



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

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

Summary record of the 713th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 26 January 2006, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Pimentel (Vice-Chairperson)

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06-22312 (E)

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

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

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

Combined fourth, fifth and sixth periodic report of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (CEDAW/C/VEN/4-6, CEDAW/C/VEN/Q/4-6 and Add.1)

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

2. **Ms. León** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), said that another Government had been in place during part of the period covered by her country's report. Under the new Government, elected in 1999, her country had made every effort to comply with its international obligations, particularly in respect of women's and men's human rights, which were enshrined in its Constitution. As an authentically democratic and inclusive society, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela promoted the integration of all previously excluded groups, especially women. It had, however, suffered imperialistic and criminal aggressions that had slowed down its progress in both the economic and social spheres.

3. Under new Venezuelan legislation, the situation of women had improved considerably. The 1999 Constitution recognized domestic work performed by women as an economic activity that created added value and produced wealth. It also recognized the equality of all persons before the law, provided for the adoption of affirmative action against discrimination and established social and family rights. The Land Act granted preferential treatment to women heads of households for the allocation of land. Prenatal care was subsidized, and women's sexual and reproductive rights were guaranteed.

4. Two institutions had played a leading role in the advancement of women in her country: the National Women's Institute (INAMUJER), established in 1999, and the Women's Development Bank (BANMUJER), set up in 2001. Both had benefited from an increase in their budget allocations. Significant advances had been achieved in gender mainstreaming, thanks in particular

to the putting in place of a subcommittee on gender statistics in the National Statistical Institute (INE) and the adoption in 2005 of a national budget that took gender equity into account.

5. Women's participation in public life had increased as a result of concerted efforts by INAMUJER and women's organizations, reflected in a 2005 resolution of the National Electoral Council calling for female as well as male candidates for national, municipal and local decision-making bodies. The proportion of women deputies in the National Assembly had risen from 10 per cent to 25 per cent. Further examples of her country's more gender-sensitive participatory democracy included the grass-roots women's organizations known as "Meeting points with INAMUJER" and the "Grass-roots networks of BANMUJER clients". While women's civil and political rights were enshrined in the Constitution, measures were still needed to combat persistent forms of discrimination against women that were the legacy of a patriarchal culture.

6. Employment was one of the Government's priorities, particularly in the context of its efforts to stamp out poverty. It had encouraged women to set up microenterprises, first through a microcredit scheme, and, with the opening of the Power to the People Bank in 2001, through cooperative organizations the Bank offered a special appropriation line for women known as "credimujer". Other means of financial assistance were made available to women through the Women's Development Bank, the Microfinance Fund and, more recently, the Ministry of Popular Economy and special campaigns or missions ("misiones").

7. Women, including the poorest among them, had benefited significantly from the successful national literacy and education campaigns, and from government efforts to create jobs, enabling them to set up cooperatives supported by public finances. The development of the health-care system had also been specifically directed at women, notably during pregnancy. Other campaigns had targeted remote areas, where the majority of excluded women lived, and the indigenous population, concentrated in six states, where elected representatives in the National Assembly had been active in law and policymaking.

8. Rural indigenous and other vulnerable groups of women participated in the various large-scale campaigns ("misiones"), which attacked the root

causes of such problems as underdevelopment, dependency, socio-economic inequalities, environmental disturbances, poverty and the feminization of poverty. Progress had been achieved on all those fronts but not as much as the Government would have liked. By linking and coordinating the action of Venezuelan women with that of women throughout the world, her country would advance at a much faster pace.

9. Her country had undertaken many initiatives to combat violence against women. Over 1,500 workshops had been organized with the support of both governmental and non-governmental organizations and had reached some 500,000 women throughout the country. The Violence against Women and the Family Act set out procedures for reporting acts of violence, precautionary measures, and types of penalty applicable. A free hotline had been set up for reporting cases of violence against women and shelters had been opened for the protection of victims. The problem was a cultural one linked to the persistence of patriarchal values, and would therefore not be eradicated overnight.

10. The Ministry of the Interior and Justice had developed a programme in cooperation with INAMUJER to address the social, economic and cultural causes of prostitution and trafficking in persons, particularly children and women. On the question of human rights generally, the efforts of the current Government far exceeded what had been done previously. Recognizing that much still remained to be done, it would continue to pursue the same aims, in particular through its far-reaching action to promote gender equality.

Articles 1 to 6

11. **Mr. Flinterman** commended the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for having ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and asked whether any measures had been taken to widely publicize the Protocol pursuant to article 13 thereof. Reiterating the remedies and procedures available under the Optional Protocol, he expressed concern about the Government's assertion that some so-called "civil society" organizations had refused to participate in the preparation of the report, particularly since he had heard from several independent sources that a number of women who had

expressed opinions that differed from those of the Government had been ill-treated or even killed. He therefore wished to know what measures had been or would be taken by the Government to ensure that women submitting communications to the Committee would not be subject to ill-treatment or intimidation.

12. Turning to the State party's obligation to establish legal protection of women (article 2 of the Convention) he welcomed the fact that, pursuant to article 23 of the national Constitution, international human rights conventions prevailed over domestic laws and enquired as to the specific remedies available to women at the national level. Noting that between 2000 and 2003 the National Office for the Defence of Women's Rights had dealt with around 12,000 complaints brought by women concerning violations of their rights, he requested updated information on the number of complaints brought in 2004 and 2005, and on how many of them had been referred to the national courts. He also wished to know whether the National Women's Institute (INAMUJER) had a mandate to take action on such complaints and, if so, whether its decisions had legal force. He wondered whether any rulings handed down by the national courts had cited the Convention and also asked whether measures were in place to familiarize judicial and law enforcement officials with the provisions of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations.

13. Lastly, he drew attention to the apparent lack of distinction between the terms "equity" and "equality" in the State party's legal system and requested additional clarification on the Government's understanding of those terms.

14. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** pointed out that, while the State party's report provided detailed information about the policies and measures adopted with a view to eliminating discrimination against women, it lacked an analysis of the real impact of those measures. She hoped that that shortcoming would be rectified in the next report.

15. The report did not devote much attention to the question of cooperation between the Government and civil society. She therefore wished to know whether any formal channels for such cooperation existed and whether all interested non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had had the opportunity to comment on the report. Since all public bodies in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had to draw up a register of

NGOs wishing to participate in their work, she wondered whether there were any requirements for registration with INAMUJER and whether NGOs were subject to any operational restrictions.

16. Although she recognized that the usage of particular terms differed from language to language, she wished to draw attention to the apparent failure of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to distinguish between the concepts of “equity” and “equality”. While the former placed the emphasis on fair treatment and comparable conditions and, in Latin America, was often regarded as the ultimate goal in the fight for women’s rights, it was not synonymous with the latter. She therefore urged the State party to give further thought to the distinction between them.

17. Many different plans and programmes for the advancement of women were described in the report. While the Government’s efforts in that regard were commendable, she stressed the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach in order to prevent duplication of efforts and to ensure that gender equality was mainstreamed into all areas of national life.

18. **Ms. Arocha Dominguez** said that the Committee was aware of both the socio-economic difficulties facing the State party and the Government’s willingness to comply with the provisions of the Convention. Already in 1997, the Committee had expressed concern about the national machinery for the advancement of women, but, according to various non-official sources, the current machinery (namely, INAMUJER) was even weaker than its predecessor. In that connection, she remained unclear about the role of INAMUJER, which was described as an autonomous body attached to the Ministry of Popular Participation and Social Development. What advantages were conferred on the Institute by that particular status, and were efforts still being made to secure a Cabinet post for its President? She would be grateful to know whether, in its current incarnation, INAMUJER was able to cooperate effectively with high-level Government officials and ministries.

19. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** commended the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for the serious efforts it had undertaken to speed up the advancement of women. However, she was somewhat confused about the State party’s understanding of the

concept of human rights: women’s rights were also human rights, and consequently efforts to protect and promote the rights of women by eliminating discrimination and achieving gender equality were also efforts to protect and promote human rights. Those efforts should be pursued without delay rather than progressively.

20. Turning to the issue of temporary special measures, she welcomed the fact that, pursuant to article 21 of the Constitution, the Government was bound to adopt positive measures in favour of persons or groups who might suffer discrimination or be marginalized or vulnerable. However, there seemed to be some confusion over the meaning of the term “positive measures” which, under international law, usually signified positive action taken by a State to achieve a specific objective. While she commended the steps taken by the State party to promote the advancement of women, such as the establishment of the Women’s Development Bank and the granting of rural dwellings to mothers, those seemingly permanent actions were not, to her mind, temporary special measures designed to accelerate the achievement of de facto equality between women and men. In that connection, she wondered whether the State party’s confusion about the nature of temporary special measures could have been responsible for its 1997 decision not to apply quotas. Consequently, she wished to know whether a debate on the nature of such measures was currently under way at the governmental and civil society levels. She asked whether the Government intended to apply those measures to other areas of women’s lives and whether it had any plans to introduce temporary special measures geared specifically towards indigenous women and women of African descent, who were often the victims of multiple forms of discrimination.

21. **Ms. Popescu** recalled that, during its examination of the third periodic report of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Committee had pointed to the persistence of gender stereotypes and patriarchal patterns and had recommended the adoption of broad-based measures to combat them. In that regard, she welcomed the fact that the 1999 Constitution employed non-sexist language throughout and that article 76 thereof recognized women’s sexual and reproductive rights. In addition, a number of media-sensitization and educational programmes had been introduced. However, the report did not contain an evaluation of

the progress made in that sphere or a description of the main obstacles encountered.

22. With reference to the portrayal of women by the mass media, she noted that, while the adoption of the Act on Social Responsibility in Radio and Television was a positive development, no complaints about breaches of that Act had been received. Furthermore, the procedures for investigating complaints were extremely complicated. She wondered whether the Government intended to facilitate those procedures and introduce a clearer system of penalties for breaches. She also wished to know whether any specific measures had been taken to encourage a proactive approach to the portrayal of positive images of women in the media.

23. She would be grateful for an assessment of the results of the second phase of the Educating for Equality Programme and invited the State party to provide further information on any additional measures taken to raise awareness among both girls and women of the need to ensure gender equality and combat sexual violence in schools. She wished to know whether any efforts had been undertaken to prepare girls for professions traditionally reserved for men.

24. Lastly, she pointed out that illiteracy and school dropout rates were very high among indigenous women and women of African descent, who were also more susceptible to trafficking and exploitation. She enquired whether any studies or research had been carried out on those groups and drew attention to the need for temporary special measures designed to improve their situation.

25. **Ms. Pimentel**, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that she was concerned about female victims of domestic violence, which was a particularly widespread phenomenon in Latin America. The persistence of gender-based stereotypes and the attachment to the principle of non-interference in individuals' private lives were largely responsible for that situation and she took the view that greater attention should be devoted to research in that area. As incidents were seldom reported to the police, the health services should establish domestic violence registers to keep track of cases. Furthermore, preventive measures designed to eradicate violence and change attitudes should be incorporated into school curriculums, and media campaigns geared towards both women and men should be launched. She expressed particular concern

about the appeal launched by the Government Attorney's Office to omit from the Violence against Women and the Family Act provisions providing for precautionary measures against the perpetrators of domestic violence and enquired about the steps taken by the Government and civil society to address that sensitive issue.

26. Lastly, in its responses to the list of issues and questions, the State party had asserted that prostitution and trafficking did not seem to be a major problem in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. She disagreed with that statement, because it was common knowledge that increased poverty in the developing world had led to an increase in those crimes, and urged the Government to step up its efforts to combat the problem.

27. **Ms. León** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), replying to Committee members' questions, said that Venezuela now had an Office of the People's Defender and a National Office for the Defence of Women's Rights attached to the National Women's Institute (INAMUJER).

28. **Ms. Jaimes** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that human rights treaties enjoyed the same rank as the Constitution in Venezuela. For that reason, Venezuela's body of law had to conform to those treaties as well as to the Constitution. Regarding efforts to raise women's awareness about the existence of human rights instruments and their rank, she noted that the Convention had been invoked in the courts. In that regard, it should be recalled that Venezuela was undergoing a political process that encouraged the active participation of men and women, on the basis of knowledge of constitutional principles. Every effort had therefore been made to raise awareness of the Constitution and the principles contained therein through, inter alia, the publication and dissemination of hundreds of copies of the Constitution, the organization of human rights workshops and conferences, and campaigns to raise awareness of international treaties and conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Moreover, INAMUJER had invoked the Convention in response to the Government Attorney's appeal against provision for precautionary measures against perpetrators of domestic violence. In 2004, INAMUJER had published a booklet which had been distributed to women throughout the country. Workshops had also been held

on the constitutional rank of treaties and a document published containing information on the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, the Equal Opportunities for Women Act, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Violence against Women and the Family Act, all of which were well known in Venezuela. The workshops targeted focal point coordinators who could then raise awareness among the general population, the bodies that received accusations of violence against women and other public authorities. The rights enshrined in the Constitution were also covered in those workshops.

29. **Ms. Acevedo** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), responding to the question concerning government efforts to ensure a coordinated approach towards implementation of the National Plan for Women's Equality, said that INAMUJER — the guiding body for public policies relating to women and gender equity — drew up a five-year plan for all public authorities. Gender mainstreaming mechanisms included consultation with the various bodies during the preparation phase and technical working groups and agreements with government agencies during the implementation phase. Evaluation was carried out on the basis of indicators identified in the Plan. Because Venezuela's state and municipal governments were autonomous in terms of drawing up projects and preparing budgets, INAMUJER encouraged the establishment of regional and municipal women's institutes to implement the Plan. Those regional and municipal institutes were assessed by INAMUJER's Regional and other Directorates. To date, 14 regional institutes and 7 municipal institutes had been set up. In some states, the President of the regional women's institute was part of the state government. INAMUJER also sought to provide gender training to government officials directly responsible for drafting and implementing gender equity policy.

30. Regarding efforts to ensure coordination, an agreement had been signed with the National Statistical Institute (INE) to mainstream a gender perspective in national statistics in an effort to address the lack of gender-disaggregated data. A national subcommittee on gender had also recently been established. At the Ministry of Health, a working group was developing the Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme; sexual and reproductive health norms were now being implemented at the national level. Agreements had also

been signed with the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Planning and Development.

31. She maintained that the policies of the former National Council for Women had indeed had an impact nationwide. As for the Institute's efforts to improve its status within the Government, the proposal of setting up an independent ministry was still being discussed and, in the meantime, INAMUJER was pursuing all possible avenues for achieving greater influence in both central and regional government. Despite the Institute's status as an autonomous body attached to the Ministry of Popular Participation and Social Development, it had developed strategies to gain national coverage and to work as effectively as possible with the various government bodies. INAMUJER was nonetheless convinced that it must strengthen its interaction with the rest of the Executive Cabinet.

32. **Ms. de Saab** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), responding to a question concerning the role of the Government Attorney, said that in August 2005, as a direct result of efforts by INAMUJER, a communiqué had been sent to all Venezuelans informing them that at least one prosecutor's office responsible for domestic violence was to be established in every state. For the first time, states would have a special prosecutor for domestic violence.

33. In an effort to end the exploitation by unscrupulous individuals of women and girls from indigenous communities in her own state of Anzoátegui, the state government and the Warao community had signed an agreement providing the Warao community with such items as fishing boats and instruments, as well as assistance to sell their produce through official channels, thereby granting them economic independence and allowing them to return to their place of origin and make a living more in line with their traditional way of life.

34. On the subject of trafficking, Anzoátegui, like many tourist destinations, had a number of very remote areas that were often beyond the reach of the Government's special campaigns known as "missions" (misiones). Following an agreement signed between Venezuela and Cuba, in just one year (2004-2005), more than 95,000 young children and adolescents — in particular girls — had been registered as part of the campaign entitled "Misión Identidad". It was a major

step forward, as many mothers did not have the economic means to take their children all the way to the state capital. As a result of that mission and the registry, it would not be so easy for unscrupulous groups to take girls to tourist areas. In recognition of the mission's success, a permanent registration centre for children and adolescents who were particularly vulnerable to trafficking had been set up in Anzoátegui state.

35. Lastly, Anzoátegui state had also set up the state women's institute by official decree, as well as a shelter where women and their children could stay for up to three months and receive legal, psychological and health-related assistance. A record was also kept of all the domestic violence victims that had received assistance at the regional level. In that regard, the support provided by INAMUJER in terms of guidelines, regional workshops and meeting points was invaluable.

36. **Ms. del Mar Álvarez** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), responding to the question concerning measures taken to address human rights violations, said that the Government's policy was one of absolute respect for the human rights of all citizens, including those belonging to the opposition. In the event that public or private entities filed a complaint, the judicial procedures established by law were followed. That approach was in stark contrast to previous Governments, under which Venezuelans had been victims of persecution and forced disappearances. There were no concrete reports of human rights violations in Venezuela; constitutional provisions prohibiting such offences (including forced disappearances and unauthorized searches) were complied with.

37. Regarding legal channels between NGOs and the Government, she said that when the Government — in particular, INAMUJER — was approached by an NGO, it always listened to what it had to say. NGOs that had worked on the issue of violence were mentioned in the report. INAMUJER registered NGOs so that it knew who they were and how it could support their work. The only requirement for registering was a legal document attesting that the entity concerned was an NGO working in the area of violence against women or domestic violence. There was no requirement preventing any NGO from registering.

38. Turning to the questions on domestic violence, she noted that 13 states had Offices for the Defence of Women's Rights, which dealt with women victims of domestic violence. Reports of such offences had risen because of increasing awareness among women that domestic violence was a crime, making them more willing to file complaints. Statistics on the number of reported cases had been included in the report, although the actual figure might be higher because many women still tried to hide the fact that they were victims. Any such reports received by sectoral bodies were forwarded to the Office for the Defence of Women's Rights. When the Statistical Institute's subcommittee on gender statistics concluded its work, a more general overview of the situation should be available.

39. With regard to the appeal by the Government Attorney's Office to the Supreme Court concerning precautionary measures against perpetrators of domestic violence, INAMUJER had held discussions with the NGOs that had demonstrated outside the Supreme Court in protest and the judges of the Constitutional Court, but no decision had been reached to date and the stalemate continued. The commission set up to review the law expected its proposal to be ready for review by the NGO community in March 2006.

40. **Ms. Castañeda** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the Centre for Women's Studies at the Central University of Venezuela had also entered into a rich and very broad debate over the significance of the terms "equality" and "equity" to women's advancement. She pointed out that it was possible to speak of equality in diversity: although a professional woman in Caracas and an indigenous woman of the Amazon region were equal and certainly had common concerns, their lives were very different in many ways. It was not possible to resolve the debate for the moment, but the discussion would continue.

41. **Ms. Osorio** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that reported cases of domestic abuse and sexually transmitted diseases had risen, in large part because women had become aware that help was available. About half of the individual states provided health statistics to the National Statistical Institute.

42. The Government had decided to institute a policy of affirmative action to benefit indigenous groups by restoring their rights, and had established special

health-care programmes, educational curricula, bilingual services and hospitals to meet their needs. As a result of massive immunization campaigns, particularly against yellow fever, mortality rates from infectious disease were dropping among indigenous people.

43. She was also proud to report that UNESCO had declared Venezuela a “Territory Free of Illiteracy” at its thirty-third General Conference in October 2005.

44. **Ms. Arratia** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the signing of the Optional Protocol to the Convention had been announced in the national press and in the newsletters issued by INAMUJER. It would continue its large-scale dissemination of information on the Optional Protocol to ensure that all women were aware of the complaint mechanism. All Venezuelans enjoyed full freedom of expression, and there was no ill-treatment of those who expressed opposing views. The report to the Committee had been drafted with input from NGOs, government agencies and independent bodies.

45. The Ministry of Education and Sport was in the process of revising school curricula and textbooks to harmonize them with the anti-discrimination provisions of the Constitution. It had just formed a commission to work on eliminating stereotypes from educational materials, particularly of indigenous women and women of African descent. The Law on Indigenous People included the right to education in indigenous languages. There was also a national educational programme to change the image of Venezuelans of African descent among the population in general. Of the 1.4 million people receiving literacy training, 67,000 were indigenous, and a high number of the trainees were of African descent as well.

46. The Presidential Commission on Racial Discrimination, headed by the Ministry of Education and Sport with the participation of NGOs and other government agencies, had been formed to dismantle the discriminatory culture that had existed in Venezuelan society. She had experienced the change in mentality firsthand when she, as a woman of African descent, had headed the delegation that signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention in 2005, something that would not have happened a generation earlier.

47. Under the Act on Social Responsibility in Radio and Television, which had recently been adopted, two broadcasters had been prosecuted for violations to date.

48. **Ms. Jaimes** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that under the new Constitution, the bicameral Parliament had become the unicameral National Assembly. Within the new structure, the Parliamentary Commission on Women’s Rights had been superseded in the National Assembly by the Standing Committee on Women, the Family and Youth, which was composed of three subcommittees on each of those areas of interest. Thus, there was a committee dealing specifically with gender issues in the National Assembly. The current level of women’s representation in that body — 25 per cent — was unprecedented, even though it fell short of the ultimate goal of 50 per cent. The Constitution upheld non-sexist language, and work was proceeding on its elimination from some laws. Women were still underrepresented among the judiciary and in the legal profession, however.

49. **Ms. León** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the penalty imposed on violators of the Act on Social Responsibility in Radio and Television was to use broadcast time to send positive messages on women and minorities or to provide educational programmes for children. Women had made great progress in gaining access to the information media, acquiring a voice and sending messages about who they were in all their diversity throughout the country.

50. **Ms. Morvai** stressed that, with the greater emphasis placed on human dignity under the revolution, a stronger commitment was needed to end all forms of human exploitation, including prostitution which cast women in the role of objects to be used to satisfy the needs of others.

51. **Ms. Saiga** asked whether article 88 of the Constitution had been implemented and whether the 1982 Civil Code was still in effect, unchanged. Referring to the 1937 Penal Code, she drew attention to the INAMUJER position that it should be replaced, not just partially amended, and asked what the delegation’s position was on that question.

52. **Ms. Patten** requested information about the measures taken to improve women’s access to the courts, for example for women of African descent, and to make legal aid available to all women.

53. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, congratulated the delegation on the national literacy campaign but asked whether any strategy had been devised to prevent the newly literate from losing their recently acquired skills.

54. **Ms. León** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) responded that the President shared the concern regarding literacy skills and, accordingly, the initial literacy campaign had immediately been followed by a second campaign to bring literacy to a higher level. Many students had already graduated from the higher level of studies.

55. **Ms. Castañeda** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), responding to questions concerning prostitution and the labour force, explained that her Government's strategy, in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals, was to reduce extreme poverty to 12.5 per cent by the year 2015 and to eliminate it by the year 2021. As a result, more people would be employed in the formal economy and fewer in the informal economy. Infrastructure and financing would be provided to that end, and land reform would seek to encourage people to move from the coastal urban areas, where there were pockets of great poverty, and to settle in the northern plains areas.

56. That endeavour was closely related to solving the problem of prostitution and trafficking in human beings, because it would help women rise out of poverty, hold dignified jobs and become central to the economy. An example of what had already been achieved was the Women's Development Bank.

57. **Ms. del Mar Álvarez** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) pointed out that the reform of the 1982 Civil Code created equal rights and duties for men and women and eliminated the subordinate role of women in marriage. Those provisions had been further expanded in the Bolivarian Constitution, for instance with respect to the equal parental responsibilities of both fathers and mothers.

58. She agreed that the Penal Code was obsolete, but new penal provisions, drafted from a gender perspective and submitted by INAMUJER, were currently being discussed and, following popular consultation, would be used to prepare a draft combined penal code and gender code.

59. The Offices of the People's Defender facilitated access to the courts for poor women, for example by

preparing the necessary, and at times very costly, legal documents free of charge. Such documentation was then submitted to the courts by the Special Women's Defender.

60. **Ms. Jaimes** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) recalled that, under the Constitution, access to the judicial system was free, and the large increase in the number of People's Defenders ensured free legal representation for all. Furthermore, over one quarter of the judges on the Supreme Court of Justice were women, and women accounted for more than half of all judges nationwide. Judges were currently selected through a competitive examination, for which an intensive training programme was available. Half of all judges currently serving had been chosen through that process, and it was hoped that the figure would soon reach 100 per cent with a view to ensuring the independence of the judiciary.

61. **Ms. Castañeda** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), referring to article 88 of the Constitution and women's right to social security, explained that efforts were focused on making those provisions a reality through the pension system. That topic was currently under discussion in the National Assembly.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.