



**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 544th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 25 January 2002, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Acar (Vice-Chairperson)

Contents

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

Fifth periodic reports of the Russian Federation (continued)

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Ms. Acar, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.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)

Fifth periodic report of the Russian Federation (continued) (CEDAW/C/USR/5, CEDAW/PSWG/2002/I/CRP.1/Add.3 and CEDAW/PSWG/2002/I/CRP.2/Add.4)

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

2. **The Chairperson** invited Committee members to pose further questions to the delegation of the Russian Federation on its fifth periodic report.

3. **Ms. Manalo** urged the Russian Federation to pursue its gender mainstreaming process, which was not sufficiently described in the report, perhaps because it was not sufficiently developed, and to introduce gender budgeting into its “socially-oriented budget” (CEDAW/PSWG/2002/I/CRP.2/Add.4, p. 7). If the Russian Federation already had a system of gender budgeting, the delegation should explain how it functioned.

4. She requested clarification of the decline in the number of women in the State Duma of the Federal Assembly (CEDAW/PSWG/2002/I/CRP.2/Add.4, p. 10). Was the strategy to increase women’s representation in politics ineffective? Did it rely too heavily on political parties to mobilize women? Noting that women tended to be concentrated at the lower levels of government bureaucracy rather than in leadership posts, she enquired about measures being taken to redress the situation.

5. Lastly, she wondered whether the Russian Federation had signed and ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking Persons, Especially Women and Children.

6. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** welcomed the State party’s timely submission of its current report and the preparations already under way for drafting its sixth

periodic report. She wondered when it planned to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention, and whether it intended to ratify the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention.

7. It would be interesting to hear about any plans to discuss the Committee’s concluding comments on the State party’s report in political organs, including the Duma, at a press conference or in seminars with non-governmental organizations.

8. Noting that the transition to a market economy had a particularly adverse effect on women, she enquired about legislation and other efforts to banish stereotyping of family responsibilities in order to ensure that women could compete in the labour market on an equal footing with men. Being viewed mainly as mothers (she recalled the concept of “working mother” under the Soviet system) would remain a built-in structural impediment to women in the labour market unless men’s role as fathers was emphasized to the same extent. She also wondered how the extensive childcare system of Soviet times had fared in the transition to a market economy. Had it been dismantled or become very expensive, and, if it had survived, was it administered at the national, regional or municipal level? Like previous speakers, she urged the Russian Federation to enact special temporary measures under article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention in order to ensure that unemployed women were given preference in hiring over unemployed men. The provisions of the article should be fully utilized to make headway in both the public and private sectors, if possible, within the framework of the outline of legislation to ensure equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women. Legislation and practice in other countries, for example the Scandinavian countries, provided a useful model. She asked about the Government’s intentions with regard to the adoption of both the outline of legislation to ensure equal rights and draft legislation on domestic violence.

9. She cautioned that women’s opportunities on the labour market might be severely restricted by the list of 456 jobs hazardous to their health. What action was the Government taking to retrain women in hazardous jobs for other work, or to influence employers to ensure safer working conditions, particularly with regard to the reproductive health of both women and men? The exaggerated concern over hazardous jobs seemed paradoxical in a country where abortion, which was also hazardous to women’s health, was rampant. She

urged the State party to allocate sufficient funds to ensure that abortion was not misused as a contraceptive. She enquired whether proposed pension reforms would take into account the fact that women often received lower pay or had to take leave for family reasons; discrimination in employment must not be perpetuated into Russian women's old age.

10. The delegation should indicate any obstacles to the registration of women's non-governmental organizations, for example, the payment of high registration fees or taxes, and how such non-governmental organizations were included in the political process and consulted on draft legislation. It would also be interesting to know whether the Government was financing services, such as job training, legal education and childcare, provided by non-governmental organizations, or passively allowing them to take over some of its own responsibilities.

11. **Ms. Abaka** echoed the concerns expressed by Ms. Livingstone Radaay with regard to contraceptive use. It was puzzling that a mere 23 per cent of Russian women used contraceptives. The delegation should clarify whether they were actually available to everyone free of charge. Both the report and the delegation's oral introduction seemed to indicate that abortion was relied on as a form of birth control, and yet the hazards of repeated abortions were great, especially for young women who might wish to have children later on. She recommended awareness-building programmes on the importance of contraceptive use.

12. She questioned the delegation on the persistently high maternal mortality rate in the Russian Federation, where 99 per cent of births were assisted by skilled professionals; in that connection, the State party's efforts to improve the nutrition of pregnant women constituted a step in the right direction.

13. The State party should not accuse women with human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) of anti-social behaviour; such women could well have been infected by unfaithful partners. She enquired about research concerning the treatment of patients with both tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

14. Lastly, she asked whether the Russian Federation provided counselling for children who grew up witnessing domestic violence, particularly boys, who might be prone to perpetuate it.

15. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** enquired whether any institutional mechanism existed whereby non-governmental organizations (NGOs) could make their views known to the Government.

16. The report (document CEDAW/C/USR/5, p. 9) mentioned that the incidence of gynaecological problems among adolescent girls had tripled over the past five years and that early sexual maturation and sexual initiation were resulting in teenage pregnancies. She asked what policies and measures were being envisaged or implemented to address those concerns. Specifically, was sex education being systematically offered in all schools? Were family planning services effectively available to adolescents? In addition to the one pamphlet that had been mentioned, did girls have real access to information and advice?

17. Turning to the issue of prostitution, she regretted that the statistics on the numbers of minors involved were not broken down by sex. She asked whether clients and exploiters of prostitutes were also punished. If those aspects of the sex trade were not criminalized, there was bound to be an increase in trafficking. As for the other anti-trafficking measures mentioned in the report, were they being implemented and, if so, what concrete results had they achieved? Had the Russian Federation ratified other conventions and protocols on the subject? With regard to the scale of trafficking, she was puzzled by some discrepancies. The report (p. 23) stated that a few thousand women were involved, whereas information from other sources put the number at tens of thousands trafficked to some 50 countries, with women also trafficked into the Russian Federation from neighbouring countries. One basis for the report's lower estimates was information from consular offices abroad on the number of women seeking to return to the Russian Federation. She wondered how significant that information was, since it concerned only women in irregular situations. In any case, the numbers of criminal prosecutions (37 in 2000, 28 in 1999) were extremely small.

18. The report did not mention sexual harassment in the workplace but information from other sources indicated that the problem existed on a large scale, as everywhere else in the world, with 60 per cent of Russian women having had some experience of harassment. She enquired whether there had been any research, complaints or convictions on the subject.

19. The delegation had asserted that all cases of suspected rape or sexual assault against Chechen women were investigated and that just one case of rape had been confirmed, whereas the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Elimination of Violence against Women had cited “strong evidence” of sexual violence against women by military personnel of the Russian Federation. She asked the delegation to comment on that discrepancy.

20. **Ms. Karelova** (Russian Federation) said that, although the Russian Federation had now acquired a socially oriented budget, it could not yet claim to have gender budgeting. The issue would no doubt be addressed in the sixth periodic report (to be submitted in 2002).

21. The Government recognized the importance of involving women in efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the national strategy for promoting their participation in high-level decision-making. She understood from personal experience the psychological barriers that might prevent women from participating in aggressively competitive elections. The first step was to encourage more women to participate in local elections, in the hope that those same women would eventually agree to run for seats in the State Duma. Certain parties — such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s Liberal Democratic Party — did not have a single female candidate. The bill on political parties would, however, make the inclusion of women candidates mandatory. No woman had yet had recourse to the courts on matters of electoral discrimination, but complaints had been lodged with the Central Electoral Commission. An equal opportunities bill had been given a final reading and its likely adoption in 2002 would provide further impetus for enhanced participation of women in the political process.

22. She was also pleased to announce that the Russian Federation, having signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, would be proceeding to its ratification in 2003.

23. The fifth periodic report had been prepared in consultation with civil society representatives from various parts of the Russian Federation. The Committee’s concluding observations would be widely disseminated in a similar spirit of transparency. A governmental commission would be providing follow-up, and a consultative round table would focus

on the current situation of women in the Russian Federation.

24. In the field of employment, it was not easy to combat the mindsets and approaches that discriminated against women. Her delegation was currently studying the positive experience of other countries in that regard. Although younger men were beginning to modify their perception of women’s roles, the older generation was much more slow to change. The major challenge, however, was to raise awareness of women’s labour rights among employers and persons in authority. A recently televised exchange between leaders of political parties and representatives of women’s groups had served to further encourage public debate on the issue of equal opportunities.

25. Her delegation wished to correct the misconception that pre-school facilities no longer existed in the Russian Federation. The reduction in childcare facilities for working mothers was fully in line with the drop in birth rates in recent years. In 2000, 56 per cent of children under seven years of age had continued to benefit from childcare, compared to 55 per cent in 1996. The only change was that most childcare facilities were now fee-based. Fees varied, however, and 80-per-cent subsidies were available for the poorest families.

26. The many thousands of children still in orphanages were a legacy from the Soviet period that posed enormous problems. In a remarkably short time, however, an extensive network of institutions had been established to assist families with children and to provide special facilities for disabled children. Currently, there were 2,974 such facilities, compared to only 107 in 1994. Another positive development was the recent threefold increase in maternity benefits.

27. Thanks to pressure from women’s groups, the official list of hazardous occupations was currently under review. Efforts were also under way to introduce job certification and to improve scrutiny of working conditions and of women’s labour rights.

28. In view of the financial difficulties faced by some women’s groups, registered organizations were not liable for State taxes, nor was any charge made for such registration. Women’s groups had recently been invited to participate in ten federal programmes designed, inter alia, to benefit children, older persons and disabled persons. One non-governmental organization had already received support in that

context for the establishment of crisis centres for women. The Government was keen to encourage the development of non-State social services in line with international standards, and had established a legislative basis to that end. An All-Russia conference to be held in March would provide further impetus to such efforts.

29. Budgetary resources accounted for some 25 per cent of the total expenditure on female contraceptives. It was clear that wider access to contraceptives, particularly in rural areas, would significantly reduce the number of abortions and improve women's health overall. Also in the field of health, the Government was currently elaborating a minimum nutritional requirement for pregnant women.

30. The next periodic report would provide more details of the Government's response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and of current research in that field.

31. A Special Rapporteur had been invited to Chechnya and the Russian Federation to investigate allegations of violence against women. Further details would be included in the next periodic report.

32. **Ms. Cui** asked for further information about harmful, hazardous or strenuous working conditions, particularly for women of childbearing age. According to the report, there were some 600,000 women employed in such jobs. Why had the Basic Legislation on Protection of Labour, whose entry into force had initially been scheduled for 1999 and then deferred to July 2000, effectively been suspended altogether in July 1999 (document CEDAW/PSWG/2002/CRP.2/Add.4, p.17)? Did that mean in practice that women were now allowed to work in such jobs? Some way should be found to avoid both extremes, namely prohibiting such employment altogether for women of childbearing age, and abolishing all protection for them.

33. The delegation's written responses had also provided useful statistics on unemployment. She had been puzzled to see that, while women represented 54.5 per cent of unemployed persons with less than a secondary general education, they accounted for almost 68 per cent of those with higher vocational qualifications. In other words, the more educated a woman, the more likely she was to be unemployed. Was education in the Russian Federation unsuited to the labour market?

34. Lastly, she welcomed the many initiatives to improve the lot of rural women. She asked for specifics concerning the training that rural women were receiving for management and decision-making positions. She also asked what proportion of rural trainees were women.

35. **Ms. Aouij** congratulated the Russian Federation on its efforts towards democratization, a lengthy process that called for constant vigilance.

36. The Russian Federation had correctly identified violence against women as a threat to national security and given it high priority. An impressive array of social services was available for dealing with violence but, to judge from the numbers of women injured and killed, those efforts by themselves did not suffice. What was needed was a panoply of responses ranging from social and other services provided by the Government to action by non-governmental organizations, awareness-raising and special radio and television announcements. Above all, it was vital to consider introducing special legislation to combat violence against women. Until such a law was in place, more should be done under existing legislation. For instance, why were the numerous women in the judiciary not fully applying existing laws? Women judges could also be proactive in raising the awareness of women, who still looked on violence as an inescapable part of life. Women had to learn that they could turn to the system of justice to prevent, and not just punish, acts of violence against them. She looked forward to learning what further action the Russian Federation would take in implementing those aspects of the Convention.

37. She shared the concerns expressed about women in Chechnya and would like to know what help they received from the Government and non-governmental organizations and what social services were available to them.

38. **Ms. González** agreed that organized crime transcended national borders and required transnational action. Notorious cases of organized crime had been seen around the world but Russian criminal groups trafficking in persons, drugs and arms were notorious. Trafficking had to be tackled by all, including the exporting countries and the countries of transit. In her opinion, however, the root of the problem lay in the countries of destination, where demand was driving supply. Those countries had to be more proactive in reducing the domestic market for trafficked products.

At present, the rich rewards reaped by successful traffickers were merely increasing the incentive for trafficking.

39. The Russian Federation's next report should give statistics on the scope of prostitution by boys and girls, the size of the child pornography industry, and rates of drug addiction and alcoholism among Russian women.

40. **Ms. Ferrer Gómez** said that she was worried that, even though the responses to the list of issues acknowledged that growing poverty was a threat to national security and 40 per cent of the population would soon be living below the poverty threshold, no official statistics had been compiled on the subject. It was essential that such data be gathered in the future, since it was a well-known fact that the female population was worst affected by indigence, which was leading to a marked decline in their health, education and employment. Attending to the plight of poverty-stricken women and children ought to be a high priority of the Russian Government.

41. It had been repeatedly stated that women formed the majority of the unemployed and were often in the lowest pay bracket. In her opinion, the various plans and measures outlined in the report and by the delegation should therefore contain programmes to reduce women's poverty. She was concerned by the lack of specific budgetary appropriations for improving the training, employment and health care of women. Although such gender budgeting might be introduced in the future, it was required immediately. Because of prevailing stereotypes and cultural patterns, preference was being given to men in initiatives to raise the living standard, yet poverty was leading to a boom in prostitution and the trafficking in women and girls.

42. She hoped that the next report would describe the results of current steps to prevent the mass dismissal of women and create new jobs for them. What sort of posts had been found for them to date? She asked whether employment schemes were monitored to avoid the traditional practice of relegating women to poorly paid, lower-status positions and what the term "appropriate jobs" meant. The next report should specify what percentage of part-time workers were women. Given that the main burden of looking after the home and caring for children and the elderly fell on women, they were tending more and more to work part-time and that was by no means an ideal situation.

43. Lastly, she drew attention to the absence of any reference to programmes to eliminate stereotyping. The return of women to the home at the beginning of the 1990s had reduced their role in the economic, social and cultural life of the country. It was therefore crucial to mount campaigns to heighten awareness among employers, journalists, civil servants and teachers of the importance of equal opportunities for both sexes. From the replies, she gathered that no gender equality training was given in schools either. Girls had to be instructed in their rights, but boys also needed to be taught about the rights of women and men's responsibilities in family life.

44. **Mr. Melander** observed that implementation of a recently adopted law which drew a distinction between refugees and displaced persons and of detailed provisions governing refugee determination procedure was still anything but perfect. Asylum-seekers were not allowed to participate in the procedure, which might drag on for years, during which time many applicants were held in detention centres, like the special women's detention centre in Moscow. He therefore wished to know whether the procedure could be carried out more expeditiously.

45. In view of the considerable number of stateless persons living in Russia, he enquired where those persons came from and why they were stateless. He asked whether the Russian Federation had ever considered ratifying the 1994 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

46. **Ms. Gaspard** said that, contrary to the delegation's reassuring remarks about the events in Chechnya, she had read disquieting accounts in the press of renewed violence in Grozny, where the situation of women was apparently disastrous. She hoped that the next report would explain what powers the constituent parts of CIS had to promote women's rights. The attempts in the State Duma to introduce bills permitting polygamy and banning abortions showed that some politicians were extremely backward in their thinking and totally ignorant of the country's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Such moves were a sign that a more strenuous effort was required to combat stereotyping and that all concerned should be mobilized to create an awareness of the prevalence of inequality.

47. She had been pleased to hear that non-governmental organizations were so dynamic in the Russian Federation, because it was essential for a significant number of women to be associated in decision-making at all levels of politics. There were still far too few women deputies in the State Duma. The “Women of Russia” party seemed to be arousing less political interest than in the past and she would like to know whether that was because women were tending to join mainstream political parties in the belief that they would have a greater chance there of persuading political leaders to include women’s issues in their programmes.

48. Lastly, she asked whether gender research was being conducted in universities. High-level research was useful as a source of information for decision makers. She had the impression that such research as existed was being hampered by men and she would therefore like the next report to explain what role that research was playing in enhancing women’s rights.

49. **Ms. Achmad** expressed her pleasure in hearing that so much had been done to improve women’s lives in the Russian Federation. Nevertheless she considered that the Government should take the lead in helping women to overcome the psychological barriers to participation in political life and indeed the Convention obliged governments to play a prominent role in eliminating discrimination against women.

50. It was vital to introduce an awareness of gender equality from a very early stage in children’s lives. She therefore welcomed the imminent introduction of a bill on a gender strategy for Russia and wondered whether it could be regarded as a gender equality act. What main principles were contained in the bill? She hoped that it would rest primarily on the principles of the Convention and would underpin a process leading to the ratification of the Optional Protocol and the implementation of all the other human rights instruments, especially the core convention of the International Labour Organization.

51. She commended the Russian Federation’s efforts to set up national and regional machinery for the advancement of women and was eager to learn how responsibilities would be divided between the central and regional governments. To what extent was the private sector involved in such action? Since the matters dealt with in a number of articles of the Convention cut across several sectors, she would like

to know what arrangements had been made to coordinate activities related to those topics. How was political participation handled? How were measures to combat violence coordinated?

52. Another question was whether there were any efforts to promote the employment of women in the private sector and in State enterprises. Were there any plans for legislation to boost the number of women in decision-making positions in industry, trade unions and professional associations? She noted that, in fact, Russian national machinery already involved active liaison with all sectors of society and she wondered whether there was any intention to establish a legal basis for such consultation and cooperation.

53. **Ms. Goonesekere** said that she hoped that the next report would provide specific information about the judicial remedies available to women who were victims of violence. In that context, she urged the Russian Federation to amend the article of the Penal Code which provided for the reduction of sentences passed on sexual offenders in certain extenuating circumstances and warned the delegation that too much leniency would undermine efforts to protect women from violence.

54. **Ms. Livingstone Raday** asked whether the Federal Act on Political Parties had already been adopted and had the force of law. She wondered why much draft legislation which specifically dealt with women’s issues had been considered and approved by parliamentary committees, but had never become law.

55. **Ms. Karelova** (Russian Federation) said that the dialogue provided her delegation with a welcome opportunity of updating the Committee on measures implemented after the reporting period.

56. The Act on Political Parties had been adopted and was now in force. She had been speaking of a different bill on equal opportunities currently before the Duma.

57. The prohibition on hazardous work for pregnant women had remained unchanged since Soviet times, which was why those women’s rights had been reaffirmed in the new Labour Code. She had referred in her statement to efforts to improve the working conditions of the large numbers of non-pregnant women engaged in hazardous work.

58. It was indeed difficult for women with higher qualifications to find appropriate work, since the sectors in which they had most often been employed —

the defence industry and the highly technical professions — had undergone considerable downsizing in recent years. The Government was determined to solve the problem.

59. In the new national plan for women, priority would be accorded to rural women. In its next report, the State Party would thus be in a better position to provide disaggregated data on rural women. The importance of a gender-sensitive approach to a rural development programme currently under preparation at the ministerial level had already been discussed.

60. Women victims of violence failed to fully utilize the legal recourses available to them for several reasons: lack of confidence in the legal system; overburdened courts; expensive lawyers' fees; lack of legal protection for witnesses and victims; and, above all, the difficulty of proving discrimination. Ratification of the Optional Protocol would provide a valuable resource for women, encouraging them to come forward to the Committee with their complaints.

61. In the Russian Federation, only women living below the poverty line were eligible for child benefits but in Chechnya the allowance was automatically granted to all women who applied for it. Significant numbers of Chechen children had benefited from summer camp holidays in 2001 thanks to central government support. Support from the federal budget had also been provided for New Year gifts for Chechen children: a small gesture that had nonetheless been well received.

62. Concerning the representation of Chechen women in politics, a Chechen women's association was authorized to participate in all federal conferences and regularly attended meetings of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The delegation of Chechen women tended to be larger than those from other regions.

63. There were some 73,000 female narcotic drug users in the Russian Federation, 12,000 of whom had applied for treatment. Further data on drug and alcohol addiction would be provided in the next report.

64. The Government was intent on combating the serious problem of trafficking in women and would take due account of the Committee's recommendations in that regard.

65. Among women aged from 31 to 54, 21 per cent lived below the poverty line, compared to only 18.3 per cent of men in the same age group. Women below the

age of 45 who had children were the most vulnerable. In May 2001, the Security Council of the Russian Federation had identified the feminization of poverty as a particular area of concern. Although an act on social assistance had been adopted, the resources for its application throughout the Russian Federation were currently lacking.

66. The legal status of refugees was defined in federal law and the Government had worked closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to ensure that domestic law contained no discriminatory provisions. Not only did the Russian Federation have liberal laws on statelessness, but a simplified procedure for acquiring Russian nationality was also being developed. The phenomenon of statelessness was not, however, widespread. Measures for activating the country's migration policies were currently under review.

67. The allegations of confinement of female refugees in Moscow would be duly investigated; if such cases existed, they were rare.

68. It was to be hoped that a bill on polygamy — together with the bill on gender strategy — would focus attention on the importance of changing stereotypical attitudes to women.

69. Lastly, she thanked the Committee for its insights into the situation of women in the Russian Federation. The dialogue had proved most constructive, identifying a number of areas meriting attention.

70. **The Chairperson** said that the numerous questions asked had demonstrated the Committee's interest in the lives of women in the Russian Federation and the delegation's answers had provided a valuable insight into the situation there. She welcomed the promised ratification of the Optional Protocol by 2005 and was pleased that wide publicity would be given to the Committee's concluding comments.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.