



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

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

Twenty-seventh session

Summary record of the 559th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 10 June 2002, 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Acar (Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of Ms. Abaka, Ms. Acar, 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)

Combined third and fourth periodic reports of Belgium (CEDAW/C/BEL/3-4, CEDAW/PSWG/2002/CRP.1/Add.1 and CRP.2)

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

2. **Mr. de Ruyt** (Belgium) said that Belgium had a federal structure in which responsibilities for individual matters were divided among federal and other national authorities, but that there was no hierarchy among them. That left them with a degree of autonomy that enabled their policies and actions to be tailored closely to the needs and wishes of their constituencies. The third and fourth periodic reports were a product of collaboration between all those authorities.

3. All the authorities in question placed a high value on human rights in general and women's rights in particular, as hallmarks of a democratic society. There were areas in which much had been achieved, and also admittedly areas in which there was room for progress, and the Committee's role in determining weaknesses was welcome.

4. Belgium had lifted its reservation on article 7 of the Convention, and the procedure to lift that on article 15 had been started. Also under way was the procedure to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which Belgium had been among the first to sign. Because the Optional Protocol covered matters which were the responsibility of a range of federal and national authorities, ratification by the federal and regional parliaments and French and Flemish communities would need to take place; it would proceed once those bodies had signalled their agreement. The country was also in the process endorsing the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention (regarding meeting time).

5. Although its Constitution had contained an article guaranteeing equality which implicitly gave men and women equal rights, Belgium had been anxious for an explicit reference to such rights to appear, and that had been achieved in February 2002. That constitutional amendment would make taking cases of discrimination to court easier, provide an added basis of legitimacy for affirmative action, unequivocally give men and women equal rights and freedoms and promote equal access to elected office and positions of public responsibility.

6. A comprehensive anti-discrimination bill was under discussion in the Belgian parliament, and was intended to outlaw discrimination on the basis of sex, race, colour, ancestry, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, wealth, age, religious or philosophical beliefs, current or future health, handicap or physical characteristics. That law would be enforceable through civil law (orders to end discriminatory practices and elimination of discriminatory contract terms, for example) and through criminal law (including harsher penalties for harassment or bodily harm motivated by discrimination). The Government also planned to enable trade unions and human-rights associations to take legal action in discrimination cases.

7. The Government also intended to give that right to the soon-to-be-created public body to defend equal rights between men and women. The aim of that body was to increase the visibility of equality policy by collecting statistics, coordinating responsibilities and resources, making recommendations to the authorities and informing the public. To ensure that the federal and other national authorities' equality efforts were compatible with each other, an intergovernmental conference had been set up. Its debate focused on four priority subjects: preventing violence against women, giving men and women equal access to new information and communication technologies, involving women in decision-making and reconciling professional and family life.

8. A coordinated plan to prevent violence against women had been adopted in May 2001; it was the fruit of coordination between the federal and other national authorities, and sought to provide a framework for gender mainstreaming, information, policy evaluation and goals. It focused on preventing domestic violence and on combating trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation. After adoption, a public-awareness campaign had been launched under a single banner, but with different activities determined by the authorities at

more local level. The action taken included improving facilities for victims and collecting statistics. A law enacted on 13 April 1995 dealing with human trafficking had given extensive protection to women willing to testify in court against their aggressors, but the number doing so in practice was still too small.

9. The country's federal authorities, regions and communities gave equal opportunities a prominent role in their employment policies. A national action plan for employment introduced in 2002 focused on three groups with low employment rates: older workers, women and low-skilled workers. The aim in the case of women was not only to raise employment rates but to increase job quality, so efforts were being made to improve women's employability. Measures taken in that regard included allowances to encourage single mothers who had been unemployed for a long time to return to work, steps to introduce flexible working hours, expanding childcare facilities and vocational training, especially in new technologies, where women could be helped to break into a traditionally male domain. Equal pay for work of equal value was also a concern, and was reflected in efforts to categorize and evaluate jobs in a gender-neutral way, and in the completion of a number of studies on the subject.

10. Women's health had also been a focus for the federal and regional authorities and communities, with an emphasis on free screening for breast cancer.

11. The Platform for Action of the Beijing World Conference on Women had been useful in drawing a commitment from the country's governments to make regular progress reports to their parliaments (in the case of the federal and Flemish governments) and in consolidating gender mainstreaming and gender impact assessments (in the case of Flanders). Ministers in the federal government had themselves undertaken to adopt equal opportunities strategies for their portfolios, with supervision from civil-service assessors and advice from academics. Evaluation of that exercise one year on had shown some progress, but it had been slow. Gender policies could not be made more efficient without statistics, and Belgium's collection of data was still not wide or organized enough. The same conclusion applied to information on past court cases. Gender disaggregation of data was being pursued, particularly in Flanders.

12. Much had been done to combat direct discrimination against women, particularly in

legislation. Girls' performance at all levels of education outstripped that of boys, women's presence in the labour market had improved, some progress had been made with increasing women's participation in political life, and women could make their own decisions about their bodies and fertility. Indirect discrimination still had to be fought effectively, however, mainly through gender mainstreaming, affirmative action and combating gender stereotypes through awareness campaigns.

13. **The Chairperson** thanked the Permanent Representative of Belgium for his presentation of the country's report, and welcomed the extensive responses the delegation had provided to the pre-session working group's questions. The Committee welcomed the lifting of the reservation on article 7 of the Convention, the proposed lifting of the reservation on article 15 and the ratification of the Optional Protocol. The size of the delegation was proof of the country's desire to have a constructive dialogue with the Committee. Constitutional and legal measures had been commendable, as had the efforts to increase women's participation in political life. Belgium's role as a developed nation and a member of the European Union was to provide an example for others to follow.

14. **Ms. Gaspard** commended Belgium for being one of the first countries in the world to introduce affirmative action in employment through measures covered by article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention. She had questions on a number of matters, however. The first related to article 7. Belgium's reservation had been lifted, but she wondered if all incompatibilities had been removed. The report stated that article 60 of the Constitution, which stipulated that the throne could be passed only to the king's male heirs, had been amended, but it did not say whether article 58 of the Constitution, which stipulated that the son of the king, or the crown prince, could be appointed a senator upon reaching the age of 18, had also been amended or repealed. The second related to article 2 of the Convention. The court of cassation had confirmed that sex discrimination was unconstitutional, and she wondered whether appellants could invoke article 2 of the Convention directly before the courts.

15. The next question related to European Union legislation. She observed that Belgium paid great attention to European Union directives on equal rights, but such directives had largely been limited to employment in the past. The Convention, by contrast,

was much wider, and she wondered whether Belgium had looked to it for guidance on measures that were needed and had made officials aware of it, since it had been ratified by all the European Union member States.

16. The Committee had mentioned its concern in connection with the country's previous report that there was a danger of duplication of effort if there were so many mechanisms for promoting women's rights. She asked if the delegation could provide further details on the way they were coordinated. She also asked for further details on Belgium's promotion of women's rights through its activities in developing countries. With regard to article 4 of the Convention, she asked for more statistics on the special measures taken in the public and private sectors to expand women's representation. Her last question related to article 6 of the Convention. A 1995 law had decriminalized procuring. She asked whether that meant that a man could force members of his family into prostitution without risk of prosecution. She also wondered whether the statistics on prostitution, which dated from 1998, were still valid, or if the situation had changed.

17. **Ms. Corti** welcomed the progress Belgium had made in achieving equal rights for women. She would like to know in what way, and to what extent, non-governmental organizations had participated in the preparation of the report, and more broadly, what role they played in the advancement of women's rights.

18. She commended the Government for the many positive steps it had taken on behalf of women, and enquired whether such measures had been prompted by article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention. Was there a specific national policy calling for temporary special measures to improve the situation of women?

19. The report described the policies of the communities separately and provided no explanation as to whether or how those policies were coordinated. Furthermore, no comparison between the different systems or an analysis of their relative effectiveness had been offered. Nor had comparative statistical data been provided.

20. In general, the report focused more on policies than on the results of policy. For instance, no explanation of the meaning of direct and indirect discrimination was necessary, but it would be useful to know the consequences of such discrimination.

21. **Ms. Goonesekere** said she wondered why the Constitution did not refer to discrimination on the basis of categories, including gender.

22. The response to question 8 of the list of issues suggested that Belgian jurisprudence in the area of equality was related mostly to employment. She wondered whether case law existed on other aspects of discrimination, and whether it had been collected and disseminated. In addition, she would like to know whether sexual harassment laws were confined to employment or covered other venues as well.

23. She asked about the enforcement mechanism for the constitutional guarantee of social and economic rights, an unusual and commendable provision. She would also like to know whether the Government had established or was contemplating the establishment of a human rights commission to enforce rights protected by the Constitution.

24. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said that in future the State party should incorporate statistics into the report, rather than offer them in annexes. Unfortunately, the annexes to the current report had not been provided in all the languages, so not all members could consult them.

25. She commended Belgium for the significant work it had done in enacting temporary special measures, and enquired how effective such measures had proven in the employment sector. She had concluded from the annex that an increase of roughly 10 per cent had been achieved in the upper echelons of the public sector. Although the structure of such measures seemed inefficient and cumbersome, it was results that ultimately counted. She would like to know what, in the view of the State party, were the major obstacles to equality for women in both the public and private employment sectors, and what measures it was taking to remove them.

26. **Ms. González** pointed out that, regrettably, the responses to the list of issues had not been translated into all the languages, and it was therefore difficult or impossible for all members to read them.

27. Noting that the Ethics Commission for telecommunications information services had formulated a code for the signatories of contracts and users of the Internet, she said she hoped that the measure would help to eliminate the use of the electronic and communications media to promote the

sale of child pornography and the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and that other countries would be inspired to take similar steps.

28. After the First World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in 1996, there had been a number of reports in the international press involving the sexual exploitation of children, the traffic in persons and the forced prostitution of boys and girls. She had been interested by the response of both the Belgian authorities and Belgian society to reports of a case involving the sequestration of children for sexual purposes, and wondered whether the sense of public outrage had evolved into public action. In particular, she would like to know whether the Standing Commission on Child Abuse kept a registry of such incidents, and whether most victims were boys or girls.

29. Lastly, she congratulated the Government for its significant programmes and measures to combat violence against women.

30. **The Chairperson** asked the delegation to respond to the questions raised by members of the Committee.

31. **Ms. Paternotte** (Belgium) said that the Belgian Constitution provided that the son of a king was automatically a member of the Senate. Although the relevant text had not been formally amended, the problem of discrimination had been resolved de facto, since the term "royal prince" had been interpreted to mean a royal child, regardless of sex, and the princess had been made a senator.

32. Under Belgian law, an international instrument to which Belgium was a party could indeed be invoked in a court of law. It fell to the judge, however, to determine whether the provisions were sufficiently precise to allow for their application under domestic law. Although the Convention had been found to be directly applicable, there were other instruments for which that was not the case.

33. Questions had been asked about the efficacy of temporary special measures to combat discrimination in the workplace. In order for such measures to work, a superior or manager had to be willing to participate, and employees needed to be well informed. On the basis of experience, her Government had concluded that it was best to introduce the concept of equality into the management of human resources in both the public

and private sectors. Belgium was in the midst of a total restructuring of the federal administration, and the interesting question under discussion was how to incorporate a gender perspective into the new system.

34. The Belgian Constitution did, in fact, make reference to discrimination, by providing that equality between the sexes was a fundamental right.

35. Although Belgium had no national system for keeping track of its jurisprudence, there was in fact a special administrative service that monitored case law regarding employment discrimination. The newly created Institute for Equality between Men and Women would be responsible, inter alia, for gathering the relevant jurisprudence, and could also undertake court proceedings.

36. Although sexual harassment occurred in other aspects of daily life, the law on sexual harassment targeted the employment sectors, both public and private, because sexual harassment was most common in the workplace. A new draft law with a much broader scope aimed to combat violence in the workplace and encompassed both sexual harassment and physical violence.

37. The Council on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women was a consultative organ, and as such not empowered to handle complaints. Both organizations and individuals could, however, bring to its attention cases or instances they considered discriminatory, and the Council rendered an opinion.

38. She had taken note that statistical information should be integrated into the report.

39. Child pornography and the commercial sexual exploitation of children were important, sensitive subjects in Belgium. Since the terrible events mentioned, there had existed a strong political and popular will to confront the problem. At the time, certain measures already existed; others had since been enacted. Although until recently efforts to monitor the use of the Internet for such purposes had been divided among a number of organizations, there would now be a central mechanism. In addition, Belgium was in the process of ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

40. **Ms. Verzele** (Belgium) said that the Belgian Government took the Convention into account in proposing initiatives and evaluating public policy, and

the Minister for Equal Opportunities used both the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action in the drafting of measures.

41. As for the matter of coordination, it was important to remember that Belgium was a federal State, made up of federal entities each of which had total autonomy: there was no hierarchy among the parts.

42. In 1990 Belgium had enacted a law on international cooperation which gave legal force to the principle of rights and opportunities between men and women and ensured that the balancing of rights and opportunities was an integral part of such cooperation. Under that law, any international cooperation undertaken by Belgium must benefit from gender mainstreaming.

43. Since its reports were generally voluminous, the Government had preferred to provide statistics that covered the country as a whole; if the Committee so wished, it could in future provide statistics related to the communities and regions as well.

44. The Government did take non-governmental organizations into consideration. Although such organizations had not been directly involved in its preparation, the report had been based closely on follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which had been carried out by Belgian women's rights groups. Moreover, Belgian non-governmental organizations had participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women and the five-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action. Since 2001, the Government had allocated €25,000 to two umbrella women's organizations to ensure a dialogue between the Government and women's rights groups working on the follow-up to the Beijing Conference. Moreover, both the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate had advisory committees that sought the views of non-governmental organizations.

45. The quota system used in Belgium to advance the status of women was indeed based on the Convention. Belgium had traditionally used a kind of quota system for community and linguistic matters, so it had easily adapted to the notion of quotas. France, which took a more universalist approach, had had more difficulty accepting it.

46. Although procuring was still a criminal offence, Belgium had eliminated sanctions against prostitutes

themselves. She did not have figures available on the recent rise in prostitution, which she agreed was a disturbing trend. Unfortunately, moreover, despite the existence of laws, prostitutes were often afraid to prosecute those who exploited them.

47. **Ms. Franken** (Belgium) said that the jurisdiction of the mechanisms for the Flanders region and the Flemish community overlapped at some points with the mechanisms at the federal level, but in such areas as health, education and social welfare, the regions had full jurisdiction. Naturally, it could appear that European Union rules governing equal employment opportunity took precedence, but her department actually gave priority to the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention. The department had been established in 1995 and had already completed one programming cycle, which had focused on gender mainstreaming. For the period 1999-2004, it would continue that emphasis while adding activities in the areas of women and decision-making and reconciling family and work responsibilities.

48. Most discriminatory provisions had been eliminated from the law in Belgium, but her department was working with non-governmental organizations to combat the de facto discrimination which persisted by making efforts to raise awareness and change attitudes. Policy makers, researchers and non-governmental organizations worked together, holding workshops on special topics such as the development of gender statistics. Her department had also formed a working group with local equality officers from 60 communities and towns throughout the Flanders region.

49. **Ms. Adriaenssens** (Belgium) said that there were separate entities for equal opportunity in the French-speaking community, and, like their counterparts in Flanders, they had responsibility for equal employment opportunity, health and education. The French community was sponsoring university research on how to encourage girls to study science and on employment discrimination against those responsible for the care of chronically ill children.

50. **Ms. Feng Cui** said that the report mentioned efforts in the area of eliminating stereotypes, especially providing feminine forms for the titles of certain professions. A bill had been passed for the French-speaking community in 1993, and she would like to hear more about the extent of its implementation and

how effective it had been. She would also like to know if any similar efforts had been undertaken in the Flemish community. As for efforts in the mass media, it would be interesting to know the number of women in leading positions as journalists. More information about the Senior Audiovisual Council, including the number of women members and whether its code of conduct was self-regulating or supervised by an outside agency, would also be helpful.

51. **Ms. Kapalata** said that the complex structure of the federal system, with its different levels of authority each having competence in the separate regions, could appear to be a way of derogating from the implementation of the Convention; she would like to hear more about how its implementation was ensured in the regions. With regard to article 6, it appeared that different levels of assistance to victims of forced prostitution were offered to members of different ethnic groups; she wondered if any comprehensive framework for such assistance existed.

52. **Ms. Corti** said that she would like to hear more about the policy for integration of migrant women into Belgian society, including statistics on inter-ethnic marriages. The latest legislation regarding the status of the families of migrant workers had passed in 1980, and she wondered if it had been updated. More information was needed on the rights of refugees at the stage where they applied for asylum, new trends in migration of workers from outside the European Union and the specific problems of xenophobia and racism faced by women migrants.

53. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her personal capacity, underlined the need for more statistics on migrant women, who often suffered double discrimination in their country of residence and within their own community, in the next report. She would like to know if migrant women were able to enjoy their fundamental human rights on an equal footing with Belgian women. More information was also needed about language teaching policies with regard to migrant women.

54. **Ms. Raday** said that she hoped violence against women was not seen solely as a social problem; failing to regard it as criminal would have implications for the ability to prosecute offenders. With regard to domestic violence, she would like to know if orders of protection were possible and if so, the number issued in each jurisdiction. It would also be interesting to hear the

outcome of the research conducted on sentencing policy in cases of violence against women.

55. Regarding prostitution, she asked if the decriminalization of procuring deprived women of recourse to the police and courts, and whether it also applied to minors. Statistics on the number of women in the legal profession and the judiciary would also be welcome.

56. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that the national machinery for equality seemed to be very complete, with political will and involvement at all levels. The fact that the equality portfolio at the federal level was combined with employment and labour, however, was of some concern to her, as it was not ideal to associate equality with a sectoral issue. The Minister for Equal Opportunities had a coordinating role for the most part, but it would be helpful to know if she also had supervisory responsibility or could give guidance and require accountability. More details on the women's organizations among the broad spectrum of non-governmental organizations in Belgium would also be welcome.

57. **Ms. Manalo** said that gender mainstreaming appeared to focus on follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action, and she would like to hear about any specific efforts regarding implementation of the Convention. Information on gender mainstreaming in the Walloon and Flemish regional governments and on the percentage of the federal budget allocated to that area would also be helpful. She requested clarification of the description of discrimination in the bill currently before parliament regarding gender discrimination. Finally, she would like to know how well informed the public was regarding the Convention.

58. **Ms. Paternotte** (Belgium), responding to the questions posed, said that the federal State and federated entities had different jurisdictions, although there were some split jurisdictions in some areas. The system in place allowed the various authorities to meet the specific needs and priorities of the different communities and regions. For example, the French-speaking and Flemish-speaking communities took different approaches to the issue of feminizing names of occupations, grades and titles. In French, the feminine terms for professional names were used whereas a more neutral approach was taken in Flemish. The current system also encouraged the various

communities to come up with better initiatives on violence against women.

59. Turning to the issue of aid, she said that there were instances, such as the campaign against domestic violence, where certain languages, rather than ethnic groups, were targeted for assistance. Otherwise, aid was provided within a broad framework. As far as the right to jobs of female migrant workers was concerned, a programme aimed at promoting not just these women's access to the job market but also their advancement therein was under way. While it was not specifically tailored to women, it took into account the specific needs of women and men. Under those programmes, her administration worked directly with various sectors of the Belgian economy, especially those with a large percentage of immigrants or those where there was a low representation of migrant women, in order to take corrective measures. There was not necessarily anything specific being done with regard to violence in the workplace. However, the legislation being drafted in that regard would take into account the specific relationships between men and women and the ethnic origins of workers.

60. As far as the role played by the courts in cases of domestic violence was concerned, when the report had stated that courts were not necessarily the best avenue for solving domestic violence, it in no way meant that they were irrelevant to efforts in that regard. In order to resolve the problem in a comprehensive and long-term fashion, other types of action, including mediation, which was done in concert with the courts, preventive measures and steps designed to bring about a change in behaviour within the couple could be envisaged. Indeed, it was noted that one of the reasons why women victims of domestic violence did not report such incidents so that action could be taken against the perpetrators in court was the fear of breaking up their families. It was therefore deemed important to protect victims in a variety of ways. Indeed, a judge might authorize the victims to leave the conjugal domicile and go to a shelter or centre or keep the family in their domicile and issue a restraining order against the perpetrator.

61. Apart from the steps taken to isolate the perpetrator, additional steps could be contemplated, including the installation of a distress signal that would enable the victims to summon immediate help from the police, should the perpetrator decide to return to the conjugal domicile notwithstanding the restraining

order. Indeed, the ultimate goal was to end such violence and ensure that all those involved ended up in the best possible situation.

62. Referring to the results of the survey to evaluate the impact of the 1997 law to combat domestic violence between partners, she said that problems had arisen in trying to compile statistics. In 1999, 5,806 cases of domestic violence had been reported in three arrondissements under the heading of violence between partners or former partners. However, that definition was not accurate enough to draw a distinction among the various types of violence, be they sexual, physical or moral. Work was currently under way to refine those statistics.

63. She would provide gender-disaggregated statistics on the judiciary before the end of the session. She wished to indicate, however, that Belgium placed considerable emphasis on having women in the judiciary. Referring to the involvement of non-governmental organizations in the Council on Equal Opportunities, she said that, while other associations had one or two representatives, women's associations accounted for 15 of the 32 representatives. Belgium had been disseminating knowledge about the Convention together with other international legal instruments, including the European Union's directives and the conventions of the International Labour Organization. In that regard, there were plans to set up an institute at the federal level which would be more powerful than the existing institutions. Her administration would be part and parcel of that new entity, which would have the power to institute legal proceedings and would be responsible for compiling and disseminating relevant jurisprudence.

64. **Ms. Verzele** (Belgium) said that, while prostitution was legal in Belgium, forcing somebody into prostitution, living off prostitution, maintaining a brothel and renting rooms for the purposes of prostitution were all punishable under Belgian law. The act of living with a prostitute, however, was not punishable.

65. Belgium had enacted a law against human trafficking in 1995. While there was no policy specifically targeting specific groups or individuals of any specific nationality, it was known that human trafficking essentially originated in the Eastern European countries and the focus was on dealing with individuals from those areas. Persons who agreed to

lodge complaints against those who profited from the traffic in human beings had the right to temporary asylum in refugee centres subsidized by the Ministry of Employment. Belgium also supported the International Organization for Migration programme for the voluntary repatriation of victims of trafficking for sexual purposes.

66. Concerning the issue of migrant and refugee women, she noted that, with regard to the right to stay in Belgium, her Government applied the 1951 Geneva Convention in a broad manner. Refugee women could be granted political asylum on account of their sex, but there had to be reasonable grounds of fear of persecution. In 2000, 45 per cent of the applications for asylum had been granted, out of which 35 per cent were for women. Belgium not only penalized genital mutilation but also granted asylum for that reason. Once asylum-seekers had been granted asylum and had been recognized as refugees, they enjoyed rights on a par with Belgian citizens. Moreover, Belgium applied, by and large, the principle of family reunion.

67. Turning to the issue of racism and xenophobia, she noted that Belgium had adopted a law on 30 July 1981 designed to punish certain acts of racism and xenophobia. In that regard, discrimination against foreigners in the workplace was also punishable under the law, which provided that workers' organizations could go to court in cases of blatant discrimination. Moreover, the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism also had the right to take legal action on behalf of victims of acts of racism and xenophobia.

68. In the area of employment, it was a fact that women were doubly discriminated against if they were foreigners. However, there was a project under way at the federal level to provide for low-skilled women's participation in the workplace. It was not a project for migrant women workers as such but it involved many different women of foreign origin and enabled them to receive support in their quest for employment.

69. Turning to gender mainstreaming, she noted that the role of the Minister for Equal Opportunities was to coordinate matters, provide advice and lobby other ministries. In 1996, Belgium had adopted a law on the follow-up to the Beijing World Conference on Women under which the Government was committed to submit yearly reports on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. That legal obligation affected the

entire Government, which was taking its responsibilities with regard to gender mainstreaming very seriously.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.