
**Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women
Twenty-third session
12 – 30 June 2000**

Excerpted from: Supplement No. 38 (A/55/38)

**Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women: Cuba**

Fourth periodic reports

244. The Committee considered the fourth periodic report of Cuba (CEDAW/C/CUB/4) at its 474th and 475th meetings, on 19 June 2000 (see CEDAW/C/SR.474 and 475).

Introduction by the State party

245. In introducing the report, the representative of Cuba drew attention to the fact that her country had consistently adhered to the letter and spirit of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and upheld its value as an international legal instrument. Likewise, she noted that Cuba had expressed its political will to support the Optional Protocol to the Convention and undertaken a national evaluation of the actions adopted to implement the agreements of the Fourth World Conference on Women. She added that the evaluation showed the advances, the failures and the resulting new priorities on gender issues.

246. The representative informed the Committee that, during the period from 1996 to 2000, Cuba had adopted measures to solve pending problems and to outline national middle and long-term strategies to follow up the process aimed at the achievement of gender equality.

247. The representative stressed that, after the Fourth World Conference on Women, Cuba had implemented a series of actions to publicize the commitments made on the adoption of the Platform for Action among the policy-making State bodies. That wide process of social awareness-raising had culminated in a national seminar entitled “Cuban women from Beijing to 2000”, which examined the Platform for Action and elaborated recommendations for future work. The seminar had been a valuable part of the background to the establishment of the National Plan of Action to Follow up the Fourth World Conference on Women, which had been adopted into law in April 1997.

248. The representative informed the Committee that Cuba had strengthened the executive functions of each State body charged with implementing the relevant policies. She also drew attention to those bodies of the State Central Management which were involved in and responsible for the 90 measures included in the Plan. The 90 measures conformed with the national priorities established with regard to women’s employment, access to decision-making, the reflection of women’s images in the media, community participation in health services, community social work, improvement of legislation, attention to women’s human, sexual and reproductive rights and the improvement of research on women and gender relations.

249. The representative indicated that the substantial advances in the implementation of the National Plan of Action was due to the country’s gradual

and sustained economic recovery, particularly during the last five years. The Cuban gross domestic product (GDP) had risen by 6.2 per cent in 1999, and had been accompanied by a 5.4 per cent rise in job productivity, and 8.8 per cent investment growth.

250. The representative informed the Committee that the continuing growth in the economy ensured a consistent policy of favouring social programmes, particularly those that benefited women and children. She emphasized that the Cuban national budget for social programmes had risen since 1995, and, in the year 2000, the State had devoted 70 per cent of its current expenditure to education, health care, social security, housing maintenance and repair and community services. The representative informed the Committee that, during the seventh Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women, held in March 2000, it had been indicated that women's employment in the civil-State sector had risen from 42.3 per cent in 1995 to 43.6 per cent in 1999. Moreover, in some middle- and higher-level job categories (i.e., technical and professional), women's employment had risen from 63.8 per cent in 1995 to 66.1 per cent in 1999. She also noted that the participation of women in decision-making had increased from 29.8 per cent in 1995 to 32.3 per cent in 1999. She stressed the qualitative and quantitative improvement of women's participation in Parliament, where women represented 27.6 per cent in comparison to the period from 1993 to 1998, when women accounted for 22.8 per cent.

251. The representative underlined the impact of the Helms-Burton Act and the economic, commercial and financial blockade of the Government of the United States of America, and described its differential negative consequences for women and men. She noted that those factors had prevented Cuba from fulfilling the purposes of the National Plan of Action as well as the principles of the Convention. She indicated that, owing to continuing gender stereotypes and traditional sexist behaviour patterns, many women were still responsible for family and children's care, and that the blockade took a particular toll on women who were responsible for productive and social activities in the home. She acknowledged that international solidarity, including through women's organizations, had counteracted some of the negative effects of the blockade and promoted projects for the advancement of women and girls in Cuba.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

252. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Government of Cuba for submitting on time a detailed fourth periodic report containing data disaggregated by sex. It commends the Government for the comprehensive written replies to the Committee's questions, and its comprehensive oral presentation that further clarified recent developments in the State party.

253. The Committee commends the Government of Cuba for having sent a large delegation, headed by the Vice-Minister for Science, Technology and the Environment, with a high degree of expertise and including officials from various branches of Government and from the Federation of Cuban Women. Their participation enhanced the quality of the constructive dialogue between the State party and the Committee.

Positive aspects

254. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the Government's political will and commitment to implement the Convention under extremely difficult circumstances.

255. The Committee commends the Government for the adoption, at the level of a law, of a National Plan of Action to follow up the Fourth World Conference on Women, prepared in a consultative process among governmental bodies and entities of civil society, and containing a large number of actions in various fields to be implemented by various government bodies. It also commends the Government for the legislative changes and programmes implemented since the consideration by the Committee of its third periodic report in 1996, including in direct response to the Committee's concluding comments. The Committee also commends the Government for clearly recognizing the link between the Convention as the legal framework, and the Beijing Platform for Action as the operational policy document, for realizing women's human rights.

256. The Committee welcomes the increase, since 1996, in the women's employment rate in the civil-State sector, which has reached 43.6 per cent, women's participation in the National Assembly at 27.6 per cent, in leadership positions at 32.3 per cent, and in technical and professional mid- and higher-level posts at 66.1 per cent. It welcomes the fact that women constitute 60 per cent of the judiciary. It also welcomes the improvements in women's socio-economic situation as a result of the country's sustained economic recovery in recent years.

257. The Committee commends with appreciation the State party for its encouraging national indicators for social development, especially women's generally high literacy rates, and the favourable indicators in the field of women's health, including access to basic health care, low maternal, infant and women's mortality rates and a decline in abortion rates.

258. The Committee welcomes the fact that Cuba invited the Special Rapporteur on violence against women to visit the country in June 1999.

259. The Committee commends the Government for having signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention in March 2000.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

260. The Committee notes the ongoing economic blockade and its particular effects on women and on the full implementation of the Convention. These effects are compounded by the fact that women remain primarily responsible for household work and are clustered in professions that are seriously affected by the blockade.

Principal areas of concern and recommendations

261. The Committee expresses its concern about the persistence of stereotypes concerning the role of women in the family and society and of attitudes and behaviours of machismo in many areas of public and private life. The Committee is concerned that, notwithstanding the Government's recognition of this problem and the implementation of measures to address it, the persistence of such stereotypes continues to be an issue affecting efforts to fully implement the Convention.

262. The Committee calls on the Government to continue to undertake measures to address stereotypical attitudes in Cuban society. In particular, the Committee

calls on the Government to continue efforts aimed at increasing women's participation in all areas and at all levels of decision-making, as well as to encourage men to share family responsibilities. It also calls on the Government to continue to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the impact of its measures to identify shortcomings, and adjust and improve these measures accordingly.

263. The Committee expresses its concern that there is insufficient assessment of the question of violence against women, in particular domestic violence, and sexual harassment in the workplace. It notes with concern that no specific laws are in place to penalize domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace. It also notes that insufficient statistical data are available about various types of violence against women, including elderly women and against children. The Committee also notes with concern that there is insufficient information on the response of law enforcement officials, the judiciary and health care providers to such violence.

264. The Committee calls upon the Government to assess, in a comprehensive manner, the possible incidence of violence against women, including domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as, in case of incidents, the root causes of such violence. It invites the Government to increase public awareness of the need to take measures to prevent such violence, to consider launching a zero-tolerance campaign on violence against women, as well as to increase the awareness of public officials and the judiciary about the seriousness of such violence. It also invites the Government to increase the availability of support measures for women victims of domestic violence, such as telephone helplines and shelters for battered women. The Committee invites the Government to provide in its next report data on women's access to the Courts in general, and with regard to violence in particular.

265. The Committee notes with concern that, while prostitution is not a crime, there is little information about the impact of programmes and other measures to prevent women from becoming prostitutes, and to rehabilitate and reintegrate them into society. Further efforts are needed to identify the root causes of the increase in prostitution in recent years, and of the effectiveness of measures to counteract this trend.

266. The Committee urges the Government to increase its understanding of the causes of prostitution, and to assess the impact of its preventive and rehabilitative measures with a view to improving their effectiveness, and to bringing them fully into line with article 6 of the Convention. The Committee invites the Government to expand its programmes for women's economic independence in such a manner as to attack the causes of prostitution and to eradicate the need for women to enter into prostitution. It also calls on the Government to include in its next periodic report detailed information on any developments related to preventive and rehabilitative measures taken with regard to prostitutes.

267. The Committee notes with concern that, while the introduction of the option of divorce by consent constitutes a viable alternative to a court-supervised divorce, it may involve inherent risks of disadvantage for women.

268. The Committee encourages the Government to monitor carefully the implementation of divorce by consent, and in particular any negative impact this option might have for women with regard to issues such as alimony payments, custody and maintenance of children and distribution of property.

269. While recognizing the increase since 1996 in women's employment rate in the civil-State sector, the Committee remains concerned that women make up a

higher percentage of the unemployed, and at the persistence of obstacles to their full integration in all sectors of the labour market, in particular the joint venture and tourism industry.

270. The Committee calls on the Government to implement temporary special measures targeted at women to reduce the level of unemployment and of disparities in access to some sectors of the labour market. It also recommends that such measures ensure that women benefit equally from the country's economic recovery. The Committee calls on the Government to increase its efforts to create new opportunities for women in non-traditional and high-growth areas, including in new information and communications areas and in the service sector, and to strengthen efforts to ensure that they can take full advantage of the mixed economy, in accordance with their high levels of education and skills.

271. While recognizing the Government's sustained efforts to ensure women's right to health, the Committee underlines the necessity of continued efforts to address HIV/AIDS, and in particular its potential impact on high-risk groups, such as prostitutes and young adults. The Committee is concerned about the occurrence of suicide among older women. The Committee calls on the Government to study the cause of women's suicide with a view to adopting preventive measures.

272. The Committee is concerned about the fact that insufficient information was provided on the situation of rural women.

273. The Committee calls on the Government to provide in its fifth periodic report a comprehensive picture of the situation of rural women, including data disaggregated by sex, and comparing the situation of women in urban areas. It also invites the Government to provide further information about the system of rural cooperatives and their benefits for women.

274. The Committee requests the Government to provide in its next report information, including statistical data, on the prevalence of tobacco use and alcohol, drug and substance abuse by women of different age groups and measures aimed at preventing and reducing such abuse. It also invites the Government to provide information about the availability of counselling and rehabilitation measures for women drug abusers.

275. The Committee requests that the Government responds in its next periodic report to the specific issues raised in these concluding comments.

276. The Committee encourages the Government of Cuba to deposit its acceptance to the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, and to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention as soon as possible.

277. The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Cuba of the present concluding comments, in order to make the people of Cuba, and particularly Government administrators and politicians, aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure de facto equality for women and further steps that are required in that regard. It also requests the Government to continue to disseminate widely, and in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention, the Committee's general recommendations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the further actions and initiatives adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-third special session, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".