



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

Distr.: General  
3 October 2001

Original: English

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**  
**Twenty-fifth session**

**Summary record of the 527th meeting**

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 18 July 2001, at 10 a.m.

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

*later:* Ms. Acar (Vice-Chairperson)

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

*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties  
under article 18 of the Convention on the  
Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against  
Women (continued)**

*Second periodic report of Guyana  
(CEDAW/C/GUY/2)*

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

2. **Ms. Shadick** (Guyana) welcomed the Committee's close scrutiny of Guyana's second periodic report (CEDAW/C/GUY/2). Her Government was committed to the institution of de jure and de facto mechanisms guaranteeing the full and equal participation of women and men in society. She would highlight developments in seven key areas, and asked the Committee to bear in mind the persisting challenges of patriarchal norms and the difficult economic environment.

3. Although the principle of equal rights and non-discrimination was enshrined in the 1980 Constitution, it was not legally enforceable. For lack of awareness and education, women had made minimal use of subsequent legislative provisions, such as the Equal Rights Act (1990) and the Prevention of Discrimination Act (1997). She was pleased to report that the limitations inherent in the Constitution had been addressed during Guyana's recent constitutional reform process. The Constitutional Reform Committee, comprising representatives of religious organizations, civil society and all political parties, had concluded that the Constitution should include an enforceable fundamental right to non-discrimination on grounds of sex, gender, marital status and pregnancy. It had also decided that seven international and regional human rights conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, would in future be part of the Constitution's provisions and applicable to both the public and the private sectors. A bill passed by the National Assembly at the end of May 2001 called for the establishment of several Constitutional Commissions to monitor the application of those conventions. Of interest to

CEDAW were the Women and Gender Equality Commission, the Indigenous Peoples Commission, and the Rights of the Child Commission.

4. She next outlined the responsibilities of the various agencies and programmes that constituted Guyana's national machinery for the advancement of women. In order to ensure that their roles and functions were complementary, her own Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security had formulated clear goals for each.

5. The Women's Affairs Bureau, an agency within the Ministry, had been established in 1981. With responsibility for coordinating national efforts to eliminate discrimination and ensure women's full participation in society, the Bureau had made policy recommendations, proposed legislative and other measures, implemented consciousness-raising and other programmes, organized training programmes, managed a revolving loan fund for microcredit, and collected and disseminated information. To enable the Bureau to phase out some activities and deal more effectively with policy initiatives and gender mainstreaming, a process of streamlining had begun in 1997 with the establishment of two UNDP-funded agencies — the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute and the National Resource and Documentation Centre. The Bureau itself was soon to be strengthened in terms of structure, staffing and finance.

6. The Bureau, Leadership Institute and Documentation Centre were the three strategic agencies through which her Ministry would coordinate a holistic programme with a four-year project cycle entitled "Building Capacity for Gender Equity". The programme, in which non-governmental organizations (NGOs) would play a role at all stages, would target five groups: women leaders in politics and public life; women in NGOs such as trade unions and community-based organizations; marginalized women living in rural or urban poverty; highly educated women suffering from low self-esteem; and policy makers, professional groups and others who could incorporate a gender perspective in their work.

7. The Guyana Women's Leadership Institute focused on empowerment through consciousness-raising in order to remove psychological barriers and attitudes that deterred women from participating in development. Its training programmes, directed at promoting both interpersonal skills and self-confidence

for participation in the public, civic and economic spheres, had concentrated on grass-roots women; future challenges included increasing the impact of training on rural women and redressing the disparity between the availability of qualified women and their under-representation in managerial positions. The National Resource and Documentation Centre collected and disseminated information on gender issues, published a newsletter of interest to women, and collaborated with the Bureau in compiling statistics on women's involvement in various sectors.

8. An integral part of "Building Capacity for Gender Equity" was the Guyana National Plan of Action for Women, 2000-2004, which would be funded mainly by the Government. Taking a comprehensive approach to the many factors affecting women, the plan outlined strategies for action at both microlevel (e.g. skills training) and macro-policy level. The plan also recognized that women's access to power and decision-making was indispensable for ensuring that women would benefit equally with men from development resources and programmes.

9. An Inter-Ministry Committee, comprising senior technicians from different sectors of the economy, shared responsibility with the Women's Affairs Bureau for mainstreaming gender and provided the Bureau with technical advice. A National Commission on Women, which advised the Government on policy issues and initiated research, had a membership drawn from the political parties and from a broad base of women with experience in the field of women and development. Its functions were recognized to be part of the wider range of responsibilities of the Women and Gender Equality Commission.

10. Equality in political participation was vital for women's advancement in other areas. A critical mass of female decision-makers would be able to change male-dominated values and priorities. She was therefore pleased to announce significant increases in the number of women representatives at various levels following the recent general elections. Women currently accounted for 20 out of 65 parliamentarians, an increase of around 15 per cent over 1997. The number of women holding ministerial office had doubled, from two to four. For the first time, a woman of Amerindian background held such an office, having been assigned the portfolio of Amerindian Affairs. The Women's Parliamentarians Association and the nascent Women's Political Forum, the latter supported by

Canada, would ensure that women as a whole benefited from their increased representation in Parliament. Within the local government system, women's representation in the 10 Regional Democratic Councils had risen from 21 per cent in 1997 to 30 per cent, although there was no woman currently chairing a council. Finally, she was pleased to announce that the Honourable Madame Justice Desirée Bernard, a former Chairperson of CEDAW, had become the first woman to hold the position of Chancellor of the Judiciary.

11. Guyana had the second highest rate of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection in the Caribbean region. Owing to poverty and unemployment, women had become a vulnerable group, accounting for 45 per cent of HIV/AIDS cases reported thus far in 2001. The Women's Affairs Bureau intended to mobilize women through NGOs to work with the restructured National AIDS Secretariat on a multifaceted prevention programme, for which additional government funding had been allocated, while other advocacy and education programmes were operating with the help of CARICOM, UNAIDS and USAID.

12. Guyana had registered significant health achievements over the 1997-1999 period. Both female mortality and child mortality had declined by around 30 per cent. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act had legalized such termination when carried out by registered physicians in approved hospitals. Abortion had been legalized under certain circumstances — for example, when pregnancy resulted from rape or incest or posed a risk to the woman's health, or when a woman was HIV-positive or risked having a child with physical or mental abnormalities. Under the Act, the pregnancy could not be more than eight weeks; termination had to be a non-surgical procedure administered or supervised by a medical practitioner. Mandatory pre- and post-abortion counselling was provided by government practitioners and a specialized NGO.

13. In the field of education, a range of government-supported and other agencies and NGOs were providing school drop-outs with skills for employment. In June 2001, 159 women had graduated from the first cycle of training in non-traditional skills for women such as carpentry and plumbing and many of them had already secured jobs with construction companies.

14. The Equal Rights Act and the Prevention of Discrimination Act were the main legal instruments protecting women from discrimination in employment; measures were being taken to encourage cases to be brought and sanctions applied in the event of violations. Measures to reduce unemployment were included in the National Action Plan for Women's Development. The Rural Women's Network, an NGO, was working with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture to implement educational and income-generation programmes for women.

15. While women on the staff of government agencies could take three months of paid maternity leave, women employed in the private sector had no guarantee of such leave and many were even dismissed, covertly, after a pregnancy. Her Ministry would attach high priority to formulating a national policy on maternity leave through wide-ranging consultations with the private sector.

16. Guyana, and particularly the country's women, faced economic difficulties because of its debt burden, despite significant progress in debt forgiveness. Within the framework of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, the Government had drafted a poverty-reduction strategy involving local, regional and national consultations with women, which would pave the way for further debt relief by the World Bank and IMF. Other poverty-reduction steps that benefited women were being implemented through community-based initiatives.

17. Countering the phenomenon of violence against women and children required challenging cultural beliefs and practices, including the view that such matters should be kept in the private domain. Civil society had already taken the lead to move the issue into the public domain. Laying the basis for government action, the NGO Women's Rights Campaign had drafted the Domestic Violence Act (1996). To date, the Government had provided counselling services and legal aid, established NGOs to help with counselling, support in court, and shelter, provided grants to NGOs such as the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers and Help and Shelter and trained members of the police force and social work agencies to manage cases of violence against women.

18. She deplored the present climate of political instability as a challenge to women's development and

said that the National Plan of Action for Women's Development would help unify women to work across religious, social and political lines as a bridging force for society. Under the Plan, analytical systems would be developed to ensure that official data would be disaggregated by sex and geographical location. Guyana, one of the first countries to accede to the Convention, had made significant strides in reducing gender inequality, with the help in particular of UNFPA, ECLAC, UNICEF, UNDP, UNIFEM and the Government of Canada.

19. **Ms. González** commended Guyana for producing its second periodic report so promptly; it could serve as an example to other countries in the region which had not yet reported or had reported late. Ms. Shadick's detailed oral presentation filled gaps and laid to rest some doubts raised by the written report, and by the statistical tables that had just been distributed showing, among other things, a notable increase in women's representation in politics. However, with reference to the table on HIV/AIDS, she wondered whether reported cases were really declining.

20. She welcomed the creation of constitutional commissions to monitor the implementation of human rights instruments and suggested that, as a complementary measure, women should be educated about their rights. She asked for clarification concerning the relationship between the Women and Gender Equality Commission and the existing machinery for the advancement of women, such as the Women's Affairs Bureau and the National Commission on Women. What kinds of coordination existed, and how could the various mechanisms be made mutually reinforcing?

21. **Ms. Hazelle**, while noting the progress made in the promotion of women's rights, expressed concern about the partial implementation of existing legislation and the lack of effective mechanisms. For example, she wondered how active a role the Chief Labour Officer played in his capacity as prosecuting authority for the Prevention of Discrimination Act, whether the staff concerned received adequate training and whether there was sufficient awareness of the provisions of the Act in society as a whole. She also wondered whether the Women and Gender Equality Commission had in fact been established and inquired about its mandate and membership, whether it would be a full-time agency, how concerns would be brought before it and whether it would replace or simply complement the work of the

National Commission on Women. It would also be useful to know what links and/or national mechanisms had been created to ensure partnership and collaboration between all stakeholders in order to increase awareness of the Prevention of Discrimination Act and what role was played by the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers. Reorganization of the national women's rights machinery was a positive step and it was important that the Inter-Ministry Committee on Gender include relatively high-level representation in order to be truly effective; she also requested more information on the staff and budget of relevant national women's rights mechanisms.

22. It was important that the judiciary receive training on the question of violence against women and she wondered what had been done to train the police, the judiciary and students with regard to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and also what penalties were provided under the law for persons convicted of intra-family violence. The situation of teenage mothers was also aggravated by poverty and she expressed surprise that those mothers were not allowed to return to school after giving birth.

23. **Ms. Ferrer Gómez** requested more information on the National Plan of Action for Women, 2000-2004, in particular any projects to assist women in the most vulnerable groups. Noting the coordinating role played by the Women's Affairs Bureau, she wondered whether the Government intended to create a separate ministry for women's affairs and whether more funds would be allocated to women's issues. Adequate coordination at all levels and between all stakeholders was especially important for the advancement of women. The situation of Amerindian women, who generally lived in rural areas and were among the most disadvantaged, was a source of particular concern and she noted that a higher percentage of Amerindian women were heads of households. She requested more information about the situation of rural women and about the extent to which rural women, in particular Amerindian women, were represented on village councils, the Indigenous Peoples' Commission, the Ethnic Relations Commission and the Rural Women's Network.

24. **Ms. Abaka** stressed the effect of poverty on women from ethnic minorities in particular, expressed satisfaction that a young Amerindian woman had been assigned the portfolio of Amerindian Affairs and

inquired whether any special measures had been adopted to improve the situation of Amerindian women. With regard to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, she wondered whether there were any provisions for termination of pregnancy after eight weeks, for example, for reasons of abnormal development of the foetus or mental health of the mother. She also inquired whether there was any explanation for the increase in HIV/AIDS, in particular among certain ethnic and age groups.

25. **Ms. Shadick** (Guyana), in response to questions about the links between women's rights mechanisms, said that the constitutional reform bill passed on 31 May 2001, a copy of which would be provided to the Committee, defined the mandate and membership of a Women and Gender Equality Commission. That Commission had not yet been established but its members would be appointed by the National Assembly following public consultations and would include the Administrator of the Women's Affairs Bureau and a representative of the Women's Advisory Committee of the Trade Union Congress. The various commissions would be grouped under the Human Rights Commission and the mandate of each would be defined as it was established. The exact links with existing agencies and the role of the National Commission for Women remained to be defined. With regard to HIV/AIDS rates, she said that the total of 1,862 cases contained in the table distributed in the conference room in fact referred to the entire period from 1987 to 2001, not just 1987. The grouping of labour, human services and social security in one ministry would make it easier to ensure that labour officers enforced anti-discrimination provisions. Training had been provided to labour officers and, although few complaints had been received to date, the creation of the new ministry should lead to better enforcement. The Women's Affairs Bureau and the National Commission on Women, in collaboration with the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers, provided resources and training for women's groups. She noted that the Inter-Ministry Committee on Gender already had relatively high-level representation and was therefore quite effective. The current budget of the Women's Affairs Bureau, 0.0065 per cent of the national budget, was adequate and did not seem to imply any underfunding of women's programmes.

26. Turning to the issue of violence against women, she said that police officers at all levels received basic

training with regard to their role when dealing with cases of domestic violence but such cases were often poorly documented or undocumented. Accordingly, after meeting with senior officers and the Commissioner of Police, she had provided police stations with a list of instructions, including specific questions to ask a victim, for police officers dealing with cases of violence against women. The Government, non-governmental organizations and churches were working to increase awareness of the Domestic Violence Act; for example, the previous week a training seminar had been held for counsellors. In addition, 16 social workers had been trained and were empowered to bring cases before the courts without police intervention; they could request protection orders and appear on behalf of victims. Anyone who violated a court protection order was subject to imprisonment and domestic violence was prosecuted under the relevant provisions of the Criminal Law with regard to assault and grievous bodily harm.

27. In discussions with the Chancellor of the Judiciary, she had recommended dealing separately with cases which fell under the Domestic Violence Act and appointing magistrates who specialized in domestic violence. It was to be hoped that the necessary legislation for the creation of family courts would be adopted by the end of the year. The Chancellor had said that there would be no problem in designating judges for those courts.

28. Replying to Ms. Hazelle, she said that it was not true that pregnant girls were not permitted to return to school; indeed, they were encouraged to resume their studies after the birth of the child.

29. Replying to Ms. Ferrer Gómez, she acknowledged that women were indeed the main victims of poverty and one of society's most vulnerable groups. Programmes were being put in place to address that situation, particularly in the rural areas. Legal aid services for rural women had been established with resources from a special poverty fund within the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security. The legal aid services were particularly valuable to divorced or separated women who had difficulty obtaining maintenance or securing their property. On the basis of consultations with women's groups in the regions, the Ministry provided grants to enable particularly vulnerable women to launch small income-earning enterprises. Such measures would be

bolstered by the implementation of the HIPC Initiative and the poverty reduction strategy paper. In addition, the President of Guyana had announced that assistance would be provided for the establishment of garment factories in rural areas in order to create jobs for female heads of households.

30. A considerable amount of work had been done with the Amerindian communities. Women sat on the Amerindian community councils and relayed the needs of the communities to the Minister for Amerindian Affairs and other government authorities. Health facilities (clinics in the larger communities and "health huts" in the small settlements) and schools through the secondary level had been established in all the Amerindian communities. Some communities already had water supplies, and the Ministry of Housing and Water was overseeing the installation of facilities in the others. Currently, heads of household were not classified by ethnic group; however, with computerization, it would be possible to generate ethnically disaggregated statistics. Her Ministry had been working with the Amerindian communities through the women's committees at the regional level. Amerindian women also participated in all national women's conferences held in Georgetown.

31. Replying to Ms. Abaka, she said that it was not true that Amerindians were not as well educated; as she had explained, there were schools through the secondary level in all communities. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act did not provide for abortions after eight weeks; that would be left to the physician's discretion. Although there had been no research on the causes of the upsurge in HIV/AIDS, she believed that it was largely attributable to the reluctance of adolescents to take precautions. Through advocacy and education, the Government was attempting to transform the attitudes of young people and alert them to the dangers of HIV/AIDS. There was no information available on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in various ethnic groups. Most victims were between 18 and 30 years of age.

32. **Ms. Livingstone Raday** praised the State party for its achievements in terms of women's participation in politics and public life and their high literacy rate, which contrasted sharply with the persistence of poverty and stereotyping. Women's scant presence in the labour force — 26 per cent — was indeed worrying and called for more effective enforcement of labour legislation. In that connection, she questioned the

emphasis on criminal prosecution rather than civil remedies under the Equal Rights Act. Criminal remedies involved both a heavy burden of proof, which could be very problematic in cases of discrimination, and bureaucratic intervention, which had not been very successful thus far. More importantly, under that system, women did not feel empowered to seek their own remedies and had no real incentives (e.g., punitive damages, job reinstatement, equal wages) to do so. She wished to know whether Guyanese women were entitled to seek civil remedies and, if so, why that option had not been emphasized in the report. If not, she wondered whether the State party had any plans to provide for civil remedies.

33. She was concerned about the lack of mandatory maternity leave and insufficient guarantees of paid maternity leave. In particular, she wondered whether penalties were imposed on private-sector employers who defaulted on their contributions to the national insurance scheme or if, at the very least, they were obligated to cover the paid maternity leave of the employees whom they had made ineligible.

34. She welcomed Guyana's constitutional reform process and wondered whether the recommendations for mandatory gender representation of 33 1/3 per cent had been as successful at the regional level as at the national level. She would appreciate figures on reported cases of violence against women and, in particular, domestic violence, on prosecutions and convictions, and on the severity of sentences in cases of conviction. It would be interesting to know whether the State party planned to expand its police officer training programme on violence against women. She hoped that its forthcoming seminars for the judiciary on violence against women and domestic violence would be highly successful.

35. **Ms. Goonesekere** expressed surprise that a country with such an impressive number of women in political life, an Equal Rights Act and Domestic Violence Act should fall short of the Convention's standards on maternity leave, which, under its articles 5 (b), 11 (1) (f) and (2), was considered a core right and not a privilege that could be revoked at an employer's discretion. The State party should refer to the standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and those embodied in international human rights instruments, including the Convention. It was particularly important to persuade the private sector that granting maternity leave was indeed sound

management practice, and that economic production would suffer if women's and children's health were at risk. She shared Ms. Livingstone Raday's concern about the emphasis which the Equal Rights Act placed on criminal proceedings rather than civil remedies in enforcing constitutional guarantees. The Prevention of Discrimination Act seemed to focus on labour issues; she would appreciate clarification of its scope. She urged the State party to contemplate, in the context of constitutional reforms, the establishment of a complaints procedure, which would afford women more rapid relief than court proceedings. That could be complemented by an independent national commission with its own complaints mechanism. The State party might wish to look at India's extremely successful experience in that regard. An independent commission would also strengthen the partnership with non-governmental organizations, which was absolutely crucial. Lastly, she suggested that Guyana should rethink its laws criminalizing prostitution, particularly in the light of the HIV/AIDS crisis.

36. *Ms. Acar (Vice-Chairperson) took the Chair.*

37. **Ms. Gabr** said that, despite its notable legislative and political achievements, the State party's level of social services was lagging and women were most adversely affected. She expressed concern at the country's overall literacy rate and, in the area of health, stressed the urgency of increasing awareness about contraception. Lastly, she welcomed the cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organizations.

38. **Ms. Myakayaka-Manzini** wondered whether the State party had considered adopting legislation or administrative procedures on compulsory maternity leave, which was particularly crucial in the private sector. She enquired about measures to sustain women's outstanding gains in political life, for example, through the political parties or women's non-governmental organizations, and about government initiatives to ensure gender equality in all fields by, inter alia, providing the necessary budgetary support.

39. **Ms. Kwaku** said that Guyana was advancing the status of women at all levels. The situation of rural women, however, was rather pathetic compared to the huge advances which had been made in other sectors, and she urged the Government and women of Guyana to put in place priority programmes and projects for them. She expressed the hope that Guyana would be

the first developing country to achieve a 100 per cent school participation rate for rural women.

40. **Ms. Shadick** (Guyana) explained that there was no legislation in place to improve the representation of women in the labour market by imposing mandatory quotas, but nor were there any legal impediments or other bars to women applying for and being appointed to any position; indeed, since the second report (CEDAW/C/GUY/2) had been issued, the percentage of women in employment had increased. In the teaching profession, over 80 per cent of every cohort passing through teacher training college were women, while in the legal area, in her own graduating class at law school in 1998 there had been 17 Guyanese of whom only 4 had been male. That trend was continuing.

41. The Equal Rights Act did not focus only on rights at work but covered all areas of society, including property rights for a woman living with a man out of wedlock. The Prevention of Discrimination Act on the other hand focused primarily on labour matters. Under that Act, the Chief Labour Officer could bring criminal prosecutions against violators, but that was no legal impediment to women taking civil action in order to seek damages or some other relief, as it was everyone's right to do. Such actions had led in the past to the imposition of punitive damages, job reinstatement of the victim of proven discrimination and so on. The real impediment to women taking civil action was the severe backlog of cases in the court system: it might be five or six years before an action was heard and a ruling made or damages awarded.

42. Under the National Insurance Act, compulsory maternity benefit contributions were required from both employee and employer. An employer who defaulted on contributions or failed to register an employee was liable to criminal prosecution under the Act. The scheme was enforced by a system of inspectors in all regions of the country who would respond to any complaint made. The Act also mandated six weeks' maternity leave before confinement, one week surrounding confinement and six weeks after confinement. Of course, some private employers would try to circumvent the Act by coming to some other contractual arrangement with their employees. However, under contract law contractual terms that conflicted with the legislation in force were not valid and such an employer could be taken to court by the employee for redress.

43. The Prevention of Discrimination Act penalized discrimination on grounds of race, sex, religion, colour, ethnic origin, membership of the indigenous population, national extraction, social origin, economic status, political opinion, disability, family responsibilities, pregnancy, marital status or age. Labour officers were to be given training on tackling all those forms of discrimination, but she conceded that, until that branch of the system had recently been brought into her Ministry, there had been no real opportunity to motivate the inspectors and reorient them to tackle gender discrimination more effectively. Previously, there had been a tendency for certain aspects to be overlooked. The labour officer or national insurance inspector would first enter into consultations with the employer to try to reach a satisfactory settlement of disputes rather than automatically bring a criminal prosecution, but would bring a criminal prosecution if there was no other way. However, the main task remained that of making women themselves aware of their rights, and her Ministry was engaged in an education campaign to that end.

44. The Government recognized the need to amend or introduce legislation in order to tackle indirect discrimination, sexual harassment and so on. She expressed the hope that that would have been done by the time her country came to present its next report.

45. She agreed that there was a need for a complaints procedure outside the government structure and noted in that regard that there was a police complaints authority. She stressed that, when labour officers received complaints, they did hold discussions with the employers as part of their investigations, and sometimes managed to rectify the situation before court action was needed. She promised to try to set up a complaints procedure in the very near future.

46. She noted that 30 per cent of the members of the regional councils were women. Sadly however, all those councils had elected male chairmen. Women's groups and her own Ministry were very vigilant on the matter of representation of and by women and would do all they could to make sure that there was no slippage in the figures. Indeed, they were all trying to improve the representation to 50 per cent; that goal was achievable.

47. She read out data on the number of rape cases brought before the courts between 1996 and 2000: year by year, those numbers were 9, 10, 9, 5 and 8. In 1996,

five cases had been tried with two resulting in discharge or acquittal; one sentence of 3 months and two of 15 years' imprisonment had been imposed. In 1997, one case had been tried leading to a sentence of 8 years' imprisonment. In 1998, five cases had been tried leading to one discharge or acquittal, one fine of \$75,000, one sentence of 4 years' imprisonment, one of 15 years and one of 20 years. In 1999, one case had been tried leading to a sentence of 15 years' imprisonment. In 2000, one case had been tried leading to sentences of 20 years' imprisonment for each of four defendants. She stressed that the cases which had not been tried had not been abandoned but were still pending, and some might be tried during the current High Court session.

48. She provided information from the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic on domestic violence: between January 2001 and April 2001, 46 people had sought representation from the Clinic on domestic violence matters; 19 had been represented by lawyers from the Clinic and 27 had been given advice as to what action to take. There had also been a number of personal injury cases, but it was impossible to say how many of them were also domestic violence cases. Two rape or other sexual assault victims had sought help from the Clinic and had been given advice.

49. The training of police officers on domestic violence was an ongoing process. The curriculum for each new batch of police officers included training on domestic violence. Older officers who had not received domestic violence training were sent on special courses. The goal was to have one police officer at each police station who was a trained social worker also, and it was as close to being achieved as was possible in practice.

50. The National Commission on Women was an independent national commission with representation of non-governmental organizations, as had been recommended by the Committee. The Government of Guyana had never tried to exclude non-governmental organizations and independent bodies. When the Constitutional Commissions were set up, the role of the other Commissions would have to be discussed to determine whether they would remain as they were or become agencies of Government, and the question of their independence would be borne in mind in those discussions.

51. Guyana had studied the Indian legislation for models on a number of occasions and she committed her Ministry to studying it on the matter of an independent commission to deal with complaints.

52. She agreed that that legislation on prostitution was archaic and unsuitable. She undertook to give reform priority and to include it in her programme for 2002. Prostitutes were arrested mainly on charges of loitering, vagrancy, solicitation or larceny; their customers were not brought up on charges, not least because they could be difficult to identify. Of course, people were notoriously close-mouthed about such matters and were certainly unwilling to speak about them in a court of law.

53. The literacy rate was a concern for the Government of Guyana in general and the Education Ministry in particular: although education was universally available in Guyana, some children were still leaving school unable to read. The Ministry of Education was addressing the problem with remedial reading programmes for adults and children.

54. Within the AIDS awareness programmes being conducted in Guyana, the issue of contraception arose frequently. The Guyanese Responsible Parenthood Association provided advice and contraceptives free of charge and ran training sessions and programmes with young people and teenagers. Unfortunately, there was a marked reluctance to take the risk of HIV seriously, and much work remained to be done to raise young people's awareness of the need to use contraception.

55. The situation of rural women was beginning to be addressed through the national plan of action for women, which, it was hoped, would have a positive impact.

56. She undertook to study the budget allocations for women and women's issues as part of the budgetary process for the year 2002, which would begin in September 2001. She had not had any input into the 2001 budget, and would try to ensure that the organs of Government dealing with women's affairs were adequately funded in 2002.

57. She confirmed that there were five female Supreme Court Judges in Guyana, and that the Chancellor, the former Chief Justice, was also a woman.

58. **The Chairperson**, speaking on behalf of the Committee, commended the Minister on her country's report, congratulated her on her contribution to a positive and constructive dialogue and wished her success in continuing the good work already done by and on behalf of the women of Guyana.

*The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.*