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

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**Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women: Rwanda**

Third periodic report

451. The Committee considered the third periodic report of Rwanda (CEDAW/C/RWA/3) at its 227th meeting, on 1 February (see CEDAW/C/SR.227).

452. In presenting the third periodic report, the representative apologized for not being able to reply to the questions of the pre-session working group, which had been sent to the Government before the twelfth session. He said that communication problems between the permanent mission and the competent government offices had prevented him from doing so. He referred to the armed conflict that had been going on since October 1990, which had led to destabilization and a deterioration in the quality of life of the population, in particular of women and children. He noted that the establishment of a multiparty system had created uncertainty. He underlined the socio-economic factors that hampered the effective implementation of the Convention and pointed to the emphasis in the report on the situation of rural women, since they constituted the majority of women in Rwanda and carried out the most arduous tasks.

453. With regard to the political aspects of the status of women, the representative said that expenses had been incurred in the course of the war that should have been dedicated to the development of the country, in particular to the well-being of women. However, all political parties had included the advancement of women in their programmes, and a Ministry for the Family and the Advancement of Women had been created to help women become aware of their rights and liberties. Currently, there were three women ministers. Although there was no machinery to press for the recruitment of women in public service, the number of women in political positions had increased considerably. He noted, however, that the legislation referring to the elimination of discrimination against women could still be considerably improved.

454. Regarding socio-cultural aspects, the representative spoke about the Government's education and health policy and stated that women's associations like Urunana rw'Abanyarwandakazi mu Majyambere (URAMA) were currently stagnating because, in the past, URAMA had been attached to what had then been the only political party. Currently, however, URAMA and other non-governmental women's associations were trying to establish their identity and find new ways and

methods of carrying out their work. The Government's health policy concentrated on the most vulnerable groups of society, namely, mothers and children.

General observations

455. Members pointed out that the Government should be fully aware that marginalization and the increasing impoverishment of women constituted a serious obstacle to society as a whole. Regarding government programmes and awareness-raising campaigns to promote the advancement of women, members wanted to know what those programmes were and what the practical results of those campaigns had been.

456. Asked whether any efforts were being undertaken to remedy the current lack of statistical data disaggregated by gender, the representative stated that the statistical service was not well developed, nor was the need for disaggregating data by gender properly understood in the country.

457. In reply to questions on the number and category of persons that had been affected by the civil war, the representative stated that the number of displaced persons was 320,828, among whom there were 18,828 children under five years of age, 2,832 orphans, 780 widows and 11,000 pregnant or lactating women.

458. Concerning the preparation of the third periodic report, members inquired whether it reflected national consensus and whether women's organizations had also been involved in its preparation.

Questions related to specific articles

Article 2

459. Considering that women were deprived of equal rights in many fields, such as inheritance, property, access to credit, legal capacity (of married women) and political representation, members asked whether there were plans to enact the necessary laws or to amend existing ones. The representative explained that it was difficult to make parents change their traditions and to make them understand that their daughters, even if married, still had the right to inherit from their parents. Traditionally, families assumed the debts of their members and were entities that belonged to men rather than to women. To change people's customary outlook was a very slow process.

460. Members asked why the President of the Republic had not enacted the family code although it had been adopted in 1988.

Article 3

461. Members asked whether specific programmes were being carried out in Rwanda to advance the status of women and what form they took.

462. When asked for a timetable of URAMA efforts to advance the status of women, for information about the relationship between that association and the national machinery for the advancement of women or other similar institutions, whether it was a legitimate organization and what its administrative structure was, the representative said that, previously, URAMA had had close links with the single existing party in the country. With the establishment of the multiparty system, the association had lost its identity and structure. Currently, there was no further close connection with the Government and subsidies would have to be sought. Only when democracy had taken hold could it be expected that URAMA would draw up a plan of action.

463. As it had been stated in the third periodic report that the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention was the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior, members asked about the nature of the machinery for such monitoring and whether URAMA was also involved in the process.

Article 5

464. The representative explained that currently no change in traditional practices and customs was foreseen in any programmes.

Article 9

465. In view of the contradiction between the Law of 28 September 1963 regarding the conditions for transmission, retention, acquisition or change of nationality and the Convention, in that the Law was discriminatory to women, the representative agreed with the Committee's recommendation that the Government should do everything possible to revise the Law and bring it into line with the provisions of the Convention.

Article 10

466. Considering the low level of literacy in Rwanda, members inquired whether specific machinery existed to pursue the objective of URAMA to eliminate illiteracy among women. The representative replied that there was no special machinery to ensure that girls or boys received schooling, but that awareness-raising was being carried out through local community meetings, particularly as primary education was obligatory and free of charge.

Article 11

467. When asked about the existence of structural adjustment programmes, analyses of their negative effects and possible measures to secure the employment of women, the representative said that the effects in Rwanda had been devastating. A meeting with URAMA and the donor parties was planned to overcome the negative effects.

Article 12

468. With regard to a question about family planning services, the representative stated that family planning was dealt with by the National Office for Population. Its most important task was alerting women and men to the dangers that closely spaced pregnancies constituted for the lives of women and their children.

469. Members asked whether the statement in the third periodic report that Rwandese health policy remained "oriented towards mass medicine" and whether offering "priority care to the most vulnerable population groups" meant that contraceptives were easily available in Rwanda. They asked further what the contents of the family planning programmes and their results were, in view of the fact that a woman's fertility had a very important social meaning in African countries. In view of statistical data indicating that the most frequent offences for which women were imprisoned were illegal abortions, members inquired whether women had any access at all to safe and legal abortion.

470. The representative mentioned the recently created National Laboratory for the Fight against AIDS to raise people's awareness of the importance of using condoms. Awareness was being promoted through radio publicity, information distributed by local dispensaries and specific seminars. Members asked whether education programmes for young girls existed.

Article 14

471. Considering the large percentage of women living in rural regions, members asked whether any specific programmes had been implemented for them and whether there was the intention and means of evaluating, in monetary terms, the economic value of the domestic work undertaken by rural women. The representative stated that, apart from awareness-raising campaigns, there were no specific programmes for rural women. The five-year plans referred to development in general, but were not specifically geared to women.

472. Members asked under which exceptional conditions rural women could own land and obtain access to credit.

Concluding observations

473. While members of the Committee expressed appreciation for the timely submission of the third periodic report, in spite of the country's dire economic and political situation, and also for the frank presentation, they suggested that the third periodic report did not show the Government's commitment to advancing the status of women since it often referred to legal institutions that had been in force at the time of the previous report. It was not apparent whether the actual situation of women had changed and what measures had been taken to improve their situation. As the representative had not answered most of the questions that had been sent to the Government before the twelfth session, members asked that the answers be provided to the Secretariat in writing within a month and be circulated to them in the working languages. They urged that the Convention be disseminated as broadly as possible and hoped that it would be a useful instrument for Rwandese women to make the Government adhere to its international commitment to improve the status of women.