



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

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

Summary record of the 418th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 29 January 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gonzalez

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

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

Combined second and third periodic reports of Thailand (continued) (CEDAW/C/THA/2-3; CEDAW/C/1991/I/CRP.1/Add.4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Chutikul (Thailand) took a place at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Chutikul** (Thailand), replying to questions raised by the experts, said that rural community health centres were staffed by trained nurses, who referred serious cases to urban hospitals. Health volunteers — most of whom were women — were also assigned to community centres to assist women with their problems. Most of the students enrolled in medical schools in Thailand were women and affirmative action in favour of men had had to be taken in order to restore gender balance. However, female graduates of medical schools were often reluctant to serve in rural areas outside the capital.

3. Suicide was a phenomenon that affected not only women but also men and children. The situation had been aggravated by the serious economic crisis of the past two years, and a national plan to expand counselling services was currently awaiting the approval of Parliament. Special training curricula were being developed for social workers, psychologists, HIV/AIDS workers and prisoners, among others, to help bring about changes in behaviour and the way people perceived their reality.

4. She did not believe that poverty was the sole reason for child prostitution. Prevailing social attitudes also contributed to that phenomenon, as well as lack of education and rampant consumerism. Girls were sometimes forced or lured into prostitution by false promises. Efforts to combat paedophilia included the establishment of a blacklist banning known offenders from returning to Thailand, since most paedophiles were foreigners from the United States of America and Europe. The victims of paedophiles were mainly male street children. Tourist police in resort areas were also active in combating paedophilia.

5. Campaigns involving the use of posters, calendars and T-shirts had been launched in schools in order to change prevailing social attitudes about prostitution. Recent legislation had decriminalized but had not

legalized prostitution and emphasis had shifted away from punishing prostitutes to punishing not only their clients but also parents who permitted their children to engage in prostitution. As a result of those efforts and the threat of HIV/AIDS, prostitution was currently less prevalent than it had been a decade earlier.

6. With regard to domestic violence, including violence against parents and children, she agreed that enough had not been done to increase public awareness of the problem. A more determined effort would therefore be made to treat domestic violence as a public, and not a private, matter and to encourage citizens to report instances of abuse. Unfortunately, even the police frequently sought to reconcile the parties without involving the courts.

7. Men and women enjoyed equal property rights, with the exception of the right to own land. Thai women who were married to foreigners could not own property because of the law that required women to take their husband's name upon marriage.

8. With regard to life expectancy, women in Thailand generally lived longer than men. In 1997, for example, the average life expectancy for women was 74.9 years, while that of men was only 69.9 years. Measures were being taken to provide tax benefits for the elderly, although no tax exemptions were envisaged for caregivers. Unfortunately, little work had been done to prepare young women for old age.

9. The provision of adequate services to women who lived in remote border areas or who were members of hill tribes was made difficult by the fact that the people living in those remote regions often did not speak Thai and did not register as Thai citizens. Frequent cross-border movement also made it difficult for the Ministry of Social Welfare to verify the identity of individuals. Moreover, some public officials in those regions engaged in corrupt practices. The National Security Council and the Ministry of the Interior were currently considering ways of providing assistance to the communities concerned, while at the same time protecting the State from unmanageable inflows of undocumented migrant workers.

10. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** reiterated the need to adopt comprehensive legislation to eliminate discrimination against women in Thailand. The Government's planned legislation to protect the welfare of children should include a definition of intentional and unintentional discrimination; otherwise, it would

be difficult to address situations of hidden discrimination, which posed a particularly serious problem during times of economic hardship.

11. She disagreed with those who argued that explicit legislation on marital rape was unnecessary. Without such legislation, victims might not realize that they were entitled to legal remedies and that marital rape was not simply a private family matter but a serious violation of the inherent dignity of women.

12. **Ms. Goonesekere**, referring to the hill tribes of Thailand and the cross-border movement of populations, asked whether the Government had any plans to register migrant workers in order to protect their rights.

13. On the subject of legislative provisions for the protection of women's rights in Thailand, she wished to reiterate the importance of an equal rights amendment act. In that connection, the proposed legislation for the protection of children's rights should be consistent with the provisions of the Convention so as to facilitate the adoption of an equal rights amendment act at a later stage.

14. **Ms. Corti** said that political will was needed to modify prevailing social attitudes towards women. For example, rape, which was a violation of personal integrity and therefore of a fundamental human right, was still a taboo subject and often treated as a family matter. Education was the key to the success of Thailand's efforts in that area, and she wondered to what extent the Government was cooperating with representatives of civil society, including non-governmental organizations, to address the problem.

15. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her own capacity, said that every effort should be made to translate the text of the Convention into the Thai language in order to facilitate its dissemination and discussion. She welcomed the fact that Government family-planning programmes now targeted both women and men, since men should shoulder an equal share of the responsibility for family planning. Lastly, she agreed with the recommendation that rape within marriage should be criminalized. Domestic violence was not a private matter but a social problem which, if left unchecked, could become an obstacle to development.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.