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

Second periodic report

350. The Committee considered the second periodic report of Mexico (CEDAW/C/131/Add.10 and Amend.1) at its 163rd meeting on 30 January 1990 (CEDAW/C/SR.163).

351. In introducing the second periodic report and responding to questions posed by members of the Committee, the representative of Mexico stated that her Government's aim was to ensure the full integration of women in social life and for the first time the Development Plan 1989-1994 contained a special section about the participation of women. The Government had made special efforts to obtain information on the status of women and to work on family planning. The implementation of the Convention was closely related to the persistence of poverty. She said that the Government would carry out a national census in 1990 in order to obtain a clearer picture of the progress made, and for the first time, the contribution of women would be taken into account. None the less, obstacles persisted that were hard to overcome in addition to the most serious economic crisis that the country had been undergoing since the Second World War and which made it more difficult to meet the country's commitments under the Convention. Aware of the most acute social problems, the Government had launched an ambitious

National Solidarity Programme to improve the living conditions of the most needy groups of the population.

352. Replying first to the general questions, namely the extent to which women had recourse to the courts to enforce their rights, she said that women and men were equal before the law and had the same rights of recourse. Regarding the functions of the Secretariat on the Status of Women established in 1987, she explained that it was a government office of the State of Guerrero to promote the rights of women and she outlined its objectives. Concerning the problem of domestic violence, she informed the members of a programme of social and family integration and legal assistance that dealt with cases of domestic violence and said further that many women's associations were involved in the matter and various institutions had been set up to help women in despair. Women's awareness in the matter had also been raised.

353. Regarding activities to publicize the Convention, she said that the contents of the Convention had been disseminated through publications and seminars and, as the bicentenary of the Declaration of Human Rights coincided with the Convention's tenth anniversary, the latter event had been used to give publicity to both instruments. The United Nations information kit on the Convention was widely distributed and various other events were organized.

354. Among the legal measures that had been adopted since the time of the initial report, she mentioned the reform of the Civil Code in the Federal District concerning the recognition of women's rights in cases of voluntary divorce, the regulation concerning donations among spouses, a clear definition of the conjugal domicile and the setting up of government agencies dealing with sex-related crimes. A follow-up to the 1982 National Demographic Survey that would give a clearer picture of the progress made would be the census planned for 1990. She also stated that no further obstacles than those already identified in the two reports prevented progress in the advancement of women.

355. Referring to questions raised under article 2, she explained that the results of the survey carried out in the first half of 1983 showed that the demographic trends of the female population were the same as those for the total population, the economic participation of women had been rising, the illiteracy rate in 1980 was 16.7 per cent for men and 20.6 per cent for women. The crucial problem, however, was the high rate of female drop-outs from school. There were vast regional differences concerning the levels of health and social well-being of women, and some of the further problems that affected women were related to disablement, prostitution, alcoholism and drug addiction. She stated further that the National Commission for Women had been set up in 1985 as a pressure group to watch over the implementation of statutory rights of women in the fields of employment, health and family law.

356. The Government had not taken any temporary special measures within the framework of article 4.

357. Turning to article 5, she said that information campaigns through the mass media had been carried out to stress the role of women in the family, the need for joint responsibility of all family members, and to fight against the drop-out of girls from school. The Government was revising school textbooks and providing adult education programmes and was trying to modify socio-cultural patterns of conduct of men and women in order to create a better understanding of the role of

women as workers and mothers. Although the progress in changing the socio-cultural patterns in the mass media was slow, there was growing awareness of the need for change.

358. Among the programmes to support women who were victims of rape, she mentioned a service that gave assistance to persons in need, the initiation of a revision of the relevant laws, the setting up, in 1989, of agencies, which were staffed with specially selected social workers and operated 24 hours a day and all year round and were located next to the criminal investigation offices. Those agencies helped women victims to lodge their complaints. With regard to the question whether religion or customs constituted an obstacle to the advancement of women, she said that there were beliefs that hindered the legalization of abortion. However, women were split into two camps on issues about abortion, which still remained an issue of conscience.

359. She said that she could not provide any data concerning the rate of prostitution, but the problem was being tackled by a 1989 reform of related legal provisions.

360. Turning to article 7, she said that there had been an increase in women's political participation since the initial report. There were a number of strong women's associations and some political parties were also dealing with the issue. The earthquake in Mexico City had led to a resurgence of new women's organizations. However, although the number of women in Parliament had increased, there was no increase in proportion. There was a marked rise of women in intermediate governmental levels, but not so much at the top levels. The same applied to the political parties. She also said that the Development Plan 1989-1994 envisaged the full integration of women in national development.

361. Referring to article 10, she said that sex education was provided through school textbooks in public and private schools at the primary and secondary levels and in community programmes, labour programmes and among other groups. The freely available textbooks had been revised to reflect equality between the sexes. Since the initial report, specific school programmes had been set up for the indigenous population. The reasons for the lesser representation of women at higher economic levels were very complex and were related to the still-prevailing prejudices and customs. There were also certain regional differences.

362. Turning to article 11, she said that one of the major effects of the economic crisis on the work of women and men was their accelerated entry into the labour market. Concerning the question as to who was included in the female economically active population, she said that so far only the formal remunerated employment of women had been taken into consideration in the national accounts. The national survey in 1990 would, for the first time, give a clearer picture of the informal sector. Women's rights in the field of health were protected in all sectors of the economy, but it was more difficult to implement that stipulation in isolated communities. She emphasized that the labour laws applied to all citizens irrespective of sex. Regarding the unemployment rate, she said that it was 1.5 to 2 per cent higher for women than for men, but that the overall rate was declining.

363. Regarding questions raised under article 12, she said that abortion was prohibited, except in certain circumstances, such as when it arose from rape, if the foetus was malformed or for reasons related to the health of the mother. There was only one special office that dealt with the consequences of rape. She also

said that it was practically impossible to estimate the number of abortions, the magnitude could only be inferred from the abortion-related complications. Since 1975, the family planning programme had been intensified and was integrated in the overall health programmes, and information had been disseminated to couples about how to regulate the number and spacing of their children. It was difficult to provide precise figures on the number of births per woman as not all childbirths took place in maternity clinics.

364. Referring to questions regarding the incidence of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), she said that 422 cases had been reported in women mostly between 25 and 44 years old mainly due to blood transfusions. Concerning a question as to whether health coverage was available only to the employed sector of the population, she stated that health legislation applied to all citizens. Since the initial report there had been a 20 per cent decline in the mortality rate of children. As for the principal causes of death and diseases of women, they were mainly cervical, uterine and breast cancer.

365. Regarding questions raised by members of the Committee under article 13, it was stated that no law made any distinction on the grounds of sex regarding the access to bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit.

366. Replying to a question concerning article 14, the representative said that the remaining most acute problems faced by rural women since the initial report were, as stated in the report, the population explosion, the demand for land and the shortcoming in producers' organizations. Rural women had the same access to family planning services as urban women, but it was more difficult to set them up in rural areas. Sustained efforts were also being made to provide agricultural training services to women in rural areas, and under the 1971 Agrarian Reform Law, farm workers over 16 years old, irrespective of their sex or age, if married, were eligible to obtain plots of land. In case of divorce, women could keep possession of such land. Women in rural areas were allowed to be associated with farms and industries set up in the Agricultural Industrial Unit.

367. Concerning a question on the legal protection for women who were living in de facto relationships, she replied that provided that the parties had lived together for at least five years and were not married to anyone else, both parties had a right to inheritance and succession.

368. Members of the Committee noted a very positive difference between the initial and the second periodic report in that the latter provided a lot of information not only on the de jure, but also on the de facto situation of women. They noted the frankness in the replies given and the commitment of the Government to women's issues and raised some additional questions. To the question as to whether the value of women's work carried out in their homes was taken into account by the courts in case of dispute about property during a divorce, the representative replied that it was of great concern to many women's organizations that women's work done in the household had not received proper recognition. To another question concerning the lack of specialized training programmes for women, she replied that the Government was putting strong emphasis on women's training programmes, especially in the informal sector. Regarding one comment that it might be more appropriate to structure the report according to the different regions, she said that it was up to the Committee to amend its guidelines accordingly.

369. Members requested more detailed information in the subsequent report on the informal sector, on the percentage of women living in poverty and on actions taken by trade unions for the benefit of women. On the question as to what the impact of the Convention had been on the status of women in the country, the representative stated that the Convention had certainly had an impact, but from the governmental standpoint, it was difficult to measure it. Special seminars and courses had been devoted to women's issues, but she had no concrete information on the activities taken by non-governmental organizations and women's movements as a result of the Convention. Concern was expressed that mass media might not be doing enough in trying to change the stereotyped ideas about women. The representative also stated that much more needed to be done to ensure the interaction between meeting the needs arising out of the economic crises and the fulfilment of the objectives arising out of the Convention.