

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

Initial report

200. The Committee considered the initial report of Sweden (CEDAW/C/5/Add.8) at its 18th and 19th meetings, held on 8 August 1983 (CEDAW/C/SR.18 and 19).
201. The report was introduced by the representative of the State party who stated that, at the time of ratification of the Convention, Sweden had fulfilled the undertakings implied by the articles, which were not specifically mentioned in the report.
202. In order to implement its policy for the promotion of sexual equality, the Swedish Government had made certain organizational reforms in 1983: a Minister with a special secretariat for that purpose in the Ministry of Labour had been made responsible for ensuring that the Government took account of sexual equality when it prepared policies, and a special body, made up of senior officials from all ministries, had been established to help her carry out her task. A Council on Equality Issues had been established to ensure contacts between the Government, the political parties represented in the Parliament, employers' and workers' organizations and women's associations. In addition, a Commission made up of politicians and social workers had been made responsible for research.
203. For the promotion of sexual equality, a National Plan of Action had been established containing a broad range of measures and recommendations aimed at strengthening equality in a number of fields such as education, employment, family policy and family law, housing and community planning, health and the social field.
204. The Committee on Equality referred to in the State party's report identified some methods that had been used to increase the representation of women in trade unions and political parties, using mass media and other means for the moulding of public opinion. Sweden attached particular importance to equality of the sexes in its international co-operation activities.
205. The representative of the State party was commended for her introduction of, as well as for, the report, focusing in particular on the problems of implementation with regard to each article of the Convention. Some experts stated that Sweden had almost fully realized the aspirations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Several experts made reference to education programmes, to the creation of the Ombudsman and to the consideration being given to immigrant women.
206. Some members of the Committee remarked on the organizational reforms carried out by the Swedish Government to promote equality of the sexes, the entry into force of the Act concerning Equality between Women and Men at Work and the establishment of an Equal Opportunities Commission whose first task was to consider complaints submitted to it by the Ombudsman with a view to summoning employers to appear or to be fined.
207. Nevertheless, the Committee was of the view that the report lacked pertinent information regarding legislation and empirical data referring to employment indicators, demographic policy and women's participation in the political, economic and social life of the country (articles 7, 8 and 14 of the Convention). The reference made in the report to previous answers given to other United Nations organs was not very enlightening. Some experts also noted that, in the field of education, Sweden had taken unusual and notable steps to promote the equality of women and to avoid occupational segregation.
208. The percentage of women in positions of managerial and judicial responsibility as well as the statistics presented on unemployment in Sweden led some experts to the conclusion that the Equal Opportunities Act was not observed in practice and that women were victims of discrimination in Sweden.

209. Several members regretted that the annexes referred to in the report were not available and requested the representative to furnish them.
210. Clarification was requested on the statement made in the report to the effect that the Convention should not have been confined to discrimination against women, but that instead it should have been given a wider approach in terms of sexual discrimination. It was asked whether men were discriminated against in Sweden.
211. Additional information was also requested on the role of the Office of the Ombudsman and the Equal Opportunities Commission and as to how it was organized. It was of interest to the members to know how the Equal Opportunities (State Employment) Ordinance of 1 July 1980 had come into being, how it was implemented and what results had been achieved since its promulgation.
212. A question was asked at what point pregnant women could leave their work and whether social services were available for parents to share the child-raising duties.
213. Furthermore, the Committee was eager to learn the areas where women's organizations or non-governmental organizations were active in the country and what part they played in the promotion of equal rights. Some experts were under the impression that the status of women had been improved more as a result of government action than of women themselves.
214. They inquired as to whether women participated in promoting new legislation and what was the percentage of women deputies.
215. The experts were also interested to know whether the Government was taking any measures to reduce women's unemployment and asked for additional differential statistics. They also requested precision on whether the new system implemented in 1982-1983 was expected to lead to better results and on the effect of material incentives given to employers hiring women.
216. Another question referred to who was responsible for labour market training and who was paying for it.
217. The experts asked what was the significance of the problem of prostitution, and concern was expressed regarding the rehabilitation of prostitutes, as well as the working modalities of the Government's campaign against pornography under the Public Order Act. Information was requested on punitive measures with regard to rape and battering. Information was also requested on sexually discriminating advertising.
218. As the representative of Sweden had pointed out that some of the issues raised seemed to be linked to alcoholism and drug abuse, the Committee was of the opinion that more details should be given about specific measures implemented to remedy such trends and it wondered how unemployment among women was related to the problem referred to.
219. With reference to marriage and the family, some experts asked whether there was "marriage for a fixed period".
220. Although some experts welcomed the initiative of having women in penal institutions moved to regional centres closer to their home, they felt that might

mean there was an increase in women's criminality and clarification was requested in that regard. Also, it was not altogether clear whether that measure was also applicable to male prisoners. Some experts wished to know if there were special facilities for juvenile women inmates.

221. Several members of the Committee commended the special measures established for immigrant women workers and for the preservation of their cultural and national heritage and requested information on the specific programmes in that area.

222. The experts were interested to know the extent to which the new Names Act of 1982 was being used and if it had induced any change in behaviour. Details of conditions for adoption were also requested, particularly whether a single person could adopt a child and under what conditions. Additional information was required on the incidence of divorce and abortion and on whether there were special rehabilitation programmes for teenage mothers.

223. A question was asked about regional employment quotas and how they worked and were implemented and what was the rate of female representation in Government.

224. The Committee was interested to know whether there was equal pay for work of equal value in Sweden.

225. Given the fact that 10 per cent of the beneficiaries of parental leave were men, some experts asked what was the effect on their career development, including promotion.

226. Some experts also wondered if there were any negative reactions or effects resulting from the extensive social measures adopted and what was the extent of the support from public opinion.

227. Specific information was also requested on the participation of women in the cultural life of the country and in high-level scientific positions.

228. Because of the opening of the armed forces to women, it was also asked whether a woman in Sweden could become Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces.

229. In replying to the questions put to her, the representative of Sweden explained what was meant by the statement that the Convention should have been given a wider approach in terms of sexual discrimination. In this regard, the Swedish philosophy was that the concept of equality required a readiness to abolish all kinds of discrimination based on sex. It was true that women were the ones who were traditionally discriminated against, but some discrimination against men could also occur. For example, whereas widows received a pension, widowers were not eligible; military service was not compulsory for women while it was for men.

230. Elaborating on the role of the Ombudsman and the Equal Opportunities Commission, she explained that both were appointed by the Government. The Ombudsman was responsible for ensuring compliance with the Act on Equality between Women and Men at Work. If persuasion through negotiations with the employer in order to reach an agreement failed to bring about compliance by employers, the Ombudsman had recourse to other measures, such as referring discrimination disputes to the labour court. The Commission was chaired by a court lawyer who followed trends in the labour market and imposed fines when employers omitted to take the measures to promote equality suggested by the Ombudsman. So far, the aspirations

of the employers to take such active measures to promote equality has been met by voluntary means. The Ombudsman was increasingly consulted as people were becoming more aware of the existence of that facility. Most of the cases were brought against public employers. The investigations of the Commission were somewhat different and were intended to support certain programmes and actions aimed at providing equal access and opportunities, mainly in the field of employment.

231. In responding to another question, she said that women could take leave of up to 60 days prior to confinement. Furthermore, either parent was entitled to take up to 12 months of paid parental leave and could stay at home until the child was 18 months old. Either parent could work a six-hour day until the child was eight years of age. Parenthood education aimed at family planning was offered to both men and women. There were child-care facilities, but presently not enough places at the day-care centres. When a parent was staying at home looking after a child under three years of age, the time was eligible for pension based on gainful employment.

232. In response to a question on the role of women's organizations, she said that they had existed in the country since the last century and had always played a crucial role in bring about important changes.

233. In providing the requested data on unemployment, she stated that, in June 1983, 3.5 per cent of the work-force was unemployed, affecting 3.2 per cent of men and 3.9 per cent of women.

234. Training was undertaken at State expense through an organizational network and participants aged 20 and over received a stipend. Social security for the unemployed was provided through unemployment insurance. Regional quotas for employment were reserved for each sex and the labour market board dealt with that issue.

235. Regarding a question on marriage for a determined period, it was explained that there were no legal provisions for marriage contracts of a limited time.

236. As a result of the prohibition of public performances of a pornographic nature, live sex shows had been prohibited and sex clubs no longer existed. Instances of rape were addressed to the District Attorney who pursued the case.

237. The number of prisons for females in the country had been increased not in response to an increase in female criminals, but in order to permit women to be imprisoned in their home regions as men were. In fact, the proportion of prison inmates in the country comprised 98 per cent males as against only 2 per cent females, a proportion which had not significantly changed over the years.

238. As regards adoption, a single man or woman had the right to adopt a child.

239. Responding to the numerous requests with regard to political participation and high-level participation of women in Swedish life, the representative of Sweden presented figures indicating a relatively low level of female participation in positions such as, Under-Secretaries of State, directors-general, members of the Supreme Administrative Court, county governors, regional representatives and members of Parliament. However, an increase over the years had been evident. Women's representation in the Riksdag and the municipal councils had roughly doubled between 1971 and 1982, with women accounting for 47 per cent of the Stockholm Municipal Council.

240. Women in Sweden had been in relatively low paid occupations, although in the manufacturing sector women's salaries were now 90 per cent of those of men.

241. Child care provided by municipalities covered only 37 per cent of children in the 0-6 years age group, although the demand was for 51 per cent coverage.

242. As regards public opinion and the media, there were various differences in the utilization of television, radio, books, newspapers and so forth by men and women, indicating that because of the existing division of labour, women had less time for recreational activities.

243. With respect to women's participation in the armed forces, any occupation in that field would be open to women.

244. The representative of Sweden concluded by saying that any questions left unanswered would be taken up at a later date in future reports.

245. Some experts recommended drawing the attention of States parties to the desirability of using the positive experiences referred to in the above-mentioned report in order to make further progress in eliminating discrimination against women, not only de jure, but also de facto.