



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

Distr.: General
12 June 2006

Original: English

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

Summary record of the 723rd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 17 May 2006, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Manalo

later: Ms. Schöpp-Schilling (Vice-Chairperson)

later: Ms. Manalo (Chairperson)

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06-35141 (E)



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 initial and second periodic report of Turkmenistan (CEDAW/C/TKM/1-2, CEDAW/C/TKM/Q/2, CEDAW/C/TKM/Q/5/Add.1)

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

2. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan), introducing her country's combined periodic report (CEDAW/C/TKM/1-2), said that, under the Constitution of Turkmenistan, women enjoyed equality of rights and freedoms with men; violations of a person's rights on the basis of sex was a criminal offence. Discrimination against women was also prohibited by its Declaration on International Obligations (1995) and its Law on the Press and Other Mass Media (1991). There was no restriction either in legislation or in practice on the exercise of women's political rights. They had the same rights and opportunities as men in respect of access to public employment, participation in elections, eligibility for election to public office and establishment of public associations. They accounted for just over 50 per cent of the electorate and 26 per cent of deputies elected to Parliament. Women took an active part in parliamentary committees; as members of local representative bodies, they were involved in setting major guidelines for the economic, social and cultural development of their regions and had a direct influence on local policies. They held high responsibilities in all areas of national life.

3. By law, women in Turkmenistan could not be denied employment, have their salaries reduced or be dismissed for reasons of pregnancy or childcare. Should they have cause for complaint, they could apply to the courts for compensation in respect of any moral or material damage suffered. The 1999 Law on Petitions of Citizens and Procedure for their Consideration thus served as a major tool in ensuring and protecting their rights. In addition, the Prosecutor's Office, trade unions and the Union of Women of Turkmenistan protected women against discrimination by the State authorities.

4. There was no recorded case in the country of trafficking in women. She stressed the absence in

Turkmenistan of the social and economic factors contributing to trafficking, which ran counter to the attitudes and way of life of the population and the very foundations of Turkmen society. As for prostitution, it was punishable by law.

5. While women were engaged in every field of activity, they were particularly well represented in public health, social security, education, culture and the arts, and less so in traditionally male-dominated activities such as construction, transport, communications and mining. The level of economic activity among women of working age was high, both through work for hire and through entrepreneurship; they accounted for 30 per cent of employers and 62 per cent of entrepreneurs. She emphasized that in the public sector the State established salary levels for men and women on the basis of the rule of equal wages for equal work, while in private enterprises salary conditions were determined through collective bargaining. Pregnancy, maternity and childcare were all eligible for social benefits.

6. In education, young people enjoyed equality both of access and of advancement; co-education was practised throughout the system. Every opportunity was given to girls to benefit from education, including at tertiary level, so as to enable them to realize their full potential. There were no basic differences in the level of education of the two sexes and no differentiation of professions into male and female categories; nor were there any more than minimal differences between men and women in the sphere of human development. A system of tax benefits was used specifically to encourage women to work, while the free provision of public utilities, the low cost of support services and measures for the social protection of women were all conducive to the well-being of families; in Turkmenistan, the average family size was 5.3 persons. She drew attention in that connection to the country's comprehensive system for the protection of women and motherhood and its nation-wide reproductive health service. Its effectiveness was reflected in the fact that over 92 per cent of pregnancies resulted in successful births. It was also important to note that working pregnant women and women with small children benefited from special treatment. The State facilitated the acquisition of property by citizens and provided support to large and low-income families and disadvantaged persons, including orphans, the disabled and the elderly. It

offered women equality of access with men to agricultural loans and credits, without exemptions or restrictions based on sex. Women similarly enjoyed the same marriage rights as men and could not be subjected to forced marriages; their rights and obligations as parents were also equal. In cases of marriage to nationals of another country, Turkmen women retained their citizenship rights.

7. Turkmenistan's efforts to provide education, health care and social services to its citizens had thus been beneficial to men and women on a basis of equality. It would continue to discharge its obligations under the Convention with a view to creating favourable conditions for the advancement of women.

Articles 1 and 2

8. **Mr. Flinterman** welcomed the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue with Turkmenistan, offered for the first time since it had ratified the Convention. He regretted the absence of precise statistical data in the State party's report and its lack of focus on issues of relevance to the Convention. He noted that the Constitution contained no reference to international human rights instruments and wondered about the status of the Convention in the country's domestic law. He asked whether it could be invoked in the courts and whether indeed it had been so invoked. Information would also be appreciated as to whether the Government was thinking of ratifying the Optional Protocol. On the question of public education and awareness-raising in regard to the Convention, it would be useful to know what action had been taken and also whether members of the judiciary and law enforcement officials had been given suitable training. He further enquired how many women's NGOs were registered in Turkmenistan, particularly for women belonging to minority groups, and what role they played in the defence of human rights.

9. **Ms. Šimonović** asked whether the Convention was legally binding in Turkmenistan, in particular by being self-executing. It would also be interesting to know whether the Constitution contained specific provisions for the equal rights of women not only in marriage but in all areas of life. She enquired whether any Turkmen law contained a definition of discrimination against women.

10. **Ms. Dairiam** reminded the delegation that the obligation to submit reports in timely fashion was a

commitment that States parties assumed under human rights treaty law, partly because it facilitated the monitoring of progress in the implementation of treaty provisions, and permitted the prompt formulation of initiatives to address difficulties. She asked whether the Government of Turkmenistan had assessed the reasons for the delay in reporting to the Committee, and wondered whether the problem lay in the State party's understanding of the scope of the rights of women and the obligations of the Government under the Convention.

11. According to the information presented in part I of the report, women in Turkmenistan were able to successfully combine family and professional responsibilities, and were broadly represented in all areas of the economy, and in the political and social life of the country. She pointed out, however, that women could not enjoy fully equal rights and freedoms if there was no provision for responsibility-sharing within families.

12. She could not agree with the position of the Government, as set out in the responses to the list of issues and questions (CEDAW/C/TKM/Q/5/Add.1), that there could be no universal model for gender equality. In her opinion, there must be such a model, even if strategies and approaches for achieving equality differed. She was therefore curious to know how Turkmenistan viewed the concept of equality and how differences between men and women should be addressed in the light of that principle.

13. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that international treaties, including the Convention following its ratification in 1996, had the force of law in Turkmenistan. In the absence of domestic laws in specific areas, reference was made to international treaties to supplement national legislation. She regretted that she had no information on the frequency of reference to the Convention in Turkmen courts.

14. Information on the Convention and its ratification was widely disseminated in the national language through the mass media, and through various seminars and training programmes organized by ministries, often with the cooperation of international organizations.

15. She informed the Committee that numerous NGOs were active in advancing the interests of women and their rights in Turkmenistan. Many unions represented women and protected their professional rights and working conditions in industrial and other

occupations. She drew special attention to the Union of Women of Turkmenistan, which had a membership of over 1 million women, and the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, 35 per cent of whose members were women, and described efforts to raise public awareness on the content and aims of the Convention.

16. The Constitution safeguarded the equal rights of men and women in every sphere, including their right to be protected from all forms of discrimination. Furthermore, with regard to the fulfilment of international obligations, she reiterated her Government's commitment to the full implementation of the Convention, and stressed that there was no ambiguity in the interpretation of constitutional protection against the violation of human rights, applicable to state institutions, private enterprises or individual persons. Turkmenistan's legal system, complemented by article 18 of the Constitution, monitored the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and imposed criminal and administrative sanctions for the infringement of the rights of all nationals.

17. She acknowledged the importance of timely reporting to the Committee for the purpose of monitoring the implementation of the Convention, and expressed her delegation's gratitude for the Committee's understanding of the technical difficulties that had created unforeseen delays. Her Government would endeavour to submit future reports on time.

18. Men in Turkmenistan fulfilled their social responsibility and performed their duty as parents. Civil society was instrumental in combating stereotypes, and its efforts, combined with those of the State in providing social assistance and allowances, promoted the achievement of genuine equality and allowed women to achieve their full potential, and ease the burden on families.

19. Strategies for a universal model of equality varied depending on national cultures and levels of development, but she agreed that there should be a single model by which Turkmenistan would be guided.

20. **Ms. Patten** asked to what extent the Turkmen judiciary was sensitized to the provisions of the Convention and, if training programmes were provided to the judiciary and police, which department conducted them. She noted that the delegation was not in a position to provide specific data on the frequency with which the Convention had been cited in the courts of Turkmenistan, but she was still interested in hearing

about any actual instances in which such reference had been made in the courts.

21. The delegation had described an impressive body of legislation, including constitutional provisions, aimed at promoting the protection of the rights of women. However, she wondered how many women held positions within the judiciary, what indicators existed to show how many women had access to the courts, and whether legal aid was available to women who wished to seek recourse through the system of justice. Noting that, according to the combined periodic report, there were no statistics on manifestations of discrimination against women, she said she was curious to know what mechanisms had been established for the collection of gender-disaggregated data on discrimination against women, and whether there was a central bureau for data collection.

22. **Ms. Shin**, following up on the question raised by Ms. Patten, expressed her disappointment at the lack of gender-disaggregated data, and asked why the Government had not allocated the earnings from the country's rich natural resources to boost the national capacity in data collection. She also drew attention to the statement that the 2000 census in Turkmenistan had been random, pointing out that a population census could not be conducted as a random exercise, and asked how regularly the census was taken.

23. She further enquired why Turkmenistan had not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention, and what factors had been responsible for the country's fall in rank on the human development index compiled by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), where Turkmenistan had dropped from 86th place in 2004, to 97th place the following year. Moreover, no data had been provided by Turkmenistan on the gender-adjusted human development index for 2005. She wondered whether the country's natural riches and increased production had brought benefits to the population as a whole and to women in particular.

24. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling**, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

25. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) assured the Committee that members of the judiciary, members of Parliament and law enforcement officials were given extensive training on the provisions of the Convention and gender sensitization by various sources, including

ministries and branches of government, and in academic forums.

26. She had neither specific data on the number of women in the judiciary nor statistics on the frequency of references made to the Convention in judicial proceedings, but she could confirm that its provisions were in fact cited in court. Since Turkmenistan was a State in transition, certain mechanisms had not been fully developed, but with international assistance, it had begun to compile data disaggregated by gender, and a number of training workshops had been held to boost competence in that area. In addition, a gender-based programme was being implemented and, to that end, the department responsible for statistics had been upgraded to ministerial status and had been preparing a body of data, broken down according to the various branches of the economy. She was hopeful that the material concerned would be presented to the Committee in Turkmenistan's next periodic report.

27. She took the opportunity to provide information on the provision of free education and universal access to education at the primary and secondary level, anticipated improvements in the standards of education and rates of infant mortality.

28. Turkmenistan remained committed to its obligations under the Convention and would proceed with ratification of the Optional Protocol and other international instruments when it was ready to do so. Turning to other international requirements, she said that the human development statistics presented by the delegation provided convincing evidence of progress in the advancement of women in Turkmenistan. The Government had invested substantial resources in the compilation of national statistics for the purpose of complying with international norms of classification.

29. *Ms. Manalo, Chairperson, resumed the Chair.*

30. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, raised the issue of reference to the Convention in the Turkmen courts, and asked whether women had availed themselves of recourse to the justice system in the protection of their rights. She also hoped that, in addition to representatives from the Permanent Mission of Turkmenistan based in New York, future delegations appearing before the Committee would include officials directly involved in issues relating to women.

31. She asked for clarification on the independence of the Union of Women and how much influence the Government had over its operations. She also asked the delegation to provide further details on the activities of NGOs.

32. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) confirmed that the Convention had been invoked in the courts where necessary, and reiterated that, where there were gaps in domestic legislation, the Convention was cited as having full legal effect.

33. She would try to ensure that in future delegations presenting periodic reports before the Committee included representatives from the capital. Responding to the questions relating to the activities of NGOs, she apologized for not being able to provide statistical data regarding the work conducted by NGOs in the protection of the rights of women. The members of civil society in Turkmenistan, including the Union of Women, enjoyed independence, and were entitled to approach the Government with questions and proposals. In May 2006 an international conference on issues of relevance to women had been arranged by NGOs, and the outcome had been submitted for the attention of the Government.

34. Women in Turkmenistan had the constitutional right to apply to the courts to seek remedies. She stressed that women were widely represented in all areas of national political, social and economic life.

Article 3

35. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said it was not clear from the information presented in the periodic report and the responses to the Committee's questions what inter-institutional coordination mechanisms existed to guarantee the advancement of women. Noting that sectoral action conducted by individual ministries required a coordinating mechanism, she sought clarification on the existence of such machinery.

36. It was not sufficient simply to prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender or to broadly declare free access to all fields of life; it was also necessary to promote opportunities to facilitate such access and to prevent discrimination. What plans were envisaged to ensure that political and constitutional statements on equality became a reality in practice? The emphasis on the protection of the family and the maternal role of women was indeed commendable, but she reminded the delegation that rights should be

guaranteed to all women, whether or not they were mothers.

37. Reliable and comprehensive statistics on issues relating to each article of the Convention were not only a help to the Committee and States parties themselves in assessing progress or setbacks, they were also needed for internal follow-up within States to analyse the implementation of treaty provisions.

38. **Ms. Popescu** said she was interested in knowing which departments, national institutions or international bodies had been involved in the preparation of the report. She reminded the delegation that the Division for the Advancement of Women was a valuable source of assistance and expertise in that exercise.

39. She referred to the 1991 national plan of action, as described on page 13 of the responses to the issues and questions raised by the Committee, aimed at addressing the 12 critical areas of concern set out in the Beijing Platform for Action. The creation of a mechanism for coordinating actions at the local, national and international levels had been cited as the first priority for the plan of action. She therefore wished to know whether such a mechanism had been created and, if so, what form it took and how it was related to the Union of Women.

40. In addition, noting that those areas of concern contained no specific reference to violence against women, she asked whether the action plan dealt with the various forms of violence perpetrated against women and, in general, what had been the process by which the plan had been drafted and the timetable established for monitoring and evaluating its implementation.

41. **Ms. Saiga**, endorsing the comments made by Ms. Arocha Domínguez and Ms. Popescu, asked the delegation to elaborate on its response to question 6, as raised by the Committee under article 3 (CEDAW/C/TKM/Q/2), regarding the establishment of a national mechanism for the advancement of women, with responsibility for supporting the implementation of the Convention. She was also interested in knowing what was the likely time frame for the duration of the plan of action.

42. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that, the national plan of action for the advancement of women had been prepared in 1999 on the basis of wide-ranging

consultations involving all ministries and the Union of Women and had been approved by Parliament. The Government had established an interdepartmental coordinating council, composed of representatives of ministries, the law enforcement authorities and civil society organizations, to oversee the implementation of the action plan and ensure coordination between all the relevant bodies. The plan was being reviewed with a view to evaluating progress made.

43. Turkmen women were able to reconcile their family and social responsibilities. Indeed, the percentage of female managers (42 per cent) was significantly higher than in other States. If necessary, she would provide further information on the legislative framework for women's involvement in the country's economic life. While family life did take precedence in Turkmenistan, all women, whether or not they had children, enjoyed equal rights.

44. On the issue of statistics, she said that the National Institute of State Statistics and Information did not have comprehensive data illustrating progress made in specific areas. Efforts were being made to rectify that situation. There were no statistics on domestic violence because the female victims of such violence did not tend to bring legal proceedings, even though they were entitled to do so. However, domestic violence was not particularly widespread in Turkmenistan.

45. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** recalled that the communications and inquiry procedures set out in the Optional Protocol were important tools that could facilitate States parties' understanding of their obligations under the Convention and enquired as to the obstacles preventing the Government of Turkmenistan from ratifying the Optional Protocol. The State party should also indicate why it had not ratified the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention concerning the Committee's meeting time.

46. She welcomed the establishment of an interdepartmental coordinating council responsible for overseeing the implementation of the national plan of action and enquired whether the members of the council representing ministries occupied senior, decision-making posts within their respective departments and whether they also served as gender focal points. Lastly, she would be grateful for more information about the function of the council — did it

play a merely advisory role or were its decisions binding?

47. **Ms. Shin** enquired whether the interdepartmental coordinating council had a dedicated secretariat. She also asked how individual Turkmen women wishing to improve their lives could access information about their rights. The responses to the list of issues and questions referred to a website created by the Union of Women, but she wondered if the Government of Turkmenistan had its own website dedicated to women's issues and, if so, whether its existence had been publicized. The State party should also indicate how many women had access to the Internet.

48. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan), responding to the questions posed by Ms. Schöpp-Schilling, said she was not aware that her Government had any substantive objections to ratifying the Optional Protocol or the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention. She therefore assumed that the necessary ratification procedures were under way.

49. As far as the interdepartmental coordinating council was concerned, ministry representatives tended to be fairly senior officials with decision-making responsibility, and their recommendations often formed the basis of administrative decisions. The council's main function was to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the national action plan. While it was primarily a consultative body, it could approach individual ministries to discuss issues relating to the advancement of women and gender equality.

50. All women in Turkmenistan were entitled to seek information about their rights. To that end, they could approach civil society organizations, a number of which had established citizens' advice bureaux, or address themselves directly to the Government in person or in writing. The Union of Women, which was an independent NGO, could also refer individual complaints to the relevant ministries. She acknowledged that Internet access in rural areas was insufficient, but informed the Committee that the information available on the Government's website was also broadcast on national television on a daily basis. A number of educational centres offered training in the area of information technology.

51. **Mr. Flinterman** welcomed the fact that the provisions of the Convention had been incorporated into Turkmenistan's domestic legal order but expressed disappointment that the State party had been unable to

provide any specific examples of cases in which the Convention had been referred to by the courts.

52. He was afraid that the Government of Turkmenistan did not fully understand the scope of the Convention. While article 4 provided for the use of temporary special measures to accelerate the achievement of de facto equality between men and women, the measures described in the report seemed to be of a more general nature. In that connection, he would be grateful for a detailed response to question 10 of the list of issues and questions.

53. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that she understood why the Committee attached such importance to the direct invocation of the Convention by the courts. She would ensure that information on specific cases was transmitted to members. The Government of Turkmenistan had taken temporary special measures in a number of areas with a view to ensuring de facto equality between women and men. For instance, a quota system had been successfully applied to university entrance procedures, with the result that women's participation in higher education had reached 51 per cent.

Article 5

54. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** said that she had been struck by the report's focus on women's reproductive functions and, in addition, by the assertion that wives were expected to obey their husbands. She wondered what would happen if a woman decided that she no longer wished to submit to her husband's orders or to bear children. Gender-based stereotypes reinforced women's subordination and denied them the opportunity to engage in non-traditional activities. The State party should provide information on any measures taken to eliminate such stereotypes. She would also be grateful for detailed answers to questions 12 and 13 of the list of issues and questions.

55. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** acknowledged the extremely broad scope of article 5 of the Convention but expressed concern that the State party's report had focused solely on the role of women in the family. While the Constitution of Turkmenistan and the Marriage and Family Code provided for the equal rights of both spouses in marital and family relations, the report made no mention of the role played by men. As a mother herself, she could understand why mothers might be regarded as sacred in Turkmenistan, but she

stressed that fathers had an equally important role to play in the child-rearing process. Referring in particular to paragraph 148 of the report, she enquired whether fathers were involved in decisions regarding family size.

56. Undue emphasis on women's role as mothers could undermine their intrinsic worth as women. More generally, unbalanced gender roles within the family had a negative effect on both sexes and made it impossible to achieve de facto gender equality.

57. **Ms. Gaspard** echoed previous speakers' disappointment at the State party's failure to provide statistical information and at the absence of Government representatives who were directly responsible for implementing policies for the advancement of women. While the report gave the impression that Turkmenistan was a paradise for women, the Committee was well aware of the gap between de jure and de facto equality.

58. In recent years, women's organizations in Turkmenistan had contributed to the elimination of some gender stereotypes. It would be helpful to know more about the role of the media in that regard. She would be particularly interested to know whether a dedicated women's press existed, and whether programmes combating stereotypes were broadcast on the television and the radio. Lastly, she enquired whether all Turkmen women were able to access the United Nations website and find information about the Convention.

59. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) said that she regretted the report's apparent bias towards mothers and emphasized that women's role in society was by no means confined to motherhood. Within the family, both spouses had equal rights and responsibilities and decisions were taken by mutual agreement. If a woman, in consultation with her husband, decided not to have children because she wanted to further her studies or her career, she was entitled to do so.

60. The Government attached considerable importance to reproductive health care, and women's rights were given priority in that area. The establishment of family planning centres meant that 90 per cent of pregnancies now resulted in healthy births. Traditionally, Turkmen mothers had several children, but they tended to leave a gap of three years between births, during which time they could resume their normal activities.

61. Returning to the issue of domestic violence, she reiterated that battered women did not tend to approach the courts, even though they were entitled to do so. However, psychological and medical facilities had been established to assist victims. The Government was doing everything possible to eliminate gender-based stereotypes, including those involving men, through advertising campaigns, the women's press, television programmes and newspaper articles.

62. **The Chairperson** wondered why women who experienced domestic violence did not go to the courts. Perhaps there was a stigma attached to such actions or perhaps Turkmen women were not aware of their rights.

63. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) replied that women did know their rights and did sometimes seek help. However, in Turkmenistan domestic violence was a rare phenomenon. People preferred to resolve such issue themselves without resorting to coercive measures from outside. The role of elders in the family was important in settling such issues.

64. **Ms. Simms** stressed that violence against women was a serious issue. It included rape, incest and the abuse of little girls. The head of the Turkmen delegation should insist that her Government attach high priority to that question. It was dangerous to wait for women to go to the police, as sometimes they might be killed or seriously injured before that happened.

65. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) stated that she would not fail to re-emphasize the importance of the issue to her Government, as it involved matters of family health. Much had been done to explain to citizens their human rights, but further action was still required in that area.

Article 6

66. **Ms. Šimonović** asked whether marital rape was a criminal offence in Turkmenistan and whether such services as Government-funded shelters and 24-hour help lines were available to battered women. It would be useful to know whether trafficking in women had been criminalized and, if prostitution was prohibited, what the sanctions were for men and women involved in it, and what assistance was available to women who wanted to leave prostitution.

67. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) noted that domestic violence was criminalized, that victims could apply to

the Ministry of Internal Affairs for assistance and that there was a 24-hour hotline. Since domestic violence was a rare phenomenon, there were no shelters, but if necessary, the situation in that regard would be re-examined.

68. There were no statistics on trafficking in women in the country. The economic and social factors conducive to such trafficking were not present, and it ran counter to the national culture. However, the Constitution did have articles banning prostitution and procurement. Grass-roots work was being done with young people to prevent them from going into prostitution and to make them aware of the health risks involved.

Articles 7 and 8

69. **Ms. Popescu** enquired as to the role and representation of women in politics and public life. Women accounted for only 14 per cent of members in local government bodies, and it was hard to understand why their number was so low. Information on the number of women in the Foreign Service and the number of women ambassadors would also be appreciated.

70. **Ms. Zou** expressed disappointment at the paucity of gender-disaggregated data on women's role in political and public life. Given that there were some 40 ethnic groups in Turkmenistan, it would be interesting to know what proportion of women in Parliament and the People's Council were members of minority ethnic groups and whether there were quotas. According to figures for 1999, 26 per cent of parliamentarians in the country had been women, while that number had now declined to a mere 16 per cent. What was the reason for that decrease?

71. **The Chairperson** enquired as to the number of Turkmen women employed in international organizations.

72. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan), referring to the decline in the number of women members of Parliament, explained that the Parliament itself was now smaller than before. Further, 42 per cent of ministers and people in decision-making positions in government were women. Three cabinet ministers, the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Social Welfare, were women. Women were being trained in diplomacy in increasing numbers, although she herself was Turkmenistan's only woman

ambassador. Women in the country were not only mothers and homemakers. They were now becoming more powerful both inside and outside the family. Much was being done to encourage men to take on more domestic chores. Those efforts were clearly effective, as, without them, women would not have been able to achieve as much as they had in the public sphere.

73. In Turkmenistan, 94 per cent of the population consisted of ethnic Turkmen. Since ethnic minorities were so small in number, there were no quotas, but members of such minorities enjoyed equal opportunities as citizens, and some occupied prominent positions.

Article 9

74. **The Chairperson** said it appeared that the Constitution of Turkmenistan did not allow women to change their citizenship. It was hard to see how that could be reconciled with the Convention.

75. **Ms. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) replied that all citizens had the right to choose their citizenship freely, without limitation. Many Turkmen had taken Russian citizenship.

Article 10

76. **Mr. Flinterman** said that he would have preferred more precise statistics to have been provided. For example, paragraph 84 of the report stated that, of the more than 1,000 students from Turkmenistan studying in institutions of higher learning in Turkey, "not a few" were women; it was not clear what that meant in terms of numbers. It was important to include sex-disaggregated data in the report. It was laudable that secondary education was free and compulsory, but the fact that the years of schooling had been reduced from 11 to 9, with pupils receiving secondary education from age 7 through 15 only, was cause for concern. There was a two-year gap between the end of secondary education and the beginning of higher education. Given the deterioration in the economic situation and the pressures for population increase, as well as the law making marriage for girls legal at age 16, it was not clear what the implications of that change in education would be for girls. Was the Government planning temporary special measures to give more girls and women a higher education and to encourage girls to study subjects and move into

professional specialties traditionally in the male domain? Finally, it would be helpful to know what reproductive health education was compulsory in secondary and primary schools.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.