



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

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

Twenty-sixth session

Summary record of the 533rd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 17 January 2002, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Abaka

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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)

Third and fourth periodic reports of Iceland (continued) (CEDAW/C/ICE/3-4; CEDAW/PSWG/2002/I/CRP.1/Add.1 and CEDAW/PSWG/2002/I/CRP.2/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Bjarnadóttir and Ms. Gunnsteindóttir (Iceland) took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Bjarnadóttir** (Iceland), continuing her replies to Committee members' questions concerning violence against women, said, in answer to Ms. Shin, that she presumed that the issue had been addressed under article 12 because of its tremendous impact on women's health. Considering how the discussion of and approach to the issue had evolved since that time, she was certain it would be dealt with under a number of other articles as well in future reports. She had no data on medical expenses but could assure the Committee that they would be included in the next periodic report.

3. Group therapy for men who had perpetrated violence against women had begun in 1998 and was still very successful. According to a survey taken at the end of 2000, 90 per cent of women in some way related to men who had benefited from group or individual therapy were satisfied with the outcome. In most instances, the violence had decreased or ceased altogether and the overall quality of the women's lives had improved; the women had said they laughed more frequently and felt more relaxed. The men surveyed had also been very pleased with the results. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs was considering a proposal to continue the project for a three-year period, to extend it to other parts of Iceland and to institute it as an integral part of prison sentences in order to reach men who would not seek therapy on their own initiative. Icelandic experts were also training personnel in Greenland, the Faroe Islands and the Baltic countries to offer therapy to men. The therapy project had consumed a great deal of energy and attention, and she believed it was now time for other, less successful projects to be given a fresh start.

4. As a result of better training, police cooperation with the Women's Shelter, the incest centre, Crisis Centre for Rape Victims at the Reykjavik City hospital

and the Women's Counselling Centre had been more positive and effective. Police had been offered courses and seminars on handling victims of domestic violence, sexual offences and trafficking.

5. **Ms. Gunnsteindóttir** (Iceland) said that, on the basis of a report prepared by the Ministry of Justice in 1997, both the law of criminal procedure and the Penal Code had been amended to provide for the victim's right to legal counsel in cases of domestic violence, protection of witnesses to domestic violence, physical injury and sexual offences and the issuance of protection orders, where necessary. There was increasing awareness of the problem of violence against women and children, and it was being discussed much more openly in society and in the media.

6. **Ms. González** praised the State party for its concise, clear and substantive report and for the wealth of supplementary information provided in its introductory presentation. She stressed the need for the strong action to combat trafficking of women and prostitution and expressed the hope that the Icelandic authorities would focus particular attention on the dangers of sexual commerce, which tended to aggravate human rights abuses and organized crime. She welcomed the strong measures already taken by the State party to stem violence against women and children, including ground-breaking provisions to cover incidents of violence inflicted by women against men. Perhaps, in its next report, Iceland could give the Committee an idea of the scope of the problem of violence against children by providing data on such cases. It would also be useful to hear about any incidents of sexual violence against children, and of violence against elderly women. She would appreciate it if the State party could answer the question posed by the pre-session working group concerning penalties for violence between spouses.

7. She thanked the delegation for the additional information it had provided on women's participation in the diplomatic service and hoped women would continue to be encouraged to enter that field. Noting that the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had previously raised the issue of increased drug and alcohol consumption among Iceland's youth and the student population, she wondered whether the Government had followed up that Committee's recommendation to analyse the problem and what its findings had been. Information on the extent of drug

and alcohol consumption by women of all ages would be helpful.

8. **Ms. Corti** referring to the Penal Code amendments under article 6 and noting that, according to an interim report published by the Ministry of Justice and interviews with victims, Eastern European women were being imported to work in strip shops, commended the State party on the action it had taken to deal with the growing phenomenon of prostitution and trafficking. At the same time, she recommended even stronger measures and harsher penalties, and expressed the hope that the next periodic report would provide more information on how the problem was being tackled.

9. **Ms. Achmad**, referring to the Government's responses to the list of issues and questions with regard to its reports (CEDAW/PSWG/2001/I/CRP.2/Add.3), wondered about the reason for the failure to achieve the 30 per cent target for women's participation in public committees (question 7). Was it that the target was unrealistic, that women preferred the status quo, or that proper follow-up measures had not been taken to provide the psychological encouragement that even highly educated women might need to enter public life? Noting the efforts by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to recruit women to 50 per cent of all new positions requiring a university degree (question 9), she asked whether that goal had been achieved and if so, whether it had engendered any reaction by competing male candidates. It would also be interesting to know the proportion of male to female applicants and whether the Ministry had recruited from specific universities or groups of women.

10. She would appreciate more details on the type of action (e.g., seminars, counselling, mentoring) taken by the relevant departments of universities to encourage more women to study engineering and technology (question 11). It was, indeed, encouraging to see that the Government had been able to attract support from the business community, including insurance companies, and other strategic groups in society to that end. Stressing that the promotion of women in science and technology was vital to solving women's problems in all areas, she enquired whether the "Women and Science" courses on the philosophy and history of science and the special conference on the status of women in science in Iceland were Government or university initiatives. It would also be interesting to know whether the Handbook on Gender Equality,

published by the National Centre for Educational Materials, was designed for teachers, students, or administrators. Finally, she would appreciate details of the "great success" of the State party's life balance project carried out in the context of flexible working hours (question 18).

11. **Ms. Goonesekere** enquired about the disparity between the maximum penalty of 16 years' imprisonment for rape, and two to four years for trafficking and operating prostitution establishments, including the exploitation of minors. She wished to know whether the State party would be seriously contemplating stiffer penalties when it reformed the Penal Code. A number of countries, including Sweden, treated the operation of prostitution establishments as a form of violence against women.

12. **Ms. Bjarnadóttir** (Iceland) said that she was unable to provide any figures on the sexual abuse of children. Although many cases had gone unreported in the past, there was a growing realization of the extent of the problem and a greater readiness to talk about it. Similarly, there was a heightened awareness of the link between violence against children and ill-treatment of their mothers. Iceland, in cooperation with other Nordic countries, was conducting research on domestic violence, which had already shown that 50 per cent of children who lived in violent homes experienced direct physical cruelty. Any available data would be included in the next report.

13. Iceland was also carrying out research on physical and psychological violence against older women, including the financial pressure to which some of them were subjected. While marital rape was an offence in Iceland, there was a tendency to regard it in a less harsh light than other sexual crimes, although such an attitude was indefensible.

14. Drug abuse in Iceland was increasing sharply among young girls and there was clear evidence of a link between drug abuse, prostitution and sexual offences. Gang rape was a new phenomenon which was also connected with drug abuse.

15. **Ms. Gunnsteindóttir** (Iceland) said that the Government was very much aware of the rise in drug and alcohol abuse by teenagers and had spent much money and effort on attempts to combat addiction among young people. More treatment centres had been opened and waiting lists at the eight centres were short. Information campaigns had been mounted in schools to

alert youngsters to the dangers of drug taking. Efforts to discover the reasons for drug abuse revealed that there were many causes, including sexual abuse, learning difficulties and social isolation.

16. **Ms. Bjarnadóttir** said that a few months earlier a big public debate had taken place about women and alcohol abuse. As a result, the health authorities were tackling what had hitherto been a taboo subject. The services of family counselling centres were being strengthened to assist women who were the victims of sexual or domestic violence.

17. Iceland would include a section on strip clubs in its next report. Local authorities were banning such clubs and their business was declining, not only because of legal measures to prevent their operation, but also because of a growing realization that women did not necessarily choose to work there, but were forced to do so out of sheer economic necessity or because they were the victims of trafficking. In Akureyri, two of the four previously existing clubs had already closed.

18. **Ms. Gunnsteindóttir** said that women needed to be encouraged to stand for election to public committees if the 30 per cent target set in 1993 was to be reached. A committee established in 1998 was holding courses to prepare women for participation in decision-making and the political life of the country.

19. **Ms. Bjarnadóttir** said that appointment procedures would have to be changed in order to meet the target of 30 per cent in Government committees. One possibility would be to have a male and a female candidate stand for election to each post. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 50 per cent of new recruits were women with university degrees and the intake of women had risen in other ministries also. Although most of the senior officers and lawyers in many ministries were women, the majority of the highest civil service positions were still held by men.

20. In response to the question about the leadership project, she explained that seminars, courses and mentoring were all taking place. Thirteen individual projects were being conducted under that heading. Two of them were aimed at persuading men to go into nursing and social work, while the others focused on women. Under the auspices of the project, women engineers and computer scientists had visited all the schools in the country in an effort to encourage girls to enter those professions. There were plans to arrange

similar visits by male nurses and social workers. The Women and Democracy conference held in 1999 had kindled the interest of the business world in the project. The University of Iceland was also involved in making arrangements for the conference on the status of women in science.

21. The handbook on equality was designed mainly for teachers, although it was used by educationalists at the Ministry of Education and elsewhere.

22. **Ms. Gunnsteindóttir** said that she attributed the success of the "Striking the balance" project to the fact that it met the demands of the labour market. Men and women wanted to combine work and family life. Young people were especially keen on flexitime, which also offered employers a number of advantages.

23. **Ms. Bjarnadóttir** said, with reference to penalties for trafficking in women and prostitution, that there was much discussion in Iceland of the new Swedish law which punished clients. There was close cooperation in penal matters between the Nordic and Baltic countries and a joint working group had just been established in order to create greater awareness of the issue. It was one area where authorities had to work hand in hand in order to secure success. People were waiting to see what results the Swedish experiment would produce.

24. Lastly, she said that in Iceland 55 per cent of the female working force were in full-time employment.

25. **The Chairperson** thanked the delegation for responding fully to all the questions and for the very interesting dialogue. While the Committee commended Iceland for its achievements in implementing the Convention, it was still concerned about the lack of participation of women in public life and the political arena, the fact that the Convention was not part of Icelandic domestic law, the trafficking of women and children to supply the sex industry in the country and the low sentences handed down for rape. She trusted that the Committee's concluding comments would be widely circulated within Iceland.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.