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Committee on the Elimination of  
Discrimination against Women  
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Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of  
Discrimination against Women: Greece

Initial report

65. The Committee considered the initial report of Greece (CEDAW/C/5/Add.28) at its 86th, 87th and 91st meetings, held on 31 March and 2 April 1987 (CEDAW/C/SR.86, 87 and 91).
66. In her introduction, the representative of Greece informed the Committee that since 1981 the Government's policy in matters related to the equality of the sexes had changed. While in the past the problem of equality had been of concern only to women's organizations, State agencies had been created to deal with the problem. However, in spite of the significant progress in various fields, the country had not achieved its aims. Much work remained to be done.
67. She said that although the 1975 Constitution provided for the protection of equal individual and social rights and obligations, it also allowed for deviations from the general principle of equality. Currently, the General Secretariat of Equality was working to eliminate the few discriminatory provisions that remained in the legislation. Equality of the sexes had been included in the country's five-year Economic and Social Development Programme for the first time in 1983. Apart from the willingness of the Government to take special temporary measures, a programme was set up for the development of activities that had been unknown in Greece until recently. The major difficulty, however, continued to be social prejudices. That was also the main reason for the low level of participation of women in the country's political life.
68. An endeavour was being made to inform the population on the subject of equality, and the social infrastructure was being developed gradually. The representative enumerated specific mechanisms that had been created to promote and monitor the new situation, such as the position of Special Adviser to the Prime Minister on Women's Affairs, the Council and the General Secretariat for the Equality of the Sexes and decentralized equality offices in all prefectures of Greece.
69. As the fields of education, work, employment, social security, health, welfare and family were considered particularly important for the promotion of equality, the representative informed the Committee of the latest developments in those fields and of related positive action programmes and gave a summary of the

activities planned for the near future. She also included in her detailed presentation recent statistical data.

70. The representative explained that the education system was passing through a period of transition. Several positive action programmes had been undertaken in that field, such as the adaptation of all school texts to the principle of equality. She mentioned, *inter alia*, that one of the aims of vocational guidance was to ensure that sexually stereotyped roles did not affect the professional choices of young people. A sex education programme had been set up to come into effect in 1987 and an equality guide had been prepared in order to make school teachers aware of equality issues.

71. With regard to the work-force, she said that considerable effort had been made, principally through positive action, to eliminate all forms of discrimination concerning equality of opportunity and treatment and specifically access to employment and remuneration. Women, however, did not exercise their right to work on the same terms as men did. In 1985, women constituted only 35.4 per cent of the work-force, while accounting for 53.3 per cent of the unemployed.

72. Social security for employees and the right to health care were constitutionally guaranteed and granted without discrimination. She drew attention to measures that had been taken recently, such as the granting to each parent of three months parental leave for the upbringing of small children, a right which was not transferable to the other parent. The representative also drew attention to preventive medicine and pre-natal care and mentioned the existence of provisions, for the first time, for the prevention of mental illness and the treatment of mentally-ill women and their social rehabilitation. Greece's first reception centre and shelter for abused women would become operative soon.

73. The representative mentioned that a bill concerning the control of advertising and the unacceptable exploitation of the human body by the advertising media had been presented to the Parliament. The representative made special reference to women farmers and said that, as farm workers, women were paid less than men, not with regard to the same work, but because the jobs they did were not as well paid. There was also a distinct division of labour between women and men. Finally, she enumerated the new adjustments made in family law to ensure equality in the family.

74. The members of the Committee congratulated the government representative on her presentation of the report and underscored unanimously its excellent quality. It followed meticulously the general guidelines regarding the form and content of reports received from States parties under article 18 of the Convention and gave detailed comments on each article of the Convention in addition to providing substantial information. The experts praised its frankness and its critical tone and welcomed the fact that it showed the country's strong commitment to the status of women. Most experts were impressed with the efforts made by the country in trying to eliminate discrimination against women and with the establishment of the appropriate mechanisms in related fields. They also encouraged the further development of programmes that were already set up to alter traditional attitudes or to widen the educational choices of girls, to achieve equal employment opportunities and to involve women in political and administrative decision-making in all sectors. The report of Greece showed to what extent a strong political will was able to change attitudes and how important the massive support given by women's organizations was. Some experts expressed the view that Greece, a country recently

under a military dictatorship and located in the southern part of Europe, was now in the vanguard of Europe.

75. A question was raised as to whether the orthodox faith changed in any way the attitudes towards the equality of the sexes.

76. It was asked whether the Convention was stronger than national laws in Greece and whether a judge had to rely on treaty provisions. More information was requested on the relationship between social prejudices and the awarding of justice. Experts asked for examples of administrative measures that were adopted to penalize infringements of laws of equality.

77. Another question was whether the nationwide information network on all aspects of the equality issue also incorporated rural women.

78. It was asked whether public opinion in Greece was hostile to the women's movement and how the women's movement could be protected against political changes in future; whether article 116 (2) of the Constitution rendered discrimination possible or even legal; and what means of recourse were available in court or through other public authorities if legal provisions were not in accordance with the Constitution. It was asked whether institutions, such as the recourse of amparo or a "constitutional recourse action", existed or whether women had access to legal aid.

79. Concern was expressed as to whether the monitoring function of the specialized authorities to promote the principle of equality really reached all women in the country and whether women were aware that new laws improved their situation.

80. As to the mechanisms set up in the country to ensure equality, it was asked whether the Council for the Equality of the Sexes replaced similar existing mechanisms, what links existed between the Council and the General Secretariat for the Equality of the Sexes and whether any special committee in the Parliament of Greece dealt with women's problems. Another inquiry concerned the funds available to provide grants to encourage women's initiatives, and more information was sought on the functions of the consultative committee within the General Secretariat for Equality. A question was also asked about the way in which the General Secretariat participated in national development programmes and how those programmes related to the promotion of women. It was also asked whether equality bureaux existed for all levels of government administration.

81. Reference was made to the importance of temporary special measures, and more information was sought about them and on the evaluation of the results. It was asked whether employers showed interest in employing more women if they received special subsidies. It was asked whether training programmes for women in co-operatives were subsidized or whether the women concerned had to contribute to their financing.

82. One question concerned the existence of programmes for the education of young couples and whether those programmes penetrated married life. It was asked what the proportion was of men that participated in the seminars and conferences organized by the General Secretariat for the Equality of the Sexes and to what extent men were involved in the work towards equality. The work carried out in order to change gender roles was also welcomed. Other questions were asked about

the achievements in making the media aware of the promotion of women and about the percentage of women working for the national radio company and the press.

83. The problem of pornography was addressed, and details were requested on the proposed bill of law to eliminate the exploitation of the female body for publicity purposes.

84. Experts were concerned about the low representation of women in Parliament and in political parties and asked why the percentage of women in 1985 was lower than four years earlier, why women had not yet attained important positions in political life in spite of all the efforts made and whether the question had not been looked into by the General Secretariat. They also inquired how the political parties viewed the struggle for women's equality and if they took any action to increase women's representation within the parties. Astonishment was expressed at the low percentage of women representatives in smaller towns and the higher percentage in larger communities, whereas in some countries the opposite was true. Clarification was sought on the statement that the State was unable to influence the degree of female participation in non-governmental organizations. Concern was expressed about the low participation of women in trade unions, and more information was requested on clashes occurring between women's organizations and political parties.

85. It was asked about the restrictions on women entering the army and why women were not admitted to military academies. It was also asked whether social prejudices were the obstacles to the political participation of women.

86. As there was no discrimination with regard to appointments in public administration under the Civil Service Code, information was sought about the position of women at decision-making levels and about the number of women ambassadors.

87. A number of reasons for the low representation of women at the international level were suggested: it might be related to different entry conditions for women under the Public Function Code; it could stem from the lack of sufficient high-ranking women in Greece; or it could be related to the fact that women were unable to attend committee meetings outside normal working hours because of family duties. The question was raised whether a monitoring committee dealing with the entry of women into public responsibilities existed in each ministry, and whether, in the case of a married couple, both spouses were allowed to work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

88. Praise was expressed for the progressive legislation in matters of nationality. Clarification was sought on the provision which related to what age a child born out of wedlock could be recognized as a lawful child.

89. The achievements made by the country in the field of education were particularly commended. Questions referred to the reasons for the high rate of illiteracy among women and to the number of women who directed institutions of higher education. Additional information was sought on concrete steps taken to attract more women to technical education, on the curricula for home economics and whether they were the same for boys and girls, on the prospects for religious academies to accept girls in the future and on the intention of the Government of Greece to terminate the existing sex discrimination in the schools of the Ministry of Public Order.

90. With regard to the elimination of discrimination in employment, the large gap between the de jure and the de facto situation was mentioned. There was an inquiry about the number of cases concerning infringements of the legal provisions and whether the differing minimum ages for appointment to the public sector based on sex led to segregation. It was asked whether Greece indeed intended to abrogate the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention No. 45 on women and underground mining work and Convention No. 89 banning certain night work for women, in order to create equal working conditions for both sexes.

91. Other questions referred to the situation in practice as regards the rule on equal pay for work of equal value. Figures on differing wages for male-dominated jobs compared with female-dominated jobs were requested. Clarification was sought on the frequency of job evaluation schemes and on the results of cases of sex discrimination that were taken to court. Experts asked which jobs were prohibited for women and for what reasons. The revision of over-protective legislation was welcomed. It was asked why, under the work-force employment agency programme, the subsidy for each man taken on was 900 drachmas a day and for each woman 1,000 drachmas a day.

92. Information was sought on the proportion of women migrant workers compared to men and on whether the employment situation of women migrant workers returning to Greece from abroad was any different from that of men.

93. Statistics referring to the unemployment rate of women, in general, and of divorced women, in particular, were requested.

94. While the institution of a non-transferable right to parental leave was particularly commended, it was asked whether and to what extent it was utilized by fathers. The ratification of the ILO Convention No. 156 concerning equality of opportunity and workers with family responsibilities was welcomed.

95. It was asked whether the Government undertook any measures to influence the private sector as regards the provision of social security measures for women. Other questions referred to the functioning of crèches and to the general attitude of Greek employers to such facilities. It was asked whether maternity leave meant leave with or without pay.

96. Experts asked whether married female civil servants could include their husbands in their medical insurance coverage and whether single people also had the right to retire after 15 years of service and, if not, why not. It was asked whether the existing system of unemployment benefits discriminated against women.

97. Whereas in one part of the report abortion was said not to be a method of family planning, it was referred to as being a means of birth control in another part thereof. Information was requested on the rate of abortion, whether it was being reduced as a result of family planning measures, whether abortion services were available for rural women and whether AIDS (Acquired immune deficiency syndrome) was becoming a problem in the country.

98. Clarification was requested on family allowances and pensions for married and unmarried women.

99. Information was sought on the programmes envisaged by the Government to do away with the sex discrimination inherent in national collective labour agreements with regard to marriage allowance.

100. Questions were asked about co-operatives in the agricultural and the tourist sectors and about the ownership relation, referring to property of rural women. Experts also asked whether rural women could take out mortgages and bank loans and whether they could make contracts in their own name. Co-operatives for women only were welcomed; it was asked whether mixed co-operatives were allowed.

101. It was noticed that no data were provided on women in prison and on the education of women in prison. It was asked if it was difficult for women in practice to produce evidence for a claim in justice, even in a case of sex discrimination. It was also asked whether the fiscal and tax systems affected married and divorced women in different ways.

102. Experts wanted to know whether an infringement of the rule of equality before the law had legal consequences.

103. It was asked whether families still gave dowries, what the situation in rural areas was and what happened to such gifts in case of divorce. It was also asked whether women were adequately protected during the transition period from the old dowry system to the modern system.

104. Other questions referred to the sharing of property after divorce: whether women who left marriage suffered penalties with regard to maintenance, custody and property and whether divorced women who were working to maintain themselves experienced prejudice in seeking custody. It was asked whether domestic violence constituted a problem in Greece, whether women had the possibility to obtain protection and whether the number of refuges was sufficient. Information was sought on the options of a divorced wife as regards her surname. It was asked whether a single mother who had children was legally protected if her relationship had lasted for more than five years, as was the case in one expert's country.

105. In replying to questions asked by members of the Committee, the representative of Greece first explained that the fundamental legislative, social and political changes did not give rise to opposition among the people of Greece, although measures related to divorce, marriage and abortion had elicited strong reactions in conservative circles and in the orthodox church. Because of the general awareness of the problem of equality between women and men, the recently implemented measures had been well established in everyday life, in spite of initial fears raised by conservative political forces.

106. Policy measures to eliminate discrimination were the setting up of 54 decentralized equality offices, which were co-ordinated by the General Secretariat. The Council for Equality had been upgraded to the level of a General Secretariat with its own budget and staff and belonging to the Ministry of the Prime Minister. It distributed many publications on women's legal rights throughout the country. Discrimination in favour of women was legitimized by the Greek Constitution only in matters related to maternity and child care. Women had never campaigned to serve in the armed forces.

107. The representative said that the General Secretariat had participated in the drawing up of the five-year national development programme of the country. It also

supported activities of the women's movement. Its Consultative Committee was composed of members of the largest women's organizations. But it could not currently subsidize women's organizations, although they were able to apply to the Ministry of Culture for assistance.

108. The representative said that women were being trained in traditionally male occupations with the support of the Work-force Employment Agency and the General Secretariat for Equality, and the percentage of women in those occupations was rising. Vocational training was also given to female co-operative members.

109. The representative said that family planning centres and municipal health care offices throughout the country provided family planning advice. The General Secretariat was involved in the selection of programmes in the mass media and in the preparation of a new mass media bill to prevent the reproduction of sex stereotypes. Exact figures for the number of women employed in the media were not available. Only few held technical jobs.

110. The representative also said that the General Secretariat had drafted proposals for specific measures and women's organizations were asked to assist in the drafting of a bill on the exploitation of the female body in advertising and prostitution.

111. She said that the number of women in trade unions was not known, but it had been slightly increasing. She stated further that recent changes in the electoral law had had negative effects on women. The participation of women in political life was smaller in rural than in urban areas because of deep-rooted traditions.

112. The decentralization process in the country since 1981 had been helping women to become more active in local bodies. However, the political parties and government bodies had a sad record in promoting women in political life. The same applied in the diplomatic sphere. In 1981, 24 out of 120 new diplomats had been women and, in 1985, 39 out of 415 diplomats had been women. In reply to a specific question, she said that married couples could be employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and serve at the same mission.

113. The representative explained that compulsory education, changing social attitudes and the rule banning children below 15 from working restricted illiteracy to adults, especially the elderly. The actual rate of illiteracy was lower in reality than in the statistics. She gave some statistical data on women in the teaching profession and said that programmes of women's studies had been introduced at one university. Their purpose was to raise consciousness and to bring about a feminist perspective in education. Girls were encouraged to take up technical career options thanks to the abolishment of stereotypes in school textbooks and to vocational guidance in school. She further explained that curricula for home economics courses were the same for girls and boys and included subjects such as nutrition, child-care, health, hygiene and environment. No girls were admitted to religious schools because the graduates had to be ordained priests.

114. The representative said that while the law on equal pay for work of equal value applied only to the lower-income groups, discrepancies existed in many sectors in the higher levels. She supplied some vivid examples in the clothing and metallurgical industries. In 1986, some 13,498 complaints had been made with respect to employment. Protective legislation could not be repealed, as the

country was bound by international covenants from which the country could not derogate before their expiry.

115. The representative further explained that many improvements had been made in social security in the private sector. A self-employed mother on maternity leave was paid a childbirth allowance and a post-natal allowance as well as a salary. A mother who was not employed but covered by her husband's social security received only the two allowances. An unemployed mother was covered by grants from the Ministry of Health before and after giving birth to a child. The transfer of a pension from wife to husband was possible only if the husband was destitute or an invalid. However, proposals to change that rule existed already. Unmarried mothers were entitled to a lump-sum allowance, followed by monthly grants until the child was 16 years old. She stated that, in 1986, 264 women and 116 men had made use of parental leave.

116. The representative said that, although abortion had never been considered as a means of contraception, it had been used as such. With family planning centres currently in service, it was hoped that the number of abortions could be reduced. No statistics were available yet. AIDS was not yet a problem in Greece. Relevant information material was being distributed. She also said that the Ministry of Cultural Affairs organized seminars for women in prison.

117. She also said that there was no discrimination regarding women's access to bank loans or other credits. Spouses were taxed individually on their personal income. Alimony was taxable, and single mothers received a discount according to the age of their children.

118. The representative further explained there were 114 women's co-operatives working in agro-tourism and handicrafts. The Government gave subsidies, and banks and regional authorities and other organizations provided support. In supporting them, the General Secretariat aimed at enhancing women's experience in management and financial control. It was hoped that women would eventually become equal partners with men in the decision-making process in the production field.

119. The representative said that many judges were still influenced by traditional beliefs leading to discrimination against women. Seminars for judges were organized jointly by the General Secretariat and the Ministry of Justice to inform them of international conventions, family law and other legal provisions relating to equality between the sexes. She said that neither sex had access to legal aid services in Greece, but that women could get help from regional equality offices.

120. Equality bureaux existed in major government bodies throughout the country. In 1986, 104 cases of discrimination against women in employment were heard by the courts.

121. An amendment to the Penal Code, she said, led to automatic prosecution and longer imprisonment of rapists. Sexual abuse was, in general, punished by imprisonment. Having recognized the social problem of battered women, the General Secretariat took the initiative of opening shelter houses. In May 1987, a refuge and an information and counselling office would be opened as a pilot project.

122. The representative stated that between 1980 and 1985 many women expatriates had returned to Greece and 70 per cent of them had become housewives. The



Work-force and Employment Agency organized seminars for them to smooth out their repatriation.

123. The representative said that children born out of wedlock could be recognized voluntarily or through court procedures. They enjoyed the same rights and obligations as other children. The length of time of a de facto union of couples was no reason for granting them fringe benefits.

124. Although fathers were no longer obligated to provide their daughters with dowries, the system as such was not yet fully abolished. However, the taxation benefit, which was one of the main reasons for the giving of a dowry, had been replaced by the right of parental donation to girls and boys equally, which led also to a reduction in tax. Assets given to husbands as dowries had to be returned to the women.

125. Several members of the Committee congratulated the representative on her extensive replies and proposed the holding of a seminar in Greece at which the methodology for drawing up reports under article 18 of the Convention in compliance with the requirements contained in the guidelines could be discussed.

126. In answering additional questions posed by experts, the representative replied that no general statistics were available as regards requests for paternity leave by fathers. In one municipality, however, 106 men and 240 women had made such requests. The rate of unemployment was higher among single than among married women because of the higher number of demands.

127. As to the legal force of the Convention in comparison with national laws, it was said that in Greece, as in other countries, international conventions once ratified by Parliament became part of national legislation and, thus, superseded any contradicting and earlier national laws. Therefore, citizens could appeal to the courts directly on the grounds of the Convention.

128. The Committee thanked the Government of Greece and expressed its appreciation and satisfaction for the manner in which the report had been prepared, particularly as regards its organization and content, as well as for the detailed statistics, which supported the information presented, and its open acknowledgement of the obstacles women continued to face in Greece.

129. The Committee requested that the next report of Greece should contain further information about programmes directed towards changing attitudes to the role of women and men in society.