the bodies established to prepare draft legislation were responsible for verifying whether it was compatible with existing law, including international treaties. It was established practice to submit draft legislation to international experts in order to determine whether it complied with Armenia's human rights and other obligations.

15. Efforts to suppress trafficking in women would require improving the national information system, ensuring an appropriate legal framework and law enforcement response, assisting trafficked persons, improving cooperation between States and addressing factors which increased vulnerability to trafficking and sustained demand. As the problem was a relatively new one, it was not directly addressed in domestic legislation. However, illegal border crossing and document forgery were punishable by law: the former by up to three years' imprisonment and the latter by up to five years' imprisonment or hard labour. Users of forged documents could be fined, imprisoned or sentenced to community service; and the theft of passports was punishable by a year's imprisonment or community service.

16. Oversight of entrepreneurial activities had become more difficult since the law no longer required the licensing of firms offering overseas employment or of travel agencies. On the other hand, the Government had recently established an interministerial working group to propose legislative reforms and develop projects to combat trafficking in women, and the public's attention was being drawn to the problem through media awareness campaigns. Trafficking was often committed under cover of labour migration. The State Department of Migration and Refugees had established a Migrants Service Point which channelled information on jobs abroad, provided legal advice and guaranteed safe labour migration; information was provided by the countries of destination, diplomatic missions in and outside Armenia and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Questionnaires submitted by or on behalf of returning Armenian nationals provided data on the length of time spent abroad, family members and desired occupation upon return. Once registered with the Migrants Service

Point, returnees were enrolled in programmes such as employment assistance, retraining, social and psychological counselling and educational guidance, some of them offered by IOM and other implementing partners.

17. While there were no specific regulations on domestic violence, the violence against women was covered under the Criminal Code. It was underreported in the interest of keeping the family together for the children's sake or because of women's financial dependence on the offender or fear of public opinion; moreover, large numbers of men and women believed that there were situations in which a man was justified in beating his wife.

18. Historical experience, general ignorance of the law and widespread corruption caused men and women to lack confidence in the legal system and, in particular, in the courts as a mechanism for the protection of human rights. A joint working group to fight corruption established in January 2001 had developed a comprehensive medium-term strategy and a detailed action plan which had recently been submitted to the Prime Minister for approval.

19. As at March 2002, 9.5 per cent of the population was unemployed and 66 per cent of unemployed persons were women. However, the official statistics might not fully reflect the magnitude of the problem, which was greatest in the cities. Past efforts to promote the development of small- and medium-sized businesses had been ineffective and only 300 women had received assistance. A new draft regulation, if adopted, would restore financing of such activities for both sexes; there were no programmes specifically for unemployed women.

20. Armenia's transition to a market economy had been abrupt and chaotic and had resulted in mass unemployment, migration and general impoverishment. Its literacy rate was 99 per cent, yet 27 per cent and 28 per cent of its people were poor or very poor. An interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) stressed the links between education, poverty and economic activity and an education, poverty and economic activity survey had been conducted as part of a social monitoring and analysis project implemented jointly with UNDP. The survey was designed to harmonize and improve the education, labour market and indicator monitoring components of the PRSP by identifying the links between poverty and access to

education and between education and economic activity.

21. Women were less mobile and therefore less competitive on the job market. The family benefit system covered only groups such as single mothers, mothers of more than one child and the disabled, and the ongoing review of the vulnerability assessment formula would doubtless eliminate many current beneficiaries. The health, education and culture budgets were also being reduced. Since March 2001, free medical services had been provided only to families registered in the poverty family benefit system, children of parents with numerous children, disabled children and children of single mothers and to women who were disabled, related to a deceased soldier, victims of repression or institutionalized. Only one child in a large family had the right to free textbooks and access to preschools was limited.

22. Under those circumstances, many mothers were therefore driven to place their children under State guardianship. However, the Ministry of Social Security, together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), was taking steps to return such children to their families and one NGO, Go and See, was implementing a programme to prevent children from being sent to institutions. Government activities targeted all children; there was no specific policy for girls. A recently established national plan of action on children's rights covered areas such as social security, education, health care, nutrition and juvenile justice and included recommendations and special programmes.

23. The Government was committed to securing both de jure and de facto gender equality as part of the governance process and as a development goal. While there had been little change in the public's perception of gender roles, there was increased awareness of the need for such change.

24. **The Chairperson** commended the delegation of Armenia for its presentation. She pointed out the advantage of Armenia being a country only 10 years old confronting a period of development in that youth was a good phase in which to calculate good practice.

25. **Ms. Corti**, noting that while women had played a major role, Armenia's 10 years of nationhood had been marked by economic and political difficulties and natural disasters. She emphasized that the country's substantial proportion of well-educated women was a

valuable human resource which should be used to accelerate progress.

26. Armenia's commitment to international law was also praiseworthy: after independence, it had been quick to sign all the major human rights instruments, and to incorporate international provisions into domestic law, stipulating that in case of a conflict they should prevail over domestic legislation.

27. The presence in Armenia of a growing number of non-governmental organizations, many representing women, was a sign that democracy had taken root in the country. However, she would welcome further information on relations between NGOs and national institutions, and details of their involvement in the preparation of the second periodic report.

28. Armenia's second report had announced the establishment in 1998 of the Commission on Human Rights, whose remit included women's issues. She wondered why it had not referred to it a single case of discrimination against women.

29. She welcomed the increase in sex-disaggregated data in the report as well as the greater focus on women's health. However, while the second report showed a recognition of the problem of violence against women she wanted to know what specifically was being done to address both issues: domestic violence and marital rape.

30. Harsh economic circumstances made it difficult to set up new institutions to implement new programmes, but some forms of action required no investment or structural change. Action to improve women's decision-making influence fell into that category. She urged close reading of the Convention to determine what issues could be addressed without major expenditure or infrastructure.

31. She asked why the legislative change embodied in the National Programme of Action to Improve the Status of Women and Enhance their Role in Society had been shortened from five to two years. She also questioned the lack of evaluation of the action undertaken, without which it would be impossible to determine whether projects and programmes should or should not continue or be changed.

32. The plan to establish a Commission to deal with trafficking in women was a positive development in the light of the increase in prostitution and violence. In that connection, it was important for Armenia to ratify as

rapidly as possible the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

33. Changing traditional mindsets was important in Armenian policy-making in order to meet the demands of modernity and comply with international treaties bearing in mind that there were areas in which financial cuts should not be made such as improvement in women's health.

34. **Ms. Gaspard** said that she had been disappointed with the content of the second periodic report because it revealed many gaps. Echoing Ms. Corti's request, she asked for further details of the parties involved in its preparation. She noted that the country's initial report had included consultation with parliamentary committees, a particularly important step in a parliament whose members were 95 per cent male, as it would increase awareness of women's issues. She asked if the same procedure had been followed and would be followed for all periodic reports. She would also like to know the extent of participation by women's NGOs.

35. She expressed appreciation of the additional information on prostitution and trafficking given in the oral introduction to the report. Armenia had ratified the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, so it should pay particular attention to article 6 of the Convention, which went beyond the scope of that Convention.

36. **Ms. Açar** also praised Armenia upon its second periodic report, noting the significance of the country's achievements by women and the high level of education they had reached in the short period of its nationhood. The establishment of a deputy-minister post to deal with women's affairs was a positive step in promoting respect for the Convention.

37. She was concerned that recent economic change had reinforced rather than weakened traditional patriarchal thinking. The initial and second reports had shown that such thinking and gender stereotyping persisted despite some positive signs; in the new legal framework, women's economic and social dependence on men had been eroded and women were breadwinners in an increasing number of families. However, women themselves seemed to accept and perpetuate through their children the old established cultural roles. Experience elsewhere had proved that

until genuine political will was put into challenging such stereotypes, change would be slow.

38. While Armenia's report had recognized such age-old traditions and practices existed, it had failed (as had the responses to the Committee's questions) to indicate specific counter-measures under article 5 of the Convention. The education system and the media in particular needed to be pressed into use for that purpose. She hoped that more details about such measures would appear in the next report, along with an evaluation of their impact.

39. **Ms. Ferrer** expressed gratification that the Government of Armenia had established a structure for women's issues that had been lacking, to the Committee's regret, at the time of the initial report. She requested further information on that Department of Women's Affairs, including its management personnel, its budget and subordinate bodies and what action had been proposed by the Commission in charge of establishing a National Programme and Plan of Action for the Improvement of Women's Status and the Enhancement of their Role in Society. She also inquired whether the previous plan of action had been evaluated and whether any expansion of future plans to cover additional areas such as the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was being contemplated.

40. On the question of gender stereotyping covered by article 5 of the Convention, the focus should be on using education to change cultural patterns. She asked for more information on efforts to resolve that problem, particularly to publicize the Convention. Training was in order for members of the media, the legal profession and teachers, who could influence the next generation.

41. She inquired further whether the promised Poverty-Reduction Strategy Paper incorporated a gender focus. Since Armenia's women were well educated but accounted for 75 per cent of the unemployed and a growing number of heads of household, special measures for women were clearly needed.

42. She was glad to know that a plan of action to combat trafficking in women was being prepared, but she requested information on the involvement in that process of the Department of Women's Affairs. She also pointed out that no mention had been made of trafficking in juveniles as opposed to adults.

43. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** noted that according to the second report the country's criminal code provided for penalties for violence against women; the same report acknowledged that women were frequent victims of violence but often concealed that fact. The written responses to the Committee's questions paradoxically stated that there appeared to be no reason to enact supplementary legislation or change existing legislation on the subject.

44. She would like to know whether the Deputy Minister of Social Security with responsibility for women's issues coordinated the activities of the Commission established to develop a National Programme and Plan of Action for the Improvement of Women's Status and the Enhancement of their Role in Society, and the Commission to deal with the problem of trafficking. The Deputy Minister of Social Security with responsibility for women's issues coordinated the activities of those Commissions.

45. With reference to article 5 of the Convention, she noted that while the report mentioned some measures to counter gender stereotyping, there were no details about plans to improve the education system, and more importantly, steps to change men's attitudes and roles vis-à-vis women.

46. In connection with article 6 of the Convention, she noted that whereas prostitution had increased, that increase would be stopped because of the social stigma attached to the phenomenon. She questioned that reasoning, particularly in light of the state of the country's economy. Such a "wait-and-see" attitude was unwise, and she asked if there were any comprehensive plans to combat prostitution and trafficking in women, which were both tantamount to modern slavery.

47. **Ms. Hakobyan** (Armenia) said that unfortunately there was a great deal of reluctance to discuss the problem of domestic violence openly in Armenia. The traditional mentality saw violence as a problem of the family, and not of society; she would prefer an approach that saw society as one family.

48. **Ms. Ayvazian** (Armenia) said that she had been the coordinator for the preparation of the second periodic report, sections of which had been prepared by experts identified by the Division of Human Rights within the relevant ministries. Non-governmental organizations had been invited to contribute input and by reviewing and commenting on the draft, although their input had been minimal.

49. She pointed out that the membership of the presidential Human Rights Commission included representatives of government ministries and the non-governmental sector. The Commission received communications directly from citizens, which it referred to the courts as appropriate. All its meetings received coverage on television and radio. Thus far, it had received no complaints of discrimination against women, which might be explained by the traditional mentality and idea of women's roles on the one hand and a persistent mistrust of government structures on the other.

50. The Commission had published brochures on human rights protection, including women's rights, and had sponsored programmes and round tables on specific human rights issues. Since September 2001, a course on human rights was included in the eighth grade secondary school curriculum, and some of the universities also offered courses. Despite problems in issuing appropriate publications, stemming mainly from financial constraints, the Commission was continuing its efforts in human rights education.

51. In connection with the questions on violence against women, rape and domestic violence, she said that the Penal Code contained no specific articles on marital rape. Rape was classified as a crime and penalties could be increased by aggravating circumstances. There was no intention of introducing any new articles to the Criminal Code, however, before trying to address the mentality that was preventing women from having recourse to the courts when they were victims of such violence.

52. Women's participation in decision-making would be addressed in the national plan of action. A special working group including representatives of all relevant ministries would be formed to cover all aspects of women's rights, set a time frame for implementation and identify resource needs. The assessment of the previous plan of action would be transmitted to the Committee in written form. That plan had been ended early because of problems between the implementing partners. Changes in leadership had also affected the implementation of some projects.

53. In reply to questions on trafficking, she said that one Committee would address the overall situation of trafficking in women and children. The working group on the subject would be an expert group made up of ministry representatives and law enforcement bodies

which would deal with the situation within the framework of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. It would propose specific programmes and legislation to cover all forms of trafficking.

54. **Ms. Hakobyan** (Armenia) said that, as Deputy Minister, she was responsible for coordinating the work of those two groups. Of course, there was a connection between prostitution and trafficking, and though no statistics were available on girls in particular, research suggested that trafficking in girls was a problem.

55. **Ms. Ayvazian** (Armenia), in answer to questions on the poverty reduction strategy, said that the first step in the strategy was a special survey linking poverty with education and economic activity. The strategy did not include any specific projects for women, but it did include gender-disaggregated statistics.

56. It was proving difficult to change the mentality that sustained gender role stereotypes, despite recent surveys showing that an increasing number of women were the breadwinners of their families. The non-governmental organizations were more active in raising awareness of the need than the Government, which had limited resources. It was hoped that the national plan of action would address the question.

57. **Ms. Hakobyan** (Armenia) said that there was no law prohibiting women from participating in elections, but they found it difficult to find funding for election campaigns because of discrimination at the decision-making level.

58. **Ms. Goonesekere** said that the legal framework of reforms and mechanisms for women's equality was in place, but the Committee was concerned at the gaps in enforcement of that framework at the policy level. She was especially concerned because women were not making use of the existing Human Rights Commission mechanism. It was unusual to find government participation in such a mechanism; in most States it was visibly independent, and it might be useful to review its composition in order to create confidence in it. She also wondered about the effectiveness of using the Commission simply as a means of channelling complaints to the courts and dispensing with any independent investigation.

59. She noted that the penalties provided in the rape laws seemed rather light given the gravity of the crime;

perhaps the law was inadvertently sending the message that rape was not considered a serious offence.

60. **Ms. González** commended the Armenian delegation on its response to members' queries, but expressed dismay at the lack of written replies to many questions on the list of issues. She was particularly unhappy that the Criminal Code contained no law for penalizing violence against women in general. She wondered whether the dearth of complaints from women was prompted by the desire to keep the family together, to protect the interests of the child, by financial reasons or a reluctance to publicize the woman's dilemma. The acceptance of wife-beating by many women and men was a lamentable example of discriminatory social stereotyping and should be eradicated worldwide.

61. The absence of legislative measures that promoted children's respect for women perpetuated the domestic violence in which some children grew up, and failed to inculcate in them a culture of peace or respect for others. That deficiency could only be remedied by commitment and political will. According to the written replies, the new Criminal Code would contain no special provisions for penalizing the exploitation of prostitutes, which meant that procurement would continue to flourish. Sexual exploitation was a heinous crime against women, some of whom resorted to prostitution for economic reasons and sometimes became serious victims of violence.

62. **Ms. Livingstone Raday** noted that the presentations by the Armenian delegation attributed the absence of cases of women's rights violations and gender discrimination to distrust of the legal system and to sociological factors that dissuaded women from taking action. However, the legal system, which was crucial for increasing equality, might not be the appropriate framework for women to appeal to the courts. Constitutional guarantees of equality notwithstanding, the legal system should serve women's non-discrimination requirements, whereas, according to the report the only specific anti-discrimination legislation pertained to maternity and pregnancy.

63. Armenia appeared to lack the equal opportunities legislation that existed in many countries that used both criminal prohibition and civil remedies to combat discrimination, focusing on women and women's NGOs and using the courts to achieve justice for

women. Positive action to prohibit discrimination could take the form of a strong public statement of intent to end the stereotyping of women's roles, which obviously contributed to poverty and women's inability to deal with the unstable situation in the country.

64. What was needed was more focused anti-discrimination legislation that empowered women to take cases to court, especially if such legislation was accompanied by adequate remedies and enforcement procedures and transferred the burden of proof to the offending employer or institution in both the private and public sectors. Also troubling was the abysmal level of women's political participation, especially when Armenian women had attained equality much earlier than those in many countries that now boasted excellent female political participation, and in the light of their generally high educational and professional achievements. It would be interesting to learn whether there were plans to increase the quota system's derisory 5 per cent target; to set it below 40-50 per cent was in itself questionable. On the subject of prostitution, she wished to be clear that it was the exploiters and not the prostitutes who were penalized, and requested specific data on prosecutions, convictions and sentencing of sexual exploiters.

65. **Ms. Manalo** said that, coming as she did from a country that produced many immigrants, she had listened with particular interest to the delegation's observations on immigration and trafficking. While trafficking often occurred under cover of migration, it was important not to equate the two because they were very different phenomena. She had been heartened to learn that Armenia was establishing an adequate migration management system, inasmuch as migration, properly managed, was constructive and highly beneficial to the host country, whereas, poorly managed, especially in a country in such difficult economic circumstances, it often resulted in trafficking in women and, hence, in their victimization.

66. At the same time, she was concerned that Armenia had no domestic legislation that adequately addressed trafficking in women and children. The punishment, under the Criminal Code, of women entering the country illegally only perpetuated their illegality, and to punish them for being in possession of the false papers furnished them by traffickers was to punish the victim rather than the perpetrator and to subject those unfortunate women to "double jeopardy".

What was needed was a law that protected them rather than meting out further punishment.

67. It was disturbing that no mention had been made in the report of a law or State-sponsored programme to help ensure compliance with article 5, which was the heart of the Convention. There could be no social progress without a programme to eradicate stereotypes and change attitudes and perceptions, since they affected education, professional choices and family status. She would also appreciate a clearer definition of the relationship between the State and the NGOs, the former appearing to have abdicated the bulk of its role to the latter.

68. **Ms. Kwaku** asked exactly how many women sat on the Commission on Human Rights and whether their numbers were guaranteed by law. She was unclear as to whether the Commission currently functioned at State level alone or whether there were regional subcommissions closer to those in need of help, especially women. She also wished to know whether it was funded by the Government; if so, were its resources adequate and could it seek outside funding? She would welcome an explanation of the disturbing fact that, in its four years of existence, the Commission had received no complaints of women's human rights violations. It might be that it was not widely publicized and that women were unaware of its existence or its utility.

69. **Ms. Kapalata** observed that it was surprising that a country which, in only 10 years of existence, had ratified the Convention and several other international instruments, had adopted an ostrich-like attitude to prostitution. Given Armenia's geographical location between Eastern and Western Europe and its unsatisfactory economic situation, she could see no end to the problem of prostitution, which was one source of sustenance for women. It was shocking that current poverty-reduction strategies did not specifically target women, without whose empowerment prostitution could never be eradicated. She urged the delegation to ensure that systemic programmes aimed at empowering women were implemented in the foreseeable future.

70. **Ms. Shin** said that those responsible for women's issues displayed the commitment, determination, openness and political will needed to enhance the lives of women. She urged them to be assiduous in demanding of the President and of their male colleagues — who might not understand their aims — a

larger budget, greater power and more human resources, and to avail themselves of the Convention and the Committee's 24 general recommendations, especially general recommendation No. 19 concerning violence against women, which was considered part of the Convention, and actively to seek international support during the difficult period ahead. She urged the authorities to seek a better understanding of articles 3 and 4 of the Convention and to make full use of the Committee's forthcoming general recommendation on article 4, paragraph 1, concerning temporary special measures aimed at accelerating *de facto* gender equality.

71. A healthy relationship between the Government and civil society was crucial, but even more crucial was their mode of cooperation, which must be a true partnership in which the Government staunchly supported the non-governmental organizations, rather than merely using them. With regard to the absence of specific non-discrimination legislation, she expressed the hope that there were plans for a series of laws to supplement the constitutional guarantees of equality, and that serious consideration would be given to legislation on violence against women, including sexual assault and domestic violence, trafficking and equal employment; failing that, women could not take their grievances to the courts. Moreover, since the criminal courts could not offer the protection such women required, counselling and other assistance were also essential from a woman-friendly complaints centre, a role that could be fulfilled by the Commission on Human Rights or another agency. She wished to know whether the National Programme of Action to Improve the Status of Women and Enhance their Role in Society was implemented, was an integral part of the more general National Plan of Action or was relegated to a single government department and ignored by the others.

72. **Ms. Achmad**, stressing the need to reassess the functioning and composition of the Commission on Human Rights, bewailed the lack of an accessible women's complaints mechanism. She hoped that the newly renamed Office for Family Issues, formerly the Office for Women's and Children's Issues, would not focus on the family to the detriment of women. Inordinate emphasis on women as part of the family, had the effect of losing sight of their work outside the home. Regrettably, men had not been specifically mentioned in connection with the aim of gender

equality, which, after all, concerned both sexes. The main thrust of Armenia's programme should be to eliminate all existing stereotypes and discrimination against women, as prescribed in article 5 of the Convention.

73. The national machinery established by the Government should stress the importance of monitoring progress on implementation of the Convention in all sectors and at all levels. It should ensure representation of the relevant departments on all national bodies, and evaluation of the progress achieved by all stakeholders. Also, a systemic approach involving civil society as well as government institutions was called for and coordination was vital for ensuring that all sectors supplied statistics, without which there could not exist an effective basis for enhancing gender equality. She reiterated the importance of gender equality as a component of efforts to promote and protect human rights and for building democracy.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.