

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

Second periodic report

139. The Committee considered the second periodic report of Norway (CEDAW/C/13/Add.15) at its 175th meeting, on 23 January (see CEDAW/C/SR.175).

140. The representative of Norway stated that many of the questions raised by the members in connection with the second periodic report had been answered or elaborated on in a draft third periodic report. At the outset, she said that the life expectancy of women was 80 years, and that of men 73 years; 72 per cent of Norwegian women were gainfully employed; the overall fertility rate was 1.9 children per woman; the literacy rate was 100 per cent; and women benefited from a pension system that ensured them an acceptable minimum standard of living.

141. She stressed that Norway was not satisfied with achieving de jure equality and policy discussions had shown that the new yardstick was de facto equality. As an example, she cited the Nordic BRYT project, the primary aim of which was, initially, to achieve a more even distribution between the sexes in all sectors of employment. While most women were still seeking work in traditionally female sectors of employment, emphasis was being placed on promoting the equal status of the sexes by improving the working conditions and pay in those sectors and by trying to reduce the disparity in wages between women and men generally.

142. Other important topics included the male role in connection with, inter alia, parental responsibilities, efforts to enhance the economic rights of women who performed care-related work in the home, and women's representation in politics. She said that it was no longer only a matter of the number of women in politics, but also of the kind of effect their presence had on the decisions made.

143. Responding to general questions posed by members, the representative of Norway said that more recent statistical data and a critical review of the Equal Status Act by the Equal Status Commissioner (Ombud) were contained in the third periodic report. Some examples of the reflection of the importance of equal status in economic and social policies were the high priority accorded to equal pay, the attention given to poorly paid occupations and the issuance of pension points for unpaid care-related work. She underlined the close connection, in the 1970s, between the women's movement and women researchers and, in the 1980s, between politicians, bureaucrats and researchers. Regarding the creation of quotas for either sex, the representative said that, while positive action in a moderate form was undertaken to some extent, the use of radical quotas in education or employment did not seem to be justified. Their symbolic effect was of greater importance than the numerical results. However, quotas regarding the

political representation of women had gradually and successfully been introduced by nearly all the political parties. From time to time men, as well as women, had protested against positive action in favour of women.

144. The representative explained that elderly and disabled women and men had statutory possibilities for claiming tax deductions. . Regarding the division of family and domestic responsibilities between couples, the Central Bureau of Statistics had been undertaking surveys every 10 years since 1971, which had shown that the increased number of women in paid employment had not led to a significant increase in the time that men spent on domestic work. Figures for the average salaries of women in different wage-earning groups showed that women earned less in all sectors of commerce, but that the differences were slowly decreasing. The representative stated that the Secretariat for Research on Women, an agency of the Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities (NAVF), had been accorded permanent status; its budget was covered by the Council and the ministries concerned. She referred to the results of the Secretariat's research and publications.

145. With regard to article 2 and complaints on recruitment and equal pay, the representative stated that information would be provided in the third periodic report. She described two successive national plans of action to promote the equal status of women. The first plan concentrated on education and employment and gave those issues publicity; however, about 15 per cent of it had not been carried out. The second plan drew on the experiences acquired by the first one and was aimed at integrating the equal status perspective into all public policy through action programmes to promote the equality of the sexes in the areas of competence of all ministries.

146. In answer to further questions under article 2, the representative replied that the second periodic report had been prepared by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, and that women's organizations had not been consulted in the process. The Equal Status Council had translated and publicized the Convention, but information on the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had not been actively disseminated.

147. In relation to article 3, she said that commissions or individuals responsible for equality existed in most ministries and in many public enterprises or bodies, and that such mechanisms were beginning to be set up in private institutions also.

148. Concerning a more effective use of the media in presenting new images of women, in connection with article 5, she said that the Government did not influence the media in the presentation of their programmes, except to use them for focusing on information campaigns and education programmes. The Board of Directors of the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation had endorsed a programme of action to promote equal status within the Corporation by setting targets.

149. Regarding questions relating to article 6, the representative said that no statistics were available on the incidence of prostitution, and that the trial projects charting prostitution in four major towns had thrown more light on that problem and on the relationship between prostitution and sexual abuse. Local general health and social welfare services assisted in rehabilitation and the municipality of Oslo had a separate centre for

prostitutes. Prostitutes who were addicted to alcohol or drugs were entitled to assistance from the specialized drug treatment and rehabilitation services. Further measures that had been taken were the publication of a pamphlet and the organization of seminars on related problems. The results of research on prostitution had been disseminated; it was unlikely, however, that the criminalization of the customer would be introduced. She said that the dissemination of information on AIDS was aimed primarily at specific target groups. Broad-based information campaigns had also been carried out. Seventy per cent of all HIV-infected heterosexuals were women.

150. On article 7, she said that the percentage of women on all committees had been increasing steadily since 1983; however, the rate of new appointments of women had been fluctuating. The representative said that the increased number of women in politics had had an impact on political decision-making and mentioned, as an example, the longer period of paid maternity leave and the efforts to provide sufficient child-care centres.

151. Responding to follow-up questions on article 7, the representative said that most political parties had adopted rules regarding quotas for women and men, and that political parties received public funding, as did women's organizations to some extent.

152. Regarding article 8, she stated that only 3 out of 72 ambassadors were women and that the percentage of women in the foreign service at the lower and higher levels was gradually increasing. She could not provide any statistics on the number of Norwegian personnel working in international organizations, but said that women in particular were urged to apply and that the number of candidates that were accepted had increased in recent years.

153. In reply to a question under article 9 on nationality, she said that, pursuant to the Norwegian Nationality Act of 1950, women's rights with regard to obtaining, changing or retaining their citizenship were the same as men's and were not affected by marriage. An amendment to the Act stated that a child would receive Norwegian citizenship if its mother was a Norwegian subject.

154. On article 10, she said that no comprehensive statistics on drop-out rates were available. She provided some data on the number of women studying at university, and said that the two critical phases in vocational training seemed to be the initial phase and the provision of an apprenticeship contract. Measures had been taken to reduce the problems in the initial phase. The Ministry of Church and Educational Affairs had the responsibility for monitoring the 1985 education programme.

155. Turning to article 11, the representative said that many women worked part time either because of inadequate child-care facilities or out of choice. The new tendency was for younger women to work in full-time employment, whereas older women, even those without child-care obligations, tended to a larger extent to work part time. Part-time workers were covered by the same social security provisions as full-time workers. Currently, domestic workers were covered by a separate act, but the integration of its provisions into the Working Environment Act was under discussion. Although the number of child-care facilities had been increasing in recent years, she said that it was still well below what was needed. Regarding the general

agreement between the Norwegian Employers' Confederation and the Norwegian Federation of Trade Unions on equality between women and men in working life, she said that similar agreements existed in most municipalities, but no evaluation of the results had been made. Some progress had been made in encouraging girls to enter jobs traditionally occupied by men. The results of the project to increase the recruitment of young women in technical vocations in northern Norway were reported as positive. However, other measures, such as the granting of wage subsidies for a certain period of time to employers who employed women in non-traditional occupations had not been taken up. Regarding questions on the Nordic project BRYT, she said that the project had ended in 1989. It had focused mainly on education and motivation; the main results were an increased awareness on the part of boys and girls of the importance of the choices they made. Work evaluation had not been conducted in recent years, and women's unpaid domestic work was not included in the gross national product; however, some measures of compensation for unpaid work were being discussed.

156. Responding to follow-up questions under article 11, the representative said that no reduction of the working day had been implemented recently. A six-hour working day was under discussion, but did not have many advocates. She stated further that, under the Working Environment Act, a person who had to take care of someone who was handicapped or ill could work fewer hours. No studies had been made of the reasons why boys and girls tended to seek work in traditional sectors of employment.

157. Turning to article 12, the representative stated that it was not so much the incidence of violence against women that had increased in recent years as an awareness of the problem. She said that 48 shelters and 8 hot-line telephones had been established all over the country to assist battered women. A therapy centre for men had been opened, and programmes to elucidate the complex issue were disseminated on the radio and television and through written material. However, it was difficult to assess the exact extent of wife-battering and other forms of family violence, and of changes in its incidence, but there were reasons to believe that the full extent of the problem had not yet been revealed. Under the Penal Code, violence against women was considered punishable with fines or imprisonment, and its unconditional public prosecution had been introduced in 1988.

158. In response to a follow-up question concerning the use of the new drug RU486 to terminate a pregnancy, the representative said that she did not know whether it was in use in Norway. For reasons of medical security, all new medicines took a long time to be introduced and to become generally accessible. Abortion was not forbidden by law.

159. Regarding article 14, she said that it was up to each married couple to decide how they wished to share the income from a joint agricultural enterprise, which should be related to the amount of work performed by each spouse. Women engaged in farming enjoyed the same economic and social rights as men.

160. Responding to follow-up questions, she replied that women tended to farm the land while their husbands participated in the fishing industry. She said that possible action to increase the participation of women in the fishing

industry would be considered. Currently, much discussion centred on the participation of rural women in planning the social and economic development of rural areas.

161. On article 15, she said that, pursuant to an amendment of the Fire Protection Act in 1987, any citizen could be ordered to serve on municipal fire brigades. No clear information could be provided on whether or not the Seamen's Act applied also to women.

162. On article 16, the representative stated that, according to the draft of the new Marriage Act, which would be forwarded to parliament in the spring of 1991, spouses, on divorce, would be entitled to an equal share of the property jointly acquired during their marriage, and housework would be assessed on the same basis as paid work. Currently alimony could be paid for an unlimited period of time; the new law, however, contained a provision that it be restricted to three years except in special circumstances.

163. Responding to follow-up questions, the representative said that the lack of enthusiasm to participate in political life might be a problem but was one that applied not only to women but also to men. The issue of ensuring that work performed by women and by men was allocated the same value was being discussed by all political parties. Concerning the relationship between the Constitution and the Equal Status Act in the context of the succession to the throne, she said that, pursuant to an amendment of the law in 1988, women also would be allowed to ascend the throne. As regards the non-involvement of non-governmental organizations in the preparation of the second periodic report, she said that the Government maintained close ties with a wide range of non-governmental organizations; however, the involvement of so many different organizations in the preparation of reports to international bodies was considered to be too time-consuming. Members stressed the importance of supplying data on prostitution in the subsequent report. The representative said that in the case of a conflict in relation to the principle of equality, the Constitution always took precedence over the legislation laws. With regard to the possible negative effect on women of frequent changes of Government, she said that all Governments were expected to give high priority to the issue of equality.

164. It was asked whether the feminist movement was, according to her personal opinion, declining in Norway and, if so, whether there were any plans to strengthen the movement in order to use it as a pressure group. The representative confirmed that the movement was, indeed, declining, but that the thoughts of the movement were currently directed towards the political participation of women. Members hoped that future reports would make a qualitative assessment of the role of women and men in Norwegian society.

165. Members expressed their appreciation for the country's constructive attitude to achieving de facto equality and for the detailed answers that had been provided to all the questions raised. They welcomed a qualitative rather than an arithmetical (50/50) approach to equality, which should serve as a model for other countries.