



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women  
Thirty-third session**

**Summary record of the 689th meeting**

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 8 July 2005, at 10 a.m.

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

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Convention (*continued*)

*Combined third, fourth, fifth and sixth periodic reports of Guyana*

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*In the absence of Ms. Manalo, Ms. Pimentel, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.*

*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)**

*Combined third, fourth, fifth and sixth periodic reports of Guyana (CEDAW/C/GUY/3-6, CEDAW/PSWG/2005/II/CRP.1/Add.5 and CEDAW/PSWG/2005/II/CRP.2/Add.5)*

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

2. **Ms. Shadick** (Guyana), introducing the combined third, fourth, fifth and sixth periodic reports of Guyana (CEDAW/C/GUY/3-6), said that, under its National Plan of Action for Women 2000-2004, Guyana had promoted sectoral growth and development based on gender equity and gender mainstreaming, and the full participation of women in development policies. Greater understanding and awareness of the situation of women by the Government and society as a whole had led to the adoption of legislation on more effective mechanisms for eliminating violence against women and eradicating the feminization of poverty. The situation of elderly, rural and indigenous women had also improved. Nonetheless, the persistence of patriarchal norms and stereotypical and discriminatory cultural practices towards women, coupled with the country's huge debt burden, remained obstacles to achieving further progress.

3. Women's equal rights and status with men in all spheres of political, economic and social life were enshrined in Guyana's amended Constitution of 2001. Under the Constitution, the Women and Gender Equality Commission had been established within the Human Rights Commission, superseding the National Commission on Women. The new Commission would be primarily responsible for monitoring implementation of the Convention and action to improve the status of women. In recent years, gender sensitization programmes had been launched in all 10 of the country's administrative regions. Other programmes were being carried out to increase women's participation in local and national government, with a view to attaining the national goal of establishing a "critical cadre of women" in key

political and decision-making positions at all levels of society. The 2001 constitutional reform process and the educational achievements of women in recent years (in 2002, 61 per cent of the graduates of the University of Guyana had been women) had further consolidated the role of women in politics and decision-making. Currently, nearly half of Guyana's 65 parliamentarians were women, their representation on the Regional Democratic Council had increased from 21 per cent in 1997 to 30 per cent in 2001. Programmes to build women's leadership capacity had been coordinated by the Guyana Association of Women's Lawyers and the Women's Affairs Bureau through the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute. The Caribbean Gender Equality Programme of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) had sponsored initiatives to strengthen the capacity of women in Parliament. Although women had accounted for 52 per cent of middle management in the Public Service in 2003, compared to 42 per cent in 1993, they continued to predominate at the lower levels of the Public Service.

4. Turning to national machinery, she said that the Women's Affairs Bureau within the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security was charged with coordinating national and international efforts to eliminate discrimination against women and promote their equal participation in the social, political, economic and cultural life of Guyana. As part of a streamlining measure, the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute, responsible for capacity-building and skills-training, and the National Resource and Documentation Centre for Gender and Development had been subsumed by the Women's Affairs Bureau. The National Resource and Documentation Centre was currently designing a comprehensive statistical database on women.

5. Increases in the human and financial resources allocated to the Women's Affairs Bureau had been commensurate with its expanded responsibilities, including that of monitoring the activities of the Regional Women's Affairs Committees throughout the country. The Inter-Ministry Committee established by the Women's Affairs Bureau monitored gender mainstreaming and gender equity within government ministries. Comprised of senior personnel in the Public Service, the Inter-Ministry Committee offered technical advice to the Bureau and helped to shape gender-sensitive policies.

6. Guyana had finalized its new National Policy on Women and was in the process of updating its National Plan of Action for Women 2005-2007 through broad-based consultations with civil society, including women in rural and hinterland locations. Informed by the National Policy on Women, the new Plan of Action would take a comprehensive approach to critical issues affecting women in such areas as health, including HIV/AIDS, education, employment, leadership, gender-based violence and trafficking in persons and include strategies for formulating gender-sensitive and discrimination-free development policies.

7. Under the Constitution, every Guyanese citizen, including sex workers, had the right to free medical care. Maternal and child health services had been upgraded, and a recent statistical survey had shown a substantial reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates and the incidence of malnutrition. Noting a steady increase in the proportion of women affected by HIV/AIDS, she said that the problem was being tackled by a Presidential Committee and special committees on HIV/AIDS within each government ministry, and through implementation of the National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS. In the past two years, an aggressive programme to prevent mother-to-child transmission had yielded positive results. Special attention was also being focused on increasing numbers of HIV/AIDS orphans and vulnerable children. Guyana was receiving assistance from the United States of America, international donor agencies and NGOs to combat HIV/AIDS and was drafting legislation to that end. Although it was not yet equipped to provide full care to cancer patients, the Government subsidized the cost of treatment overseas and was holding discussions with private partners on the introduction of a full range of treatment facilities.

8. A review of the educational policy in 2000 had led to a more gender-sensitive curriculum, which now included health, family life education and human rights education. With the assistance of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a revolving fund had been established to ensure that girls could attend tertiary-level and vocational schools. Special emphasis had been placed on educational programmes in rural and hinterland locations. With the assistance of the Committee, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNESCO, a number of measures had been taken to

boost education programmes in remote areas, including distance education, the establishment of dormitory facilities for children from remote areas, increased allowances for teachers in hinterland schools, financial support to hinterland teachers receiving training outside their communities and special programmes to prepare students who wished to continue to the tertiary level. Since teachers from the hinterland who were trained on the coastland were reluctant to return to their communities, teacher training centres had been set up in certain hinterland locations. She noted with concern that Amerindian youth who had moved away from their communities after receiving a secondary education were more vulnerable to exploitation.

9. Noting the gender disparity in the school population, she said that the Women's Study Unit of the University of Guyana had just begun investigating the reasons for early school dropouts. By increasing literacy during the primary cycle, the Guyana Education Access Project was contributing to sustainable socio-economic development and poverty reduction. In addition, approximately 300 women, largely secondary-school dropouts, had benefited from a programme entitled "Non-traditional Skills Training for Women", funded by the Inter-American Development Bank.

10. Impoverished Guyanese women were protected by social safety nets. Female heads of household were given sewing machines and other equipment by the Difficult Circumstances Unit of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security to launch small income-generating ventures. The Unit also dispensed certain medications and paid for the funeral expenses of family members of poor women. Poverty reduction strategies focused, in particular, on the needs of women in remote hinterland areas. In Moruca, a predominantly Amerindian area, women could obtain revolving loans with minimum interest rates. Financial assistance had also been given to women's and youth groups to start up and improve income-generating activities, particularly in agriculture.

11. Implementation of the Domestic Violence Act, adopted in 1996, had fallen short of expectations. Social workers had since been authorized to represent violence victims in court, and the Women's Affairs Bureau had established a National Task Force on Gender-based Violence. The capacity of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security to deal with domestic violence had been increased since its

merger with the Department of Social Security, the Department of Probation and Family Welfare Services. The Ministry worked with Help and Shelter, a local NGO, fully financing its shelters for victims of domestic violence and supporting its advocacy programmes.

12. Women were not making full use of existing protective legislation, despite the organization of public forums by the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers to apprise them of their constitutional and legal rights. A comprehensive Children's Bill and Family Court Bill drafted by the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers was currently before the Cabinet. The Women's Affairs Bureau had organized a public symposium and other awareness-raising campaigns on violence against women.

13. The Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security took a multisectoral, intergovernmental and broad-based approach to combating trafficking in women and children. It had formulated a comprehensive National Plan of Action for Combating Trafficking in Persons, conducted an intensive public awareness campaign nationwide and enacted Trafficking in Persons Act No. 2 of 2005. It had given national and international training workshops on victim identification and protection, formulated outreach strategies, trained key personnel and approximately 300 monitors across all regions and established a victim protection programme and shelter. Under the supervision of the Women's Affairs Bureau, a special unit had been set up to coordinate all anti-trafficking activities.

#### *Articles 1 to 6*

14. **Ms. Saiga** requested details of the structure of Guyana's national machinery. Had the membership of the Women and Gender Equality Commission actually been finalized, and what would be the new duties of the National Commission on Women that it would supersede? The initiative to establish Regional Women's Desks in the 10 Administrative Regions, when regional Women's Affairs Committees were already functioning in all 10 Administrative Regions, seemed somewhat redundant. It might be more effective, in that case and others, to strengthen existing mechanisms rather than to continually create new ones. She also wondered why the Government had taken over the Genesis Home for Women in Crisis when the NGO running it had encountered financial difficulties,

only to close it down (CEDAW/C/GUY/3-6, para. 3.15, p. 23).

15. **Ms. Shin** welcomed the strengthening of the Women's Affairs Bureau through the incorporation of the Documentation Centre and Training Institute, and the establishment of Regional Women's Affairs Officers in all 10 Administrative Regions. Was a long-term plan in place to build the capacities of the Regional Women's Affairs Officers?

16. She noted that the years covered by the most recent National Plan of Action were given as 2005 to 2007 in the delegation's introductory statement and 2006 to 2010 in its responses to the list of issues (CEDAW/PSWG/2005/II/CRP.2/Add.5, para. 5) and wondered why the dates had been changed. She also wondered whether there had been an evaluation of the National Plan of Action 2000-2004 and whether NGOs had been involved in that process. With regard to national machinery, she inquired about possible duplication between the functions of the Women's Affairs Bureau and those of the new Women and Gender Equality Commission. Would the two entities play complementary roles?

17. Noting the 2002 statistics on the number of women killed in incidents of domestic violence, she asked how many women had been nearly killed by their husbands in 2003 and 2004 and whether the perpetrators had been brought to trial. She also wished to know how many shelters Guyana had for victims of domestic violence. She would appreciate information on measures the Government was taking to address domestic violence; it should not have to rely solely on NGOs to deal with that problem.

18. **Mr. Flinterman** stressed the importance of article 2 (c) of the Convention and welcomed the State party's resolve to ensure that women availed themselves of the protection measures in place. He hoped Guyana would also become a party to the Optional Protocol. Noting the reluctance of Guyanese women to seek legal redress in the civil courts, he asked whether the Government intended to extend its outreach legal services beyond Administrative Region 2. What had been the results of the Ministry of Justice initiative to establish a legal aid entity with permanent legal officers to assist women? Would the new Women and Gender Equality Commission provide an alternative to costly civil proceedings? Lastly, he asked whether members of the commissions and other entities

making up the national machinery were fully aware of the provisions of the Convention.

19. **Ms. Simms**, referring to article 6, stressed the importance of State-funded institutions for the protection of women, and enquired, in particular, about institutions to help trafficking victims. Noting that trafficking in women was a major problem throughout the Caribbean region, she asked whether prostitution was legal in Guyana. If not, how could the Government be sure it was reaching the sex workers for whom health services were also available even if they felt reluctant to come forward?

20. In conclusion, she expressed profound regret that the population's attitude towards sexual orientation was impeding the adoption of legislation to implement constitutional provisions banning all forms of discrimination, including discrimination against women.

21. **Ms. Popescu** requested information on major achievements under the previous National Plan of Action 2000-2004, obstacles to its implementation and future objectives. Did either the previous or the current National Plan of Action specifically target women affected by racial tension or living in remote hinterland communities? Noting with concern that the problem of stereotypes was being addressed only through the revision of school textbooks, she urged the State party to take action through the media as well. Lastly, she said that the various programmes and projects enumerated in the report under article 4 were not really temporary special measures and, in that connection, referred the State party to the Committee's general recommendation No. 25, on article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, on temporary special measures.

22. **Mr. Flinterman** said that, pursuant to article 2 (c) of the Convention, States parties were bound to take measures to establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination. In that context, he stressed the importance of effective local remedies and expressed the hope that Guyana would ratify the Optional Protocol in order to provide women with the opportunity to seek redress at the international level. Some women, however, were reluctant to take cases to the civil courts and, in that connection, he would be grateful for additional information about the activities of the outreach legal service in Region 2. He also

wished to know whether the Government intended to extend that service to the other regions and whether the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security had acted on the proposal to establish a legal aid entity.

23. Since civil proceedings were often quite costly, he stressed the need for low-cost, low-threshold legal services and enquired whether the Women and Gender Equality Commission intended to provide such services. He also wished to know whether the members of that Commission were aware of the provisions of the Convention.

24. **Ms. Simms** pointed out that States parties were obliged to establish and fund institutions to assist victims of domestic violence and should not depend on NGOs. With reference to article 6 of the Convention, she said that trafficking in women was a serious problem throughout the Caribbean region and enquired whether the Guyanese Government was taking specific steps to address it. She also wished to know whether prostitution was legal in Guyana. If not, how could the authorities be sure that they were providing prostitutes with adequate health-care services?

25. Lastly, according to the report, the President of Guyana had not yet assented to the bill to enshrine a comprehensive right to non-discrimination in the Constitution because some sections of society had expressed concerns about the issue of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. She asked how the Government planned to deal with that situation.

26. **Ms. Popescu** observed that, since acceding to the Convention, Guyana had developed and implemented a number of national plans of action for women. She would be interested to hear the Government's views on the outcome of the latest plan, in particular its main achievements and the major obstacles encountered. She asked whether the most recent plan contained measures designed to alleviate the effects of racial tensions on women and to reach out to vulnerable women living in remote hinterland communities.

27. She expressed concern about the persistence of gender-based stereotypes and, in that connection, urged the Government of Guyana to consider making use of the media to influence attitudes. Lastly, the special welfare measures introduced by the Government were not, strictly speaking, temporary special measures within the meaning of article 4 of the Convention. In

that regard, she referred the delegation to general recommendation No. 25.

28. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said that all Caribbean States, in particular those that were members of the Commonwealth, had taken steps to establish effective national machinery for the advancement of women. However, links between that machinery and other relevant government ministries tended to be lacking. She would therefore be grateful for additional information about the structure and functions of the Inter-Ministry Committee. According to the responses to the list of issues and questions, that Committee provided technical assistance to the Women's Affairs Bureau: were its members merely technical experts or were they decision-makers who could have a real influence on policy? She also enquired as to the precise role of the Women's Affairs Bureau and requested further information about how the Government was dealing with statistics in view of the Caribbean-wide effort to make better use of gender-based data.

29. **Ms. Patten** said that the measures listed on pages 23-25 of the report were not temporary special measures within the meaning of article 4 of the Convention and, in that regard, drew the delegation's attention to general recommendation No. 25.

30. She recalled that general recommendation No. 19 clearly set out the obligation of States parties to eradicate domestic violence. While the report stated that an exercise had been undertaken to identify gaps in the Domestic Violence Act, she wondered whether the Government was actually envisaging the enactment of more effective legislation. Since the number of charges brought against abusers in Guyana was negligible, she enquired about the steps taken to ensure that victims had access to effective remedies, including low-cost legal aid, and were able to report incidents safely. She also wished to know what measures had been implemented to raise awareness of the problem among, inter alia, law enforcement personnel, members of the judiciary, doctors and social workers.

31. **Ms. Shadick** (Guyana) acknowledged that the structure of Guyana's national machinery for the advancement of women could seem confusing. The Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security was the lead department for the advancement of women and its principal agency was the Women's Affairs Bureau. The Government was in the final stages of appointing the members of the new Women

and Gender Equality Commission, which was a constitutional body responsible for protecting and promoting women's rights and for referring complaints relating to gender equality to the competent bodies. The Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security had already established a separate office charged with coordinating its own work with that of the Commission.

32. At the regional level, each of the 10 administrative regions was governed by an elected Regional Democratic Council, and each Council had a Regional Women's Affairs Committee comprised of Councillors and members of civil society. One member of that Committee was designated to serve as a full-time Regional Women's Affairs Officer and was responsible for liaising with the central Women's Affairs Bureau. The Government was working on long-term plans to strengthen the work of the regional bodies charged with the promotion of women's rights and, as the need arose, provision would be made for the recruitment of additional staff.

33. As far as the women's shelter was concerned, it had been established by the Government and then taken over by Help and Shelter, an NGO. However, in 2004, after a series of funding crises, the Government had decided to exercise greater financial control over the running of the facility and had asked Help and Shelter to submit its accounts. As a result, the Cabinet had very recently decided to allocate sufficient funds to allow the shelter to remain open for another year, and the Government intended to provide the funds necessary for its continued operation. A chicken farm located in the same compound as the shelter would be reopened with a view to generating additional income.

34. Turning to the issue of violence against women, she said that the number of women killed as a result of domestic violence had increased in 2003 and 2004. However, she stressed that the perpetrators of such violent acts were not always husbands and that men were also subjected to domestic violence. Charges had been brought against all those responsible for the deaths of women and, in many cases, the perpetrators had given themselves up. Unfortunately, legal proceedings in Guyana were extremely lengthy, and some victims of violent crime, particularly rape, lost the will to testify before their case could be heard. The Government had little control over that problem, since the judicial process did not fall within the competence of the administrative branch. However, to encourage

women to seek legal redress for violations of their rights, outreach legal services were still being provided in Region 2 and the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security had appointed a full-time legal officer to deal with complaints from the regions. After a number of setbacks, the legal aid clinic in Georgetown was once again operational, and a roster of lawyers willing to provide low-cost services had been established.

35. Battered women in Guyana had access to two shelters, both of which were operated by NGOs, and the Government also provided victims of domestic violence with alternative short-term accommodation. Although members of victims' extended families often offered to care for them, the authorities must do more to provide shelters with the necessary resources. In that connection, the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security was currently in discussions with the Ministry of Health about the establishment of a centre to care for orphans and others affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

36. In reply to the questions posed by Ms. Simms, she said that trafficking and prostitution were treated as related issues in Guyana. Although prostitution remained illegal, there was ongoing public debate on the issue of legalization. The Government was taking steps to ensure that prostitutes had access to health-care services and also advised them on alternative forms of employment.

37. With regard to the constitutional amendment that had been adopted on sexual orientation, she said that the National Assembly had reviewed the offending provision and annulled it. Racial tensions in Guyana were often inflamed by politicians during election periods; at other times, the Guyanese lived nicely together in their communities. The Ministries were making efforts to coordinate their activities in secluded areas, by, for instance, sending out a helicopter for various purposes rather than just one.

38. The Inter-Ministry Committee was made up of high-level members of the Ministries, and met to discuss, among other things, the programmes of the Women's Affairs Bureau and their impact on the work of the other Ministries. In addition, the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries of Health, Education and Labour, Human Services and Social Security met regularly, sometimes once a week, to discuss issues related to all three of those Ministries. The Women's

Affairs Bureau had no technical expertise, but when necessary they could consult the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute, which had a board of experts available to give technical assistance. She said that she would work on the matter of providing appropriately disaggregated population data.

39. Awareness events on domestic violence were being held more frequently, and police were now receiving mandatory training in the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act. Each police station had an officer responsible for cases of domestic violence, and most police stations were now keeping separate registries of such cases. Training was also provided to domestic violence workers whose role was to act as liaisons between police and victims, and to assist victims.

40. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** said that the measures described in the report were in effect special welfare measures, not temporary special measures, which were designed to accelerate the attainment of equality. For example, the report indicated that the participation of women in high-ranking posts had improved, but that Guyana had no formal plan to bring about such improvement. Time and patience were insufficient.

41. **Ms. Morvai** observed that Guyana was rich in such resources as gold and diamonds, but that half its population lived in dire poverty. She enquired who controlled the flow of such resources and the profits deriving from them. She would also like to know what was the role of the Guyana Gold Board, who were its members, whether any women were members, what procedures existed to monitor profits derived from gold, and whether women profited from gold.

42. She would also like to know to what extent women were involved in the National Development Strategy. Was the Government seeking the participation of women by, for example, reaching out to women's groups? She wondered as well whether there were gender focal points in the Ministries, and to what extent the Women's Affairs Bureau was involved in the development process. The report suggested that women should be involved only in the development that pertained to them, but in the view of the Committee women should play an active role in shaping their country and society.

43. **Ms. Khan**, noting that most Guyanese women studied social sciences, and that there was a high secondary school dropout rate, asked whether measures

were being taken to improve school curricula and whether an analysis had been made of the reasons that girls were leaving school. The delegation had used the word “equity” rather than the word “equality” in its opening statement. “Equity” referred to fairness and justice but was not a rights-based approach. The Guyanese Government should base its policy on article 1 of the Convention.

44. It would be useful, as well, to train not only police officers but also judges and other officials in the terms of the Convention and in particular the notion of substantive equality. She wondered, lastly, whether languages other than English were spoken in Guyana, whether the Convention had been translated into those languages, and what role the Women’s Affairs Bureau played in making the Convention available in all languages.

45. **Ms. Zou Xiaqiao** said that the elimination of discrimination and the achievement of full equality required not only legislation but implementation. She would like to know, in that regard, what measures were being taken to remedy the lack of resources for implementation and the disinterest of the Guyanese in gender issues, two obstacles cited in the report. She too would like to know why the delegation of Guyana had used the word “equity” rather than “equality.” She wondered what were the biggest challenges facing the Women’s Affairs Bureau, and whether other Ministries had bureaux for women.

46. **Ms. Schopp-Schilling** pointed out that Guyana was preparing its reports on a biyearly basis, rather than every four years, and enquired why reports had been late and why the current report combined several reports. She noted that the report provided frank assessments of the situation in Guyana and mentioned recommendations made to the Government; in that regard, she would like to know whether the Guyanese Cabinet of Ministers had discussed the report submitted to the Committee and had considered the recommendations it contained.

47. The portion of the report devoted to rural women gave a general description of social policy which did not seem to be woman-centred. She would like to know what was the focus on women, and whether budgetary funds were allocated for women. In addition, she wondered whether the burden of foreign debt affected women disproportionately, and whether Guyana used a gender-based approach in preparing its budget. That

was the kind of information that should be included in the report: the Committee wished to assess the impact of unintentional as well as intentional discrimination.

48. **Ms. Bokpe-Gnacadjia** said she would like details of the composition and purpose of the various bodies that made up the national women’s rights machinery, and in particular whether there was confusion about which body carried out what function, how they were coordinated, who was responsible for their coordination, whether their roles overlapped, whether tasks were scattered among them, and what was being done to ensure visibility. The report indicated that no new legislation prohibiting discrimination had been enacted, and the reply to question 8 of the list of issues mentioned that the national task force against violence was still being studied; more information on those points would be welcome.

49. **Ms. Šimonović** said that she would like to know whether the provisions of the Convention had been incorporated into the Constitution, whether the Convention was directly applicable, whether it had the same status as domestic legislation, and whether it could be invoked before the courts. She would also like to know whether Guyana incorporated both the concluding comments of the Committee and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action into its policies regarding women.

50. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her personal capacity, enquired whether a long-term action plan had been established to combat such harmful practices as sexual violence against women and girls, and noted that such a plan could be useful in the establishment of the national task force on violence against women. It was of paramount importance to monitor the effectiveness of plans and strategies, in order to protect women and girls from sexual abuse, domestic violence and incest. She suggested that Guyana should establish a dialogue with other South American and Caribbean countries regarding experiences in enacting legislation that prohibited violence against women.

51. **Ms. Shadick** (Guyana) said that “equity” meant equitable access to resources, benefits, courts and the like. “Equality” referred to equal participation. Guyana had reached the stage where the membership of national decision-making bodies was often one third or one half women. And yet, when they spoke they were not addressing issues of concern to women. Equal treatment did not take into consideration the special



needs of women that must be met before they could participate effectively. For example, women who came to court to give testimony should not be required to sit through a full day of court cases, which could be an intimidating experience and make them reluctant to speak.

52. She had become the Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security in 2001, and since then had tried to redress the backlog of reports; she believed she had largely succeeded. She was glad to know that reports were expected every four years; the misunderstanding about frequency was her mistake. The drafters of the report had submitted the semi-final report to a huge forum of NGOs and other organizations interested in women and had integrated their commentaries into the final report, which had then been submitted to the Cabinet for discussion.

53. On the basis of one of its recommendations, a special fund had been set up to assist women living in the deep hinterland. Women, and women who were heads of households, made up the majority of the poor, not because they had no earning power, but because they often had large families to care for. The Government offered assistance in many ways, including the provision of school and health supplies. It was important to provide support to women without specifically referring to women, because men tended to dislike the sense that women were being accorded privileged treatment, and violence could result.

54. Although Guyana possessed a wealth of natural resources, including gold and diamonds, it lacked the means to exploit them, with the result that concessions for exploitation went to large foreign companies in return for modest royalties. In addition, other traditional sources of income such as bauxite, sugar and rice were diminished by falling commodity prices. Revenues received were quickly exhausted paying down the country's foreign debt, even after debt-cancellation initiatives. The Government had further large expenditures related to the repair of dilapidated infrastructure and, owing to continual coastal flooding, the construction of sea defences and assistance for affected populations. It had to be noted that women were targeted in flood relief efforts, because mothers had the most important role in their family's recovery.

55. In response to other questions, she said that the Government had established a national task force on gender-based violence. The constitutional commission

was essentially a monitoring body but had considerable authority. She had participated in the meetings of the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States, which had undertaken a study in Caribbean countries in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration. Guyana was sharing its plans and experiences in order to combat the trafficking of persons and address the emigration of teachers and nurses. The Caribbean Community's Council for Human and Social Development was also active in that area. The "Children and Violence" project initiated in 2003 had produced a report, promoted public awareness and was creating a national database to track abused children.

56. **Ms. Gaspard** saw that it was necessary to involve men in the struggle for gender equality, for example, by requesting that men should be included in delegations. She asked whether the recent increase of women members of Parliament was the result of a legislated quota; if so, she wanted to know more. Finally, she asked whether Guyana's naturalization laws were equal for men and women.

57. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** noted that Guyana's debt of \$1.5 billion for just 777,125 inhabitants was an enormous economic burden and hindered progress on gender equality. Men and women in the developing world should fight for debt relief. Women deputies must take an active stance on debt relief in parliamentary discussions, and, if their political parties failed them, women representatives should form associations, as had been done in Costa Rica. She wanted to know the number of Amerindian women members of Parliament and whether they were specifically included in the quota system. Finally, she asked what efforts the men and women of Guyana had made to secure debt relief.

58. **Ms. Shadick** (Guyana) explained that unexpected circumstances and financial constraints had precluded men from joining the delegation but that men were involved in its work. With respect to quotas, the Constitution required that one third of party lists for parliamentary elections should be composed of women, with the result that currently 30.7 per cent of members were women. Three of the 65 women members of Parliament were Amerindian women, including the Minister of Amerindian Affairs. Legislation on naturalization granted nationality to foreign-born spouses, men and women, and to the children of those

marriages. The country's external debt now stood at \$1.1 billion, and 20 per cent of the national budget went to debt repayment. The President of Guyana was an economist who paid close attention to the State's financial and economic situation and made great efforts to negotiate debt cancellation. Revenue freed up would be devoted to social services.

59. **Ms. Popescu** noted that, according to Guyana's report, gender disparities emerged in secondary education and universities. She asked about the rate of illiteracy, in particular among women; measures to keep adolescent mothers in school; and measures to encourage young women to choose studies in the male-dominated areas of science and technology.

60. **Ms. Patten** was concerned at the lack of data on discrimination in employment, which hindered an assessment of the efficacy of relevant laws such as the Prevention of Discrimination Act of 1997. She asked whether a mechanism existed to monitor compliance with those laws and about the nature of labour inspections and sanctions for non-compliance. She further asked whether the judiciary was familiar with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in particular its provisions on labour laws, and whether there were special labour courts. She asked about measures to facilitate women's access to the judicial system and whether women discriminated against on the basis of pregnancy had recourses other than the ombudsman. She asked whether there were laws against gender-based discrimination in employment and asked about the status of mandatory maternity leave, as mandated in article 11, paragraph 2 (b), of the Convention, and the Government's efforts to address the situation. She wanted to know what measures incorporating a gender perspective would be taken to respond to the difficult employment situation and working conditions, which disproportionately affected women.

61. **Ms. Zou Xiaqiao** asked what targeted measures had been taken in response to the high unemployment rate of women.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*