

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

Second periodic report

224. The Committee considered the second periodic report of Rwanda (CEDAW/C/13/Add.13 and Amend.1) at its 181st meeting, on 28 January (see CEDAW/C/SR.181).

225. The representative of Rwanda, in replying to the questions asked by members, said that the statistical data requested would be supplied later, as he had asked his Government to provide them, but they had not yet arrived.

226. As regards general questions, he stated that the Government was making efforts to integrate the advancement of women into the country's development plans by promoting literacy and awareness among women. Once women were aware of their rights, he said, they could ensure that their concerns were included in all development plans. Development issues relating to women, such as the low rate of literacy, were the subject of reports submitted to the bodies and specialized agencies of the United Nations, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

227. In their additional questions, members asked whether the Government did not consider it necessary to introduce further legal measures to protect women's interests. The representative stated that the Convention had been ratified without a full study being made of how its provisions could be translated into national legislation. Members also expressed some concern that women's needs were not taken into account in the context of requests for international aid. The representative stated that the problems of women's illiteracy were dealt with by literacy campaigns carried out by UNICEF. UNESCO had also been approached for help. Community training centres had been set up to provide courses in reading, writing, hygiene and artisanal work.

228. Referring to article 2, he said that part I of the Civil Code, entitled "Family Code", had already entered into force. Some of the provisions that constituted progress for the status of women were that a man was no longer the presumed head of the family and that in the case of dissolution of marriage, the care for the children had to be subject to an agreement between the spouses. He said that the provisions concerning dowry had led to heated debate. No legislative measures other than the Civil Code had been taken yet to eliminate discrimination against women nor had the limitation on the appointment of women to the presidency been abolished.

229. Under article 2, additional questions referred to the relation of the Convention to the national legal system. It was asked whether the Convention became automatically part of the national legal system and whether it could be directly invoked before the courts. The representative explained that the Convention was in conformity with the Constitution, but in Rwanda it was not the Convention that was directly ratified by the Parliament, but the law to which the text of the Convention was annexed. Once the law concerning the ratification of the Convention had come into force, the Convention was accepted by the Parliament.

230. Turning to article 3, he said that Urunana rw' Abanyarwandakazi mu Majyambere (URAMA) was closely connected to the revolutionary movement and benefited from state subsidies. The representative provided no information on

the number of women who had participated in its first congress nor on whether or not URAMA benefited from technical advisory services. As regards violence against women, he said that it did not constitute a crucial problem and that only isolated cases had been reported.

231. Referring to questions under article 5 related to the distribution of the translation of the Convention in the national language in girls' schools only, the representative said the aim had been to increase awareness of the Convention among girls. He said that the text would, in future, be distributed in boys' schools also. He said that there was an intention to increase the number of coeducational schools. As regards the attempt to overcome traditional taboos, he said that the most important task was to eradicate existing discrimination in the curricula of primary schools. He said that there were programmes to teach the same skills to both girls and boys. Regarding the question as to whether any jobs were regarded as being associated exclusively with men or with women, he said that men tended to be associated with jobs that implied heavy physical work, whereas women were associated more with cleaning work. The most important policy of the Government regarding traditional attitudes was the adoption of coeducation in primary schools.

232. Additional queries referred to the statements made by the representative on article 5 that there were no taboos that would discourage men from assisting in the housework. Members suggested that a man might assist in the housework only on the rare occasions when a woman fell ill. The representative replied that it was difficult to reorganize the division of labour in the family, and, therefore, it was important to start changing attitudes at the primary-school level. Another query concerned his statement that violence against women did not constitute a problem. To the question as to whether it was a case of incidents not being reported or of women simply accepting the occurrence of violence, he said that, traditionally, women did not file complaints in case of rape or other acts of violence.

233. Concerning article 6, he said that prostitution was forbidden by law. As it was practised only in secret, no statistical data could be supplied on the number of women engaged in prostitution nor on the percentage of women in the centres of re-education and production.

234. Turning to article 7, he said that the only criterion determining women's eligibility to join professional organizations and to participate in their administration or leadership was their personal skill, and not their civil status. No data could be supplied on the percentage of women in the judiciary. The only criterion that counted in ensuring that women participated in the design and establishment of development and planning programmes was their level of education. As regards plans to improve the political participation of women, he said that programmes existed to increase women's awareness of their role in public life, and women were being called upon to submit their candidacy for public office. Most of those who ran were elected.

235. Regarding article 7, members asked whether the Government undertook any specific measures to provide for the adequate representation of women on the various policy-making bodies and whether temporary special measures pursuant to article 4 could accelerate the de facto equality of women. The

representative stated that the presence of 12 women in Parliament proved that women were not excluded from decision-making. Women had to be made aware of the importance of their presence on legislative bodies. Furthermore, the problem of representation was primarily one of education.

236. On article 8, no information was given on the reasons why the number of female diplomats had decreased. The only woman diplomat was serving at the Rwandese Embassy at Washington.

237. On article 9, the representative stated that the law pursuant to which only the father could transmit his name and nationality to the child had not yet been changed.

238. Regarding article 10, the representative said that boys' and girls' schools had the same curricula. The country was trying to promote the education of girls in special girls' schools, and priests took care of the scholastic education of many boys in seminaries. The representative said that coeducation existed, but gave no indication of how many coeducational establishments there were. He said that figures were not readily available on: the progress that had been made in eradicating illiteracy among adult women; the drop-out rates for girls; the percentage of scholarships for males and females; and the percentage of male and female teachers at various educational levels. He said that the Government was encouraging girls to study agronomy. Progress had been made in increasing coeducation at the secondary level. Teaching at pre-school level was taken care of by parents' associations; the Government was concerned only with the training of pre-school teachers.

239. On article 10, members asked whether positive action or transitory measures were being taken to reverse the tendency that higher education was given only to boys. The representative explained that the question of equality was linked primarily to the question of schooling. Traditionally, women were supposed to take care of the home and men were supposed to take care of all the matters outside the home. When schooling had been introduced, women had not immediately taken part in it. He said that penalties existed for parents who did not send their children to school. There was, however, no gender-specific approach to the problem. Referring to the question of coeducation, he said that mathematics, physics and biochemistry were taught mostly to boys, but currently, both girls and boys could take courses in mathematics, depending on their abilities. As regards the high drop-out rate of girls from school, he said that parents, traditionally, were in favour of girls helping at home while they would permit boys to go on studying. Furthermore, at the end of their secondary education, girls preferred to get married because, in Rwandese society, an unmarried woman was of lesser value. He observed that it was important to fight against such deeply rooted attitudes, saying that progress would take a long time, but it was being made.

240. On article 11, he stated that the social security system did not provide for maternity benefits. If the professional qualifications of women and men were the same, they received the same pay for the same work. Women no longer needed the husband's consent to accept employment contracts.

241. Turning to article 12, he said that a child was considered the most precious resource a person could have. Family planning had been introduced,

but the practice had not yet percolated through local traditions, and sterilization was neither an issue of discussion nor widely used. It could be carried out in a hospital on request. No special programmes were available to encourage women to take up the profession of physician. As abortion was prohibited by law and subject to a penalty, he said that it was difficult to provide estimates on its incidence. No data could be provided on the incidence of HIV infection/AIDS; on the number of women who died in childbirth; on the percentage of women using contraceptives; and on the infant mortality rates for girls and boys. The average number of births per woman was between six and seven; however, because many children were delivered at home, it was difficult to provide accurate data. He said that the high frequency of pregnancies was considered an obstacle to the advancement of women. Female circumcision was not practised in Rwanda.

242. On article 12, concerning whether abortion was prohibited in all circumstances and how many cases of abortion had come before the courts, he said that abortion was carried out in hospitals only in the case of medical indication and in the case of rape. He said that as the Catholic religion, which forbade abortion, was firmly rooted in Rwanda, it was difficult to discuss the issue in the country and to attempt to legalize abortion. No details on the nature of sanctions could be given. Members asked whether family planning was available to all women. As there were cases of AIDS in Rwanda, the representative said that a training centre for dealing with the problem had been set up and information campaigns had been carried out on preventive measures. No statistics were available on the incidence of HIV infection/AIDS.

243. Turning to article 13, he said that women could obtain loans through the association called DUTERIMBERE whenever needed. Any woman, irrespective of her family status, was entitled to have access to loans. DUTERIMBERE acted as guarantor; however, no data on the frequency or the purposes of such loans were available.

244. On article 14, the representative said that improved access to safe drinking-water and to health facilities was part of a long-term plan. Most women and men were involved in the cooperative movement and about 90 per cent of the female population were members of cooperatives. Educated women were also involved in agricultural development programmes, although to a lesser degree than men. Those programmes put no special emphasis on the needs of women.

245. As regards article 15, there was no de jure discrimination against women, except for the provision in the penal code that dealt with the issue of adultery. A woman who committed adultery was punished more severely than a man because she might bring a child into the family that did not belong to the husband. The laws under which, in the case of adultery, women were penalized more severely than men were still in force, but an amendment was currently being discussed. A woman could obtain a passport and travel without her husband's permission, provided she had reached the age of majority.

246. Under article 16, he said that under the new Family Code, the minimum age for entering into marriage was 21 years for women and 25 years for men, because it was thought that women matured more quickly.

247. Under article 16, members asked whether there were plans to amend the existing law that discriminated against women with regard to their inheritance rights. The representative stated that the relevant part of the Civil Code was still a matter of discussion, because it was considered by some that women, if they inherited from their father, and upon marriage, and also from their late husband, might profit doubly.

248. Members expressed their appreciation for the early ratification by Rwanda of the Convention and for the fact that the Government had submitted the two periodic reports on time despite the enormous economic and social difficulties that the country faced. Members said that the Government's political will to adopt the principles of equality and its target-oriented process to advance the status of women was evident. They recognized the fact that obstacles still existed and noted that even de jure equality had not been completely achieved. They therefore suggested that the Government should set up appropriate government machinery to deal with the advancement of women. They observed that development could never be achieved if the needs of women were not fully taken into account. They regretted that no statistics were available to measure whether the country had made progress, and hoped that that shortcoming would be remedied in the third periodic report.

249. In his reply, the representative said that he would welcome practical suggestions on the nature of the machinery that should be set up to assist in the achievement of equality.