



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

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

Twenty-eighth session

Summary record of the 597th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 20 January 2003, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Açar

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

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

*Fifth and sixth periodic reports of Norway
(CEDAW/C/NOR/5 and CEDAW/C/NOR/6)*

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

2. **Ms. Dāvøy** (Norway), introducing her country's fifth and sixth periodic reports, said that over the past few decades, Norway had put a great deal of effort into creating a society that promoted women's rights and gender equality. For several years, her Government had been seeking to strengthen the position of human rights in domestic law. The 1999 Human Rights Act gave the European Convention on Human Rights and the two 1966 United Nations Covenants and their Optional Protocols the force of Norwegian law, insofar as they were binding for Norway. By the end of 2003, the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs would put forward concrete proposals for strengthening the implementation of the Convention. One proposal was to combine the methods of incorporation and transformation, with a view to giving it greater exposure.

3. In Norway, there was a close link between family policy and gender equality. The country had done a great deal to improve conditions for families with young children. For many years, family policy had focused closely on fathers, while promoting equality and the value of family life in general. Experience had shown that gender-neutral schemes for parental leave did not offer sufficient incentive for fathers to take care of their children to the same extent as mothers did. A paternity quota had been introduced in 1993, giving fathers four weeks' paternity leave, provided that both parents qualified for parental benefits. The quota had proven a very effective tool for encouraging fathers to take leave. Eight out of 10 men now took advantage of the opportunity to the paternity quota. That was important, not just from a gender-equality standpoint, but also in light of the growing number of broken families. Increased participation of fathers in childcare promoted stability in the father-child relationship and also in families living separately.

4. With regard to women's participation in the labour market, a cash benefit scheme had been introduced in 1998, entitling the family of every child between one and three years of age to a cash benefit, provided that the child did not attend a subsidized day-care centre. The goal of the scheme had been to give families more time to care for their own children and the freedom to decide what form of childcare they preferred. It had led to some minor changes in the way people combined childcare and work, and had improved the financial situation of couples who preferred that one parent stay at home while the child was still very young.

5. There was still a shortage in day-care places for young children, and urgent efforts were being made to provide them at affordable prices. In 2003, budget allocations for that purpose had been increased by 30 per cent. During the 1990s, Norwegian women had given birth to more children than those in other European countries and were also the highest in the world in terms of participation in the labour market. That combination had been widely seen as testimony to the success of Norway's combined gender-equity and family policy. Over the past two years, however, Norway's fertility rate had declined slightly, which gave cause for concern.

6. Very few women took part in decision-making in the economic field, especially in larger corporations and firms. In 2002, women had accounted for just 6.6 per cent of board members in public companies. That could not be explained by a lack of qualified women. The men who dominated economic decision-making should be made to understand the value of women and start using their resources. Women's participation was vital for growth and development in Norwegian society. On 7 March 2002, the Government had passed a resolution, aimed at increasing the number of women on executive boards, requiring that each gender make up at least 40 per cent of such boards in public and State-owned companies. The Government hoped to achieve that level within State-owned companies by the end of 2003.

7. As regards private companies, a bill would be submitted to Parliament in late 2003, but the Government had also been trying to reach a cooperation agreement with the private sector. If agreement were achieved on the 40 per cent quota level by the end of 2005, the bill would not enter into force. Financial institutions, employers' organizations and

other business sectors had shown particularly strong resistance to the proposal, mainly on the grounds that it undermined shareholder democracy. However, there was now a growing consensus that diversity encouraged creativity and produced better company results. There had been a small increase in the number of women being elected to executive boards in private companies, which would likely meet the 40 per cent minimum within the allotted timeframe.

8. Equal pay was a high priority for the Norwegian Government. A high level of education or workforce participation was not necessarily accompanied by high pay. Over the past 20 years, the gap between men's and women's wage levels had narrowed, but there was still a long way to go. In 2002, the equal-pay provisions of the Gender Equality Act had been revised to cover work of equal value across professions and occupations under the same employer. However, that legislation was not the only instrument for eliminating wage discrepancies. The Government also wanted to focus on wage formation in general, and on how the wage gap was entrenched in institutional arrangements, social norms, market systems, and pay policies. A number of projects were being implemented in line with that approach. Raising public awareness, conducting research, developing networks and encouraging international cooperation were also crucial in that regard.

9. Norway had managed a European project funded by the European Commission's Community Framework Programme on Gender Equality, together with partners from five other European countries. The project's goal had been to examine the gender pay gap from a broad perspective, against a backdrop of wage formation and pay systems. Two factors had been identified as the sources of the pay gap: the segregation of women and men into different occupations, firms and positions; and wage differences that consistently favoured male-dominated jobs. Several mechanisms were at work simultaneously, and that might be why the gender pay gap was pervasive and persistent across time and across different labour market institutions. It was not clear how the trend towards more flexible organizations and independent work might affect the pay gap. A better educated workforce might make jobs become less gender-specific and workplaces less gender-segregated. However, increasing participation in the labour market by women would continue, and

that might be accompanied by greater segregation and a widening pay gap.

10. In 2002, a meeting financed by the Nordic countries had been held for experts and social partners on new methods and tools for fighting the pay gap. That meeting had led to a new four-year Nordic project on equal pay, which would be implemented during the period 2003-2006 with funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers. The project would explore ways to improve Nordic statistics, analyse the link between wage formation and the pay gap, and examine pay policies and the relationship between gender segregation in the labour market and differences in pay. In 2002, the Government had launched a project to develop a gender-neutral job-evaluation system that would be easy to use. That project was still in the testing phase, although one workplace had already reported the first concrete wage adjustment in favour of some female employees.

11. Combating violence was one of the Norwegian Government's highest priorities, and that was especially true with regard to violence against women. It was not easy to measure progress, however, as problems tended to be kept hidden. The services offered to victims had improved, but it was hard to be sure how much progress had been made in the area of prevention. Norway's ongoing plan of action to combat violence had involved unique and effective collaboration between the most relevant Ministries on that issue, and the Commission on Violence against Women would submit its report in September 2003. The revised plan of action for the coming years would take the report's findings into account.

12. The provisions of the Penal Code had been amended in 2000, and further amendments were under discussion. She had been shocked by a 1999 health survey among women aged 20 to 49, indicating that 5 per cent of the women had been raped by someone other than their partner, while 10 per cent had been raped by their partner. Every year, 2,700 women took refuge in a shelter, often together with their children. The number of such women born outside Norway had been rising steadily. That indicated that many of Norway's newest inhabitants did not have the resources to escape from a violent relationship. Shelters must become more effective at providing help to those groups.

13. Trafficking in women was a relatively new problem for Norway. National reports on prostitution had shown a major increase in the number of non-Norwegian nationals involved in prostitution during the 1990s and a dramatic rise over the past few years. Most came from or via the Russian Federation, the Baltic countries, and other Eastern and Central European countries. There was evidence that organized crime groups were increasingly involved, but little information was available on many aspects of trafficking. The Norwegian Government attached great importance to preventing trafficking in human beings, criminalizing all aspects of trafficking, and supporting and protecting the victims.

14. Norway was working on a plan of action to prevent and combat trafficking in women and children. The plan would be launched in spring 2003 and would cover every link in the chain of trafficking, including supply, transit and demand. Many non-governmental organizations and other organizations were involved in the plan's formulation. International cooperation was a key factor. The Nordic Council of Ministers had conducted a Nordic-Baltic Campaign against Trafficking in 2002. Norway had also signed the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its three Protocols and had begun preparations for their ratification.

15. Norway did not accept the practices of forced marriage and female genital mutilation, and had implemented several action plans and other measures to combat those practices. Dialogue with non-governmental organizations, individuals, and communities representing the cultures in which those practices had roots was particularly important in that context. The Norwegian Government had provided financial support for a feasibility study regarding a global meeting on best practices for combating violence against women.

16. **The Chairperson** said that Norway's equality policy had provided an example for the rest of the world to follow, but that much remained to be done, especially regarding inequalities in the economic sector. Norway must also address women's low participation in decision-making, the lack of gender equity in wages, and violence against women. Policies regarding immigrant women, in particular, must become more proactive.

17. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that she would welcome more information about Norway's national machinery, and notably about how the various bodies interrelated, which body was in charge of implementing government policy, and how government policy was articulated. It was paradoxical that women's participation in political life was regarded as a model for other countries, but that their participation in economic life was lower than that in certain countries that were, in general, still far behind Norway. The number of reported rapes had risen, but only 6 per cent of reports resulted in convictions. That was an extremely low percentage. Although Norway had taken a number of forceful measures, it did not seem to recognize clearly the issues involved. There were no specific articles in the Norwegian Penal Code concerning trafficking. Since the number of foreign women working as prostitutes had risen dramatically, information about convictions or prosecutions in that area would be welcomed.

18. **Mr. Melander** said that the Committee would be happy to see the Convention incorporated into the domestic legislation of Norway, which might convince its Scandinavian neighbours to follow suit and which would make it better known among the people. Turning to immigrant women, he asked to what extent they were subjected to gender-based persecution. When trafficked women brought to Norway were expelled, he wondered if there were any measures to support them on their return to their home countries. The Committee would also like to hear more about the conditions under which immigrant women could be granted a residence permit in their own right in the event of divorce.

19. **Ms. Achmad** asked for clarification of the various components of the national women's rights machinery. She would like to hear more about the "gender equality barometer", whether it included progress in equal opportunity as well as equal treatment, and the results that it showed in those areas. The Committee would be interested to hear why gender awareness training for teachers was optional and whether there had been any monitoring of its results in changes in attitude or its impact on students.

20. **Ms. Gabr** said that many of Norway's achievements in the area of women's rights should be emulated by all countries. The respect shown for the culture, religion and traditions regarding the personal status of immigrant groups was commendable, but de facto equality must be ensured for those people as well.

She would like to know why investigation of cases of female genital mutilation had not yielded any prosecutions.

21. **Mr. Flinterman** said that, in the light of Norway's clear commitment to equality, it was surprising that after 22 years as a party to the Convention, its provisions still had not been integrated into domestic law. He would like to know how the status of the Convention compared to that of other human rights treaties to which Norway was a party and if there were particular difficulties encountered. The reporting State should also indicate if the Government planned to ratify the Optional Protocol. Finally, with regard to Norway's development cooperation policy, he asked for confirmation that all its development cooperation partners had signed the Convention.

22. **Ms. Ferrer Gómez** asked if the municipalities had equal rights mechanisms for the areas of decision-making and provision of the services which were decentralized to them. She would also like to know if the Equal Opportunity Law covered immigrant and minority women, and the extent to which the provisions of that law had been disseminated.

23. **Ms. Hole** (Norway) said that the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs was responsible for implementing the Convention. A standing committee of junior ministers from eight ministries oversaw gender budgeting and mainstreaming, and reported to Parliament every October. The Ministry of Finance was receptive to gender-based approaches to budgeting. The Gender Equality Ombudsman operated independently and maintained dialogue with all other agencies in the area. The Centre for Gender Equality belonged to the public sphere, but operated independently and had contacts in both the public and private sectors. All of those bodies reported to Parliament annually.

24. Women's low participation in decision-making in the private sector had to do with underlying culture, the way boards were appointed, and how women promoted themselves. The same held true in academia, as well, where women represented 60 per cent of the students enrolled in higher education, but only 13 per cent of university professors. A pending bill would require 40 per cent of seats on private corporate boards to be reserved for women, as was already the case for State corporations — women's representation on boards had already reached 37 per cent in the public sector.

25. With regard to prosecutions for domestic violence and rape, the fact of the matter was that many women withdrew the charges when they knew the perpetrator. Education programmes were being conducted for the police and in women's health centres and shelters on how to go about pressing charges. The Ministry was working to get more accurate figures on the number of such assaults, and to generate more public discussion of the issue of violence against women. The action plan on female genital mutilation was helping to raise awareness of the problem, among men as well as women.

26. **Mr. Wille** (Norway) said that currently the Penal Code contained no specific provisions against trafficking in persons, but such provisions would be included in the revision. A programme of action to combat trafficking had been elaborated, however. There was some case law in that area, and several cases had gone to the Supreme Court. The victims were entitled to seek asylum in Norway, and there were projects in cooperation with their countries of origin to help those women on their return. Trafficking had become a major issue within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), of which Norway was member, and the main focus was on the victims.

27. With regard to the domestic application of international law, Norway was a "dualist" country but it was moving towards monism. In 1999, the Parliament had adopted the Human Rights Act, which incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights and the 1966 Covenants and their Optional Protocols and stated that they took precedence over other statutory law. The Government had not yet reached final views on the other Conventions, but could possibly incorporate them into the Human Rights Act. Currently, its approach could be termed "transformation": some of the provisions of the Convention had been transformed into specific legislation.

28. **Ms. Hole** (Norway), in reply to questions about immigration law, specifically as it applied to women, said that the plan of action against racism and discrimination included a gender perspective in its activities. Municipalities offered free pre-school and language training for immigrant mothers and their children, along with vocational training and access to health care at family centres. The Government was working with women's non-governmental

organizations to provide additional language training to ease the transition from kindergarten to primary school.

29. **Mr. Wille** (Norway) said that, under the Immigration Act, gender-based persecution was recognized as grounds for granting asylum. In 2002, 55 such applications were granted, and 23 rejected. A government committee was drafting a new Immigration Act, which would highlight gender-based persecution. Petitioners whose complaint related to gender-based persecution were entitled to a female interpreter, interviewer and lawyer. Men could also submit petitions on gender-related grounds. A woman must stay in Norway three years to be granted a residence permit in her own right. If she divorced during that period, she could remain by requesting asylum or on humanitarian grounds.

30. **Ms. Hole** (Norway) said that legislative changes in the area of gender equality had brought about changes in the national machinery for the advancement of women. The Gender Equality Barometer, published by the Centre for Gender Equality, was a valuable tool for assessing the equal opportunities situation in Norway, as it charted developments in the areas of governance, local government, business, research and education and working life and set out the challenges to be met.

31. As far as teacher training courses were concerned, Norwegian colleges and universities were responsible for determining their own curricula and were therefore not obliged to give courses on gender issues. However, all State-owned educational establishments were subject to the amended Gender Equality Act, under which they had an obligation to take initiatives to promote gender equality and to report on their work in that area. Courses on gender-based stereotypes were not mandatory for trainee teachers, but secondary-school children, including boys, had been calling for classes on that issue.

32. Freedom to worship was enshrined in the Norwegian Constitution. Unfortunately, immigrant women who had been subjected to acts of violence were generally unwilling to press charges against their aggressors and tended to withdraw their complaints before cases were brought to court. To date, no cases involving violence against immigrant women had been heard in court, and therefore no statistics were available. However, State-funded shelters offered a safe environment in which a constructive dialogue

between the authorities and victims could take place. Increasing numbers of immigrant women were seeking refuge at such shelters, and many of them were accompanied by their children. In that connection, the second plan of action against domestic violence, to be adopted in October 2003, would include specific provisions aimed at children. It would also focus on improving training for those who dealt specifically with the problems faced by immigrant women.

33. **Mr. Wille** (Norway) said that Norwegian immigration regulations contained specific provisions aimed at female victims of domestic violence, in particular the right to obtain an independent residence permit. Furthermore, staff in reception centres for asylum-seekers were given special training in that area and separate accommodation was provided for single females. With reference to development policy, he pointed out that the Government's plan of action on human rights, adopted in 1999, comprised over 300 measures intended to promote human rights at both the national and the international levels. Although the national measures had been given priority, development cooperation did figure among the list of international measures and gender mainstreaming was part and parcel of Norway's development policy.

34. **Ms. Hole** (Norway) said that a recent conference on gender identity in the public space had focused on the role of boys. Currently, only 8 per cent of trainee pre-school teachers were male, and so, in view of the importance of providing role models of both genders in the pre-school environment, a campaign had been launched to encourage more men to enter that particular profession. Action taken by Norway's municipalities and counties in the area of gender equality was measured by the Gender Equality Barometer and, in addition, those municipalities and counties were subject to the Gender Equality Act, including the reporting obligation. In 2003, the Government would be encouraging county governors to familiarize themselves with the new amendments to the Gender Equality Act and their implications.

35. **Mr. Wille** (Norway) said that, as a follow-up to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, the 2002 plan of action against racism and discrimination had been developed, which focused, inter alia, on combating racism at work, in the public sector, within the education system and on the Internet. In addition, a committee had been mandated to look

into ways of strengthening legal protection against racism and had drawn up a report containing proposals for developing a new law prohibiting ethnic discrimination, incorporating the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination into domestic legislation and prohibiting organized racist activities. In that connection, it was hoped that concrete proposals would be formulated by the end of 2003.

36. **Ms. Hole** (Norway) said that scarcely any domestic case law referred to the Convention and that it was therefore important to raise the awareness of the public and the legal profession to its existence. Nevertheless, the Gender Equality Ombudsman had recently relied upon it in cases relating, inter alia, to gender stereotyping in school textbooks, the cost of female sterilization and the use of positive discrimination to fill higher education posts.

37. **Ms. Shin** wondered whether the authorities were now providing more personal alarms to victims of violence. The reporting State should indicate whether the Government was envisaging implementing mandatory rehabilitative measures for male perpetrators of violence against women and whether the Alternative to Violence Centre had been operating successfully. Turning to legislative matters, she wished to know if the reporting State would be introducing specific laws on domestic violence and if marital rape was currently punishable by law. Gender stereotypes were still embedded in Norwegian society. Family responsibilities were not shared equally between men and women, and discrepancies also persisted in the choice of subjects studied at school. The Committee would be grateful to know whether the Government had devised measures to tackle the problem and whether any research had been done into how much time men and women devoted to child-rearing activities.

38. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her personal capacity, commended Norway's commitment to gender equality and the advancement of women. She noted that the gender gap in salaries had decreased and that women had become very visible in the country's political life. However, she was puzzled by the career limitations that Norwegian women seemed to impose upon themselves; in her experience, they were reticent when it came to expressing their professional ambitions and did not give priority to their careers. In that

connection, she wished to know whether the Government was taking action to address the situation.

39. **Ms. González Martínez** wondered why the reporting State had failed to provide answers to questions 31 to 35 contained in the list of issues (CEDAW/PSWG/2003/I/CRP.1/Add.5). She was concerned that the lack of a specific definition of trafficking in women and children in Norway's Penal Code conflicted with the aims and purposes of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Optional Protocols. It was incredible that, in such an advanced society, domestic violence was still regarded as a taboo subject and a private matter. The Committee had not received any information about educative and awareness-raising activities carried out to draw public attention to the social significance of the phenomenon. She wondered whether there had been any instances of violence against children or the elderly in Norway.

40. **Ms. Morvai** urged the reporting State to formally incorporate the Convention into its domestic law. Currently, the provisions of the Convention were not visible within Norwegian legislation, and, consequently, it was not routinely invoked by the judiciary or other members of the legal profession. With regard to the national machinery for the advancement of women, she wished to know why the title of the Ministry responsible for gender issues did not contain a reference to the word "gender" or the word "women". She underlined the importance of symbolic messages and said that the inclusion of women's issues within the mandate of a department called the "Ministry of Children and Family Affairs" tended to reinforce gender stereotypes by implying that women had rights because they were mothers or members of a family rather than because they were individuals.

41. **Ms. Gaspard** observed that, despite Norway's long history of promoting gender equality, a certain amount of resistance persisted in that area. She enquired whether progress had been made in building a gender and equality perspective into the draft budget and wished to know what criteria would be used to review the budget from that perspective.

42. Turning to the integration of policy review from a gender perspective at the local and regional levels, she pointed out that the most effective way of combating discrimination was grass-roots action. A recent European study had shown that local government

officials were relatively ill-informed about gender equality policies. In that connection, she expressed surprise that the criteria used to rank Norway's 435 municipalities by degree of equality had not included the existence of a municipal office or committee responsible for equality, and asked whether that was because every municipality had one. She was also surprised that the question of how municipalities dealt with the issue of violence against women had not been addressed. The low level of female participation in local governance was a cause for concern, especially given the fact that it was generally easier for women to be elected at the local level than at the national level. She would be grateful to know whether the new Municipal Elections Act would rectify that situation.

43. **Ms. Šimonović** wondered why the fifth and sixth periodic reports seemed to have been prepared differently, especially with regard to the inclusion of appendices containing additional comments from non-governmental organizations and the Gender Equality Ombudsman and whether the reports had been adopted by the Government and/or by the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs. With regard to article 3, she asked whether any specific measures were under way to incorporate the Convention and the Optional Protocol into Norwegian law. The Committee would welcome more information on working conditions for women, especially with regard to pregnancy and on any changes arising out of the Gender Equality Act, as well as on the use of restraining orders against perpetrators of violence, in particular whether such orders could be issued in cases of cohabitation.

44. **Mr. Wille** (Norway), with regard to incorporation of the provisions of the Convention and the Optional Protocol into Norwegian law, said that, in order to preserve normative harmony, legislation was reviewed to ensure that it was in accordance with those instruments. Incorporation of international instruments into domestic law would, of course, raise their visibility and facilitate invoking them before the courts. In cases of conflict between international instruments and domestic law, Norway's human rights legislation gave precedence to the Convention.

45. **Ms. Hole** (Norway), referring to the question of violence against women and children, said that men's roles in such violence had been studied in depth and that a white paper would be presented to Parliament in June 2003 on all aspects of family life, including cohabitation, which could lead to new legal initiatives

and/or affirmative action. That paper represented the first time that a gender issue had been mainstreamed in a major policy paper. Her Government provided financial support to three men's organizations and an Alternative to Violence Centre and would fund a men's centre which would open in the fall; the Children's Act was also under review. Although the possibility of requiring violent men to undergo counselling had not been discussed, she pointed out that the number of men voluntarily seeking help from the Alternative to Violence Centre had doubled.

46. The Consumer Ombudsman's Office worked in cooperation with the Gender Equality Ombudsman to monitor gender bias in advertising, the media and school programmes, and it was possible that gender bias in the media would be added to the responsibilities of the Gender Equality Ombudsman. Much research was under way on role modelling and statistics were being compiled on the degree to which men and women shared roles at home and at work and on the effects of the Cash Benefit Scheme. As for the name of the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs, she said the idea of adding gender equality to its official title had been discussed and would be suggested to the Prime Minister.

47. As for the practical effect of Norway's gender policies and laws and the funding of gender issues, she said that gender-disaggregated statistics were collected by all ministries, and senior officials met regularly to review progress made and make recommendations for legislators. Research on gender issues was promoted, often in collaboration with international partners. She recognized that, while a leader in some areas, Norway was not in the forefront when it came to funding gender mainstreaming.

48. She agreed that the most effective programmes were often carried out at the grass-roots level and said that the issue of gender awareness was dealt with at the biennial conference of Norwegian municipalities. Gender-awareness training was no longer funded by the federal Government, and some municipalities had regrettably abandoned such programmes as a result. She was concerned at the apparent lack of interest on the part of some local politicians in women's issues and looked forward to the entry into force of the Gender Equality Act, which would require annual reporting on gender issues, and which she hoped, would serve as an incentive for local politicians.

49. **Mr. Wille** (Norway) added that approximately 34 per cent of local-level politicians and 31 per cent of county-level politicians were women, with slightly lower percentages for the number of women mayors at both levels. With regard to marital rape, he said that crime was indeed punishable by law.

50. **Ms. Hole** (Norway) said that both periodic reports had been prepared in consultation with stakeholders and had been adopted by the Government. Any interested party, including non-governmental organizations and the Ombudsman, was free to make a submission with regard to the report. She did not know why no comments or observations had been submitted as appendices to the sixth report.

51. As for the issue of a culture of lower expectations on the part of Norwegian women, she said research was under way to analyse whether or not Norwegian women truly lacked self-confidence or were less comfortable trying to balance career and family. That was hard to understand given the level of services and benefits available, but Norwegian women did traditionally seem to have modest expectations. In order to remedy that situation, mentoring programmes, discussion groups and research and development had been encouraged as had efforts to combat gender stereotyping, for example by providing training courses for potential women candidates to the executive boards of corporations. Successful graduates were then included in a database of qualified women. Such efforts were essential in order to take full advantage of the skills and abilities of women.

52. **Ms. Gnacadja** expressed concern that, despite Norway's obvious commitment to women's rights, the situation in practice was not as positive as one would have expected. She was still unclear as to the relationship between international instruments and domestic law, which seemed to enjoy greater favour in the courts. She expressed surprise that the process for harmonizing domestic legislation with international instruments seemed so long and wondered what the obstacles were and whether the reasons for that delay were cultural, and whether those instruments would actually be applied by the courts. A sound juridical structure was essential to support the national machinery's efforts to protect women's rights.

53. More information on the positive effects of the change of focus in the work of the Gender Equality Council noted in the fifth report (para. 19) would be

welcome. Turning to the issue of violence against women, she stressed the need to address the issue of prostitution because it was difficult to protect against sexual exploitation if prostitution was legal. Prostitution was also linked to other problems such as organized crime and drug abuse.

54. **Ms. Saiga** welcomed the ambitious initiative to increase women's representation on the executive boards of enterprises from 6.6 per cent to 40 per cent within three years but, noting that approval of the employers and unions was required, asked whether any difficulties were anticipated and whether shareholders in the companies concerned had been consulted. Furthermore, given that a database of qualified female candidates existed, she wondered whether shareholders would have an opportunity to express an opinion on specific candidates for their executive boards.

55. **Ms. Popescu Sandru** requested information on any measures taken to discourage women and especially children, both boys and girls, from entering a life of prostitution and on training, counselling, rehabilitation or reintegration programmes available to such children. She was alarmed by the statistics on marital rape, but wondered specifically whether measures had been initiated to rehabilitate child victims of rape. Information would be welcome on any special sanctions aimed at abusers of children, including incestuous relationships, and on whether records were kept of the names of guilty parties and whether those names were made available to local communities as well as to foreign countries in order to discourage sex tourism. With regard to trafficking of boys and girls, she requested information on any special programmes to protect children and eliminate that phenomenon and on cooperation programmes with the countries of origin and transit.

56. **Ms. Patten** enquired about specific measures to protect the rights of disabled women, for example, compulsory reporting by health professionals of cases of abuse and increased penalties for abuse of the vulnerable, in particular disabled women. In the context of efforts to eliminate violence against women in general, the reporting State should provide information on whether the judiciary received sensitivity training in the area of gender violence and whether legal assistance was available to victims during the pre-trial stages.

57. She asked whether there was any independent evaluation of the work of the Gender Equality Ombudsman and the Centre for Gender Equality and enquired as to the degree of interaction between the two. Given that there was some duplication of tasks and that neither body had the power to impose penalties or sanctions, the Committee would like to know whether the non-governmental organization community respected those institutions or saw them as ineffectual. More information would be welcome on the number of complaints made to the Ombudsman and then transmitted to the Gender Equality Board of Appeals and on whether the appeal process was, like the cost of filing a complaint with the Ombudsman, free of charge.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.