
Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women
Eighth session

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Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women: Byelorussian Soviet Socialist
Republic

Second periodic report

375. The Committee considered the second periodic report of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (CEDAW/C/13/Add.5 and Amend.1) at its 147th meeting, on 2 March 1989 (CEDAW/C/SR.147).

376. The representative introduced the second periodic report by briefly describing the status of women and the related policy measures that had been taken. She said that, since 1983, the reform of the political system had strengthened democracy in the country and led to better management and to more importance being attached to women's matters. The Government recognized the need to increase the proportion of women in high-level positions and amendments were being made to the Constitution to enable public organizations, such as the women's councils, to encourage a wider representation of women in governmental posts at all levels. She said that in the previous three years, as a result of the current economic reforms, the average wage of industrial and office workers had risen by 18 per cent and that of collective farm workers by 24 per cent. More housing had been provided and the consumption of consumer goods had risen, indicating a rise in social standards.

377. The representative responded to the questions posed by the Committee on specific articles of the Convention. She said that women could take cases of infringements of their labour rights, such as unlawful dismissal or reassignment, to the court. Cases of dismissal for refusal to cohabit, or resistance to sexual advances by superiors, had not been brought before the courts. Under the Constitution, every citizen had the right to make proposals to, or to criticize, State authorities who were then obliged to reply to the proposals or criticism and to undertake any measures that were necessary. Persecution for criticism was forbidden.

378. It was not considered necessary to introduce special measures, such as quotas or training programmes, to achieve the advancement of women since training, retraining and redeployment programmes and courses to enhance skills existed. At least half of the participants in them were women.

379. Sociological studies had been conducted on stereotyped roles of behaviour and their recommendations had been used in developing the necessary legislation. The studies showed that women still spent two or three times as much time on housework as men. Efforts had been made to develop and improve social support services, to introduce more labour-saving appliances and to make all members of the family aware of the problems experienced by women in the household. The campaign had been conducted through the mass media in the form of newspaper columns, publications, and radio and television programmes.

380. The representative reported that prostitution did not exist as a social problem although individual cases of it occurred. She considered them to be a manifestation of the moral neglect of individual young people, and appropriate measures were taken in each instance.

381. In response to a question posed on the political participation of women, the representative gave some statistics. She said that 64 per cent of the members of bureaucratic organizations, such as co-operative and social organizations, were women, who served as managers of enterprises, judges, procurators, chairmen of collectives and State farms, and heads of schools and higher educational establishments. Women held the posts of Deputy Chairman and Secretary of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and of Deputy President of the Council of Ministers. They also held 180 (37.1 per cent) of the deputy positions in the Supreme Soviet. Thirty per cent of the Communist Party of the Republic were women, which was the same proportion of women as that elected to the leading organs of the Party. Women represented 36.3 per cent of the national judges and 57.2 per cent of the State representatives. Three of the 25 judges of the Supreme Court were women,

who had power within their spheres of competence. There were no women in the Politburo.

382. Regarding the question about the term "house committees", the representative explained that they were public associations elected by the occupants of residential houses or streets. They managed utilities and services, the planting and care of trees and grass, the maintenance of children's play areas, and holiday activities and facilities for invalids, the elderly and persons living on their own. The women's councils collaborated with the house committees.

383. An increase in the number of women scientific workers had been observed and, currently, women represented 40 per cent of the total. The representative reported that 118 doctors of science, 80 academicians, members of the academy, or full professors and over 40 per cent of the students in technical colleges were women. Basic measures for education were expanded in 1988 to increase the training opportunities, facilities and scope of occupations for women. There were 670,000 children in pre-school establishments. The number of available places was still insufficient but measures had been included in the current five-year plan to increase them, particularly in the rural areas. All students at higher education and technical colleges were given special privileges with regard to securing places in pre-school establishments for their children.

384. The representative said that statistics were not available on the proportion of women in male-dominated areas of employment. The proportion of women attending the 253 vocational technical training schools was 60 per cent. The curricula consisted of training and skill enhancement programmes conducted at the work place or at the schools. Mothers with children below the age of eight were released from work so that they could upgrade their qualifications while continuing to receive full pay. According to the law, fathers could also take parental leave for the care of sick children but the provision for prolonged child-care leave applied only to the mother, which could create obstacles to the promotion of her career and skills.

385. Regarding the policy of equal pay for work of equal value in female-dominated sectors of the economy, the representative stated that the policy was being applied in all sectors, irrespective of the dominant sex. Sometimes women were not able to maintain or upgrade their qualifications, owing to career breaks, a fact that was reflected in their earnings. The problem was currently under discussion.

386. The indicators used to study the general level of health of the community were the rates for births and deaths and infant mortality. Forty per cent of the State budget for the provision of medical care was spent on obstetric and paediatric services. In 1988, the birth rate was 16.2 per thousand and the death rate 10.1 per thousand persons. In 1987 the corresponding figures were 16.1 per thousand and 9.9 per thousand persons, respectively. There had been little change in the infant mortality rate, which was reported as being 13.4 per thousand infants in 1987 and 13.2 per thousand infants in 1988. Those figures were considered high and reflected a shortcoming in the preventive medical-care services. The demographic policies of the State were to provide housing and assistance to young families so as to encourage an increase in the birth rate, which had been static for several years. The Government felt that the measures taken under the demographic policy did not contradict the right of spouses to decide how to plan the spacing of their children. In order to encourage larger families, benefits were given and special privileges accorded with regard to school places, travel

opportunities and participation in pioneer camps. The State and employers made monthly cash payments to the parents of larger families. The areas of employment considered harmful to the health of women were classified as work underground and work involving high temperatures, excessive vibration, welding, toxic substances, heavy loads, heavy goods vehicles and machinery.

387. In response to another question, the representative stated that 35 per cent of the total population lived in rural areas. Women represented a lower proportion of the rural working force than the urban one owing to the larger urban population and the seasonal nature of work in the rural areas. There was only a slight variation in the average level of remuneration between rural and urban areas.

388. The Family Code strived to create a family situation that was representative of the conjugal relationship between the partners, to protect the mother and her child and to allow children to grow up within the family and society. Hierarchical attitudes still prevailed with regard to household management, decisions and the sharing of the work-load within the home. Studies of the distribution of family and household duties had been undertaken in colleges, the women's councils and by women themselves, and the recommendations had been forwarded to public organizations. All women's studies were financed by the State and trade unions. Voluntary social studies were undertaken by the women's councils.

389. In reply to further questions posed by the Committee, the representative said that women actively supported the peace movement in general and the nuclear disarmament movement in particular, at all levels. Women members of the trade union commissions at the regional, municipal and republican levels were concerned with improving the conditions of work for women and of services for working women with children. Measures to retrain women after career breaks were carried out in special schools and courses.