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**Committee on the Elimination of  
Discrimination against Women  
Twelfth session**

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**Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of  
Discrimination against Women: United Kingdom of Great Britain and  
Northern Ireland**

**Second periodic report**

523. The Committee considered the second periodic report (CEDAW/C/UK/2 and Amend.1) of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at its 223rd meeting, on 28 January (see CEDAW/C/SR.223).

524. In the opinion of the Committee, the second periodic report of the United Kingdom contained a wealth of valuable information, but it could have been more analytical and could have included the most up-to-date information. It would be desirable if future reports would follow the general guidelines regarding the form and content of reports (CEDAW/C/7) and comment in particular on all the general recommendations that had been made by the Committee.

525. In introducing the report, the representative outlined the reformed national machinery and brought the members up to date on the main areas of progress in women's issues. She said that the Secretary of State for Employment coordinated policy issues of special concern to women in a new Cabinet Subcommittee for Women's Issues, consisting of ministers from all the key government departments. The Subcommittee reviewed and developed policy and strategy for women and, most importantly, oversaw the implementation of work in that area. A policy framework had been agreed to ensure that women's issues were considered as an integral part of government policy development. The Subcommittee reported regularly to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs and to the Prime Minister.

526. The Equal Opportunities Commission, established under the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, worked towards the elimination of discrimination, promoted equality of opportunity between men and women, kept legislation under review and drew up and submitted proposals for amendment. The Commission was a non-departmental public body, funded by the Government. Its main function was advising and assisting individuals in taking action under the law on sex discrimination or on equal pay. It published guidance and research promoting its objectives. In addition, the Women's National Commission, consisting of members of voluntary organizations, political parties and trade unions as well as religious and professional groups, functioned as an advisory committee to the Government.

It represented the views of women's organizations and its reports were sent to government departments in order to raise current issues and, possibly, to review policies. The representative paid a tribute to the active role of women's organizations in the consultative process.

527. Highlighting recent achievements, the representative mentioned the increased number of women elected to Parliament in 1992 (60 had been elected, which was 9.2 per cent of the total), and the progress made in higher positions in the civil service, as well as a government initiative to increase the public appointments of women and members of ethnic minorities. With regard to employment issues, the representative said that women continued to play an ever-increasing role in the workplace; over 70 per cent of women of working age had been economically active in 1991. The wage differential between men and women had narrowed for five successive years and was currently 21 per cent. A new grant scheme to develop an additional 50,000 places for out-of-school child care would begin, and child care for pre-school children would expand further under the Children Act of 1989, so as to enable parents to return to work and have a wider choice of hours in which to work.

528. On women's status and participation, she noted that the aim was not only to get women to the top, but also to extend opportunities for women across a broad spectrum and help them to make progress, as well as to gain a first foothold at all levels of private, public and community life. The Government had recently made publications widely available to promote women in the workplace. Their topics included equal opportunities, flexible working practices, sexual harassment and positive action measures under the law.

529. On women's health, screening for breast and cervical cancer was accorded a high priority; the objective was to reduce the death rates by at least 25 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, by the year 2000. On social security, the representative stated that the Government was committed to the equalization of the state pension age for men and women. In relation to occupational pension schemes, equalization was already in place. The Child Support Act of 1991 would have a substantial impact on single parents, 90 per cent of whom were women. The aim of the Act was to ensure that parents made fair and consistent financial provision for their children. The Child Support Agency, which would start its work in April 1993, would be responsible for implementing and enforcing the Act.

530. With regard to education the representative stated that, under the national curriculum, girls studied the same range of subjects as boys. Girls were gaining better examination results in nearly all subjects at the age of 16 than boys. She said that women were enrolling in further and higher education as much as men. It was asked whether girls were commended for their achievements. No direct answer was provided.

531. The representative concluded by saying that, although the United Kingdom still had a long way to go, the recent positive developments that had extended women's opportunities were appreciable.

#### General observations

532. The Committee thanked the representative for the up-to-date information as well as for the detailed and exhaustive answers to the questions raised by the Committee.

533. Noting that the second periodic report covered the dependent territories of the British Virgin Islands, the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) and the Turks and Caicos Islands, a member asked whether Anguilla and Montserrat had been excluded because of their constitutional status or because it was expected that they would submit their own reports. Furthermore, concerning the dependent territories, it was asked whether they had had a chance to participate in the preparation of the second periodic report or to review it afterwards. One member questioned the assumption regarding sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) given the existence of a dispute concerning it.

534. A member asked whether women in Hong Kong were covered by the Convention, in view of the fact that China would resume authority over Hong Kong on 1 July 1997 and that both China and the United Kingdom had ratified the Convention. Another member informed the Committee of the proper procedures in the event of any intention to extend the Convention to Hong Kong during the transitional period before 30 June 1997 or thereafter.

535. The Committee expressed its appreciation for the fact that non-governmental organizations had been consulted both after the initial report had been presented, and before the second periodic report had been prepared, which provided a model for other States parties to follow.

#### Questions of a general nature

536. Concerning a question on the lower living standards of women in the United Kingdom, which was included in the statement received by the Committee from non-governmental women's organizations, the representative replied that most people lived in families and that their living standards were thus family living standards. She referred to the narrowing gap in earnings, to the lower unemployment rate of women and to the fact that most women worked part time by choice.

537. Asked about the effect of recently adopted laws and programmes and about areas in which progress had been achieved, the representative first referred to the developments that had provided significant role models encouraging women to

aspire to leadership in all fields. She mentioned the first woman Speaker of the House of Commons, the first woman Director of Public Prosecutions, the first woman Director of the Security Services and the first British woman in space. She then turned to women's involvement in the workforce, which was increasing steadily. She noted that employers both in the public and the private sectors were introducing family-friendly policies, including flexible working patterns, to ensure that they would be able to attract and retain women workers. Moreover, the Children Act of 1989 provided a framework for local authorities to review and plan child-care provisions, enabling more women to work.

538. She then referred to the increasing role of women in public life. There had been an increase in the number of women appointed to tribunals, the bodies that heard complaints made under the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act. The Prime Minister had launched an employer-led campaign in October 1991 to increase the quality and quantity of women's participation in the workforce. A number of major employers were involved in setting goals for increasing opportunities for women and in monitoring and reporting on the progress made.

539. Concerning specific goals in the national plan of action, the representative stated that plans were made by organizations, including government departments. Those plans set targets for women's participation, especially at the decision-making level, such as doubling the number of women in senior posts in the civil service by 2000 and increasing the amount of women in all public appointments to a level of 25-50 per cent by 1996. The progress in achieving the targets had been increasingly made public.

540. Asked about the Government's intentions to withdraw its reservations, which was a matter of priority, the representative announced that the United Kingdom would remove parts of its reservations to articles 11 and 13. With respect to article 11, the United Kingdom could withdraw the section concerning employment in underground work in mines. With respect to article 13, the section that referred to married men's tax allowances could be withdrawn. Other reservations might be amended in the light of changes to domestic legislation. She stressed that the remaining reservations either preserved greater rights for women or left scope for individual choice; however, all reservations were kept under review and there might be scope for their removal in the coming years.

541. The Committee expressed its satisfaction that parts of the State party's reservations were to be withdrawn. At the same time, it noted with grave concern that the remaining reservations, which were not only numerous but also substantially important, did not provide a good model for other States parties. It hoped that the improvements made in that respect would be included in the third periodic report. It asked whether the Government had made similar reservations to other human rights treaties that it had signed.

## Questions related to specific articles

### Article 2

542. Replying to the questions which social groups of women committed the most common crimes, such as theft, fraud and forgery, and whether there was a programme curbing such crimes, the representative regretted that no data were collected routinely on the social class of female offenders. The Government was required, under the Criminal Justice Act of 1991, to publish information annually about women, crime and criminal justice. Fraud and forgery constituted only 7 per cent, and theft 69 per cent, of women's offences. The programmes for all offenders included attendance centres, supervision or probation and community service orders.

543. Asked about the conditions under which women with infants were held in prisons, the representative noted that there were three mother-and-baby units, whose facilities were said to be of the highest standard. The Social Services Inspectorate had carried out inspections in 1990 and 1992 and its practical advice had contributed to the development of those units. The improved conditions included more spacious accommodation, with access to outside exercise and recreation areas. In another prison, the staff included nursery nurses, and a nutrition policy following professional advice had been adopted. New guidance had been issued and, for mothers whose children were not with them, all-day children's visiting hours and family open days were offered.

544. Regarding new legislation, and de facto changes since the submission of the initial report, the representative listed recent measures, which included independent taxation for husbands and wives, and clarification of the law that rape in marriage was an offence. Furthermore, the Church of England General Synod had voted to allow women to become priests, which, subject to approval by both Houses of Parliament, would become law; discrimination in occupational pensions had been made illegal; discrimination against women serving in the armed forces had been made illegal, and the anonymous complaints procedure had been expanded in cases of rape or sexual assault.

545. In an additional question, members requested information on the increase in the budget of the Equal Opportunities Commission, on its personnel and its main objectives. The representative announced that its budget had increased, also in real terms, recently. Its personnel numbered approximately 160, located at Manchester. With regard to the objectives of the Commission, she referred to her presentation.

### Article 3

546. Referring to general recommendation 18 (tenth session), 14/ members requested statistics on disabled women. Furthermore, they asked whether disabled

women had equal opportunities in the labour market, in education and in public life. The representative said that legislation and all positive programmes were equally applicable to disabled women. In addition, there was a quota system, requiring employers of 20 or more persons to employ at least 3 per cent of registered disabled people. It was generally recognized that the quota scheme was not operating as intended as not all eligible employees registered as disabled. However, after a consultation exercise on the employment and training of disabled people in 1990, ministers had decided to retain the quota system for the time being.

547. Members asked whether the Government should rethink its position on the additional protocol on social policy to the Treaty on European Union (Treaty of Maastricht), since those social issues had a considerable impact on women's issues as well. Europe could be more effective in advancing all women in Europe if the European Community worked together. The representative answered that that was not appropriate as the issues surrounding the protocol on social policy to the Treaty of Maastricht went much farther than those related to women and concerned the principle of subsidiarity and institutional matters. The Government was, however, committed to the recently adopted European Directives, which helped women in such matters as maternity rights.

#### Article 4

548. The Committee said that temporary special measures under article 4 remained a live issue. Referring to an additional question about the possibility of introducing a so-called flexible or "soft" quota system for women, the representative said that in the United Kingdom the word "target" was used instead of the word "quota". It meant setting numerical targets to improve the representation of women, but the Government did not favour fixed quotas for women, which could lead to tokenism.

#### Article 5

549. When asked if the Government believed that the provisions of section 38 of the Sex Discrimination Act were effective in preventing advertising of a discriminatory nature, the representative said that both newspapers and job centres refused to accept discriminatory job advertisements and reported anyone doing so to the Equal Opportunities Commission. Asked about the number of cases that had been brought to court and the number that had been ruled as unlawful, the representative noted that, in 1991, the Commission had received 4,650 inquiries, including 191 complaints.

550. To the questions why there was so little media coverage on the problems of women, why women were not employed at senior positions in the broadcasting industry and why no training was arranged to enable women to occupy those positions, the representative replied that the responsibility for the content and

scheduling of programmes rested with the broadcasters, who were independent of the Government. Under the Broadcasting Act of 1990, the independent broadcasting regulatory bodies were charged to make conditions in granting broadcasting licences, requiring their holders to promote equal opportunity policies.

551. Regarding the incidence of violence against women, the implementation of the recommendations to deal with it and the prosecution level for offences of violence, the representative noted that more than half of all cases of assault against women involved domestic violence. She referred to local victim support services, to the Safer Cities programme and to the policies of all police forces to deal with cases of domestic violence. She mentioned that the civil law to provide remedies and safeguards for women was under review. Additionally, she mentioned the alleged disparity in the law's reaction to women and men who killed, which had recently received considerable publicity. There had been successful appeals on the basis of diminished responsibility as a consequence of domestic violence. The clarification of the law that rape in marriage was an offence was mentioned, as was the strengthened protection of the anonymity of rape victims.

552. In an additional question, praising the judicial clarification of rape in marriage, a member asked whether victims of rape increasingly asked for help and contacted the police. In her answer, the representative noted an increasing and encouraging trend of victims turning to the police. She said that many sympathetic counselling practices were used by the police to handle cases of violence. In addition, the number of women in the police force had been increased. Asked about rapists among boys under 14, the representative referred to the pending bill on kerb-crawling, which would have removed the presumption that boys could not commit rape.

553. Members asked whether the Government considered the current law adequate with regard to rape and pornography in the light of the continued pictures of women. In the reply, the legislation was said to be adequate; however, the continued exploitation of women in the media by means of sexually explicit pictures was a grave concern and needed to be remedied. One member, being a citizen of a country in which decisions of United Kingdom courts carried some weight, welcomed the ruling whereby rape in marriage was considered a crime. Reference was made to a study that had reviewed the relationship between pornography and crimes of violence and that had found the evidence of such a link to be inconclusive. The Government was committed to enforcing laws in a manner that excluded improper publications, controlled proper standards and upheld decency.

#### Article 6

554. In reply to the question why Parliament had not passed a bill that would have made kerb-crawling an offence, the representative said that the passage of the bill

had been obstructed, but the Government was looking for a suitable opportunity to introduce such a measure. In answer to the question how many men had been convicted for accosting women on the street and what their sentences were, the representative cited the number 1,132.

555. Concerning the question of eliminating prostitution, the representative mentioned laws aimed at discouraging women from becoming prostitutes as well as at penalizing those who made financial gain from it. Recent figures showed that the number of women convicted for prostitution was still considerably higher than the number of persons convicted for brothel-keeping and procuration offences. The representative said that the prevention policies of the Government concentrated on the most vulnerable, including the very young.

556. In an additional question, clarification was requested concerning prostitution in the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) as the report was felt to be contradictory. The representative said that the information concerning the dependent territories was not immediately available and would be provided later.

#### Article 7

557. The representative explained the cause of the disproportionately low number of women at the managerial level by saying that it would take time for changes to be felt and that a fair appointments policy meant filling posts only with those with the appropriate ability and experience. The Committee's concern was that the increase in the proportion of women in the civil service was so slight that it could not be regarded as noticeable progress. The representative replied that a target of 15 per cent in the top three grades by the year 2000 had been set. The representative stressed the importance of the infrastructure - training possibilities, flexible working patterns and child-care facilities - in achieving sustained improvement. She added that traditional attitudes had not been eliminated entirely.

558. With regard to changes in the number of women members of Parliament, she noted that a record number of 60 women had been elected in the general election in 1992. Asked about female candidates and electors appearing on television, she replied that that was a matter for parties and broadcasting authorities. Regarding the position that the United Kingdom occupied within EEC in terms of the percentage ratio of women and men in Parliament, she said the United Kingdom ranked seventh among the 12 member States.

559. Replying to a question on women gaining access to public appointments and on relevant affirmative action plans, she referred to a new programme of action that had been launched by the Prime Minister. The legislation of the United Kingdom did not allow quotas and the emphasis was on ensuring fair procedures and open opportunities for qualified women. In reply to a question about the recruitment of



women graduates in government service, she said that women were recruited at the professional and administrative levels.

560. Concerning equal opportunities for women in the police force and in the probation service, the representative acknowledged that the police service was still largely male, even though real improvements had been made. The proportion of women in the police force was 12.1 per cent in 1991 and the recruitment level of women was over 25 per cent of the total. In the chief officer ranks, the number of women had doubled in two years. The Equal Opportunities Commission was assisting the forces to develop policies and practices, and all forces had published equal opportunities policies. Development was linked to servicing the community representatively and, consequently, successfully. Furthermore, all probation services were required to have equal opportunities policies; 45 per cent of the probation officers were women.

561. Information was requested on cooperation between women's organizations and political parties, especially with a view to ensuring that women's interests were represented in politics. The representative replied that women's organizations were active in pressuring the political parties into including women in their activities. An additional question was asked about the distribution of the 60 women in Parliament among the political parties, as well as on any specific plans the parties might have to attract more women to participate. No information was provided immediately to the first question; as to the latter one, the representative said that she understood that they all had plans.

#### Article 9

562. Members asked about the new Immigration Act and its purposes and whether it represented progressive legislation that would improve the situation of women. The representative replied that the new legislation had been introduced to simplify and accelerate decision-making in view of the increasing volume of applications for asylum. Around 20 per cent of the applicants were female and were covered by equal opportunities legislation.

563. The members thought that the problem of migrant women had not been addressed adequately in the second periodic report and thought that the subject should be given more attention in the next one.

#### Article 10

564. When asked about elementary-school curricula and whether they took into account the equal rights of both sexes, the representative noted that the introduction of a national curriculum in schools ensured women equal access to all subjects. The national curriculum was also taken into account in independent schools.

Whether children attended single-sex or coeducational schools was, according to the representative, a matter of parental choice.

565. Regarding the question whether sufficient information was provided in schools on family planning and on the prevention of AIDS, the representative said that the national curriculum included certain health issues, including aspects of sex education and the HIV virus.

566. When asked about the Government's response to the low percentage of women in higher education, the representative said that the proportion of women students had increased in most of the subjects studied and that there was now parity between the numbers of men and women entering higher education. Women accounted for 40 per cent of all postgraduate students in 1990, and for about three quarters of the increase in the numbers enrolling in further education courses between 1980-1990. Among the full-time academic staff at universities, the proportion of women was 21 per cent.

#### Article 11

567. Referring to a continuous rise in the proportion of women in the country's workforce, members asked whether the encouragement given by the Government reflected a radical policy change towards the role of women in society. The representative answered that Government policy did address changes in society and that employers were increasingly attracting and retaining female staff so as to achieve maximum economic efficiency. Women were also choosing self-employment to a greater extent. Improved and more affordable child care would further contribute to the number of women entering and advancing in the labour market.

568. Regarding the social consequences of converting military manufacturing facilities into civilian production facilities, the representative said that women were generally underrepresented in those industries, and that the decline in employment would therefore affect men more than women.

569. Answering a question on the effective implementation of the Equal Pay Act, the representative referred to a continuously narrowing pay gap between men and women. She noted that, during the period 1986-1991, almost 3,300 equal pay claims had been lodged, 80 per cent of which had been settled in favour of the complainant. With regard to the work evaluation system, she noted that the law was complex - indeed the law needed to be complex - and that the procedures required reports from independent experts. It could take time to compare jobs properly on the basis of skill, effort and other criteria. Asked for information on the income of both sexes in various occupations, she said that figures for relative pay by broad occupation were only available on a comparable basis up to 1990.

From 1984-1990, the pay of women in comparison to that of men had risen in the majority of occupations.

570. Commenting on the narrowing wage differential between men and women, members asked whether the Government intended to expand its legislation, as the principle of equal pay for equal work was so far implemented only at the same-employer level and not on the basis of a comparison with other employers or other industries, which was the actual source of the discrimination. The representative replied that a comparison was made not only between exactly equal work, but also between work of equal value for the same employer; however, because wage rates were negotiated with individual employers, a full comparison of wage rates across all job levels between different companies was not possible. The Committee stated that such a comparison would be desirable.

571. Concerning the reasons for women choosing part-time work, the representative replied that the burden of domestic responsibilities was only one of the reasons, although it was evident that women undertook a far greater share of household tasks. Only 22 per cent of couples shared tasks equally, but it was a matter to be discussed by couples themselves and not for government intervention. Women might choose part-time work in order to participate in other activities. With regard to the regulation of part-time work, she said that significant employment rights, including equal pay, legislation on sex and race discrimination, regulations on health and safety and the provision of time off for antenatal care were available to all employees.

572. An additional question was asked concerning working mothers, especially those working part time. The Committee wanted to obtain, possibly in the third periodic report, more information on the sharing of work and family responsibilities; why women tended to work part time; how many men worked part time; the amount of time that men and women devoted to household tasks and child care; and how the responsibility was shared of taking care of elderly and disabled adults who could not manage for themselves. The representative replied that opinion polls had revealed that, although men felt that household duties should be shared equally, in practice they were not shared. She said that if those duties were shared more equally women would have a fairer chance of working full time. She said that many family-friendly policies, introduced by the Government, had further increased the numbers of women working part time. The policies were not limited to the taking care of children but of other population groups as well. Moreover, the demands of the labour market had contributed to the part-time work phenomenon.

573. When asked whether the State provided allowances for periods of vocational retraining, the representative said that there were a number of schemes supporting such training. Government-funded training concentrated on school-leavers and the long-term unemployed. Special rules enabled those who had been out of the labour force for some years to join training schemes; 95 per cent of the returnees were

women and they received allowances during the free training. Women might also qualify for means-tested mandatory grants and loans to attend full-time higher education courses with a vocational element.

574. In answer to the Committee's request for statistics on the women employed on an unremunerated basis in family businesses, the representative said that it was difficult to measure that phenomenon reliably. In the regular Labour Force Survey (1992), there were 126,000 female unpaid workers, representing about 70 per cent of all unpaid family workers. When asked if that work was included in the gross national product, she replied that the United Kingdom followed international conventions and definitions and recognized the difficulties of valuing unpaid work.

575. Concerning sexual harassment, members asked about government measures to protect women's dignity. The representative said that sexual harassment might constitute sexual discrimination under the Sex Discrimination Act. The Government had issued a booklet on the law, the steps to be taken to prevent harassment and the handling of complaints.

576. Asked what percentage of working mothers and of those wishing to work were able to use child-care facilities, the representative answered that no data had been collected in the form requested. Child care facilities were provided on the basis of need, in the interests of the welfare of the child. About 70 per cent of children under five years of age were affected by some form of child care. The Children Act should encourage expansion to meet local needs. Moreover, the number of private and voluntary day nurseries had been increasing fast. A clear majority of the women who were not working had a positive commitment to looking after their children at home.

577. Asked about exceptions to the principle of equal treatment in some social security matters, the representative said that legislation usually discriminated in favour of women and those measures were to be retained. In line with its EEC treaty obligations, the United Kingdom had implemented equality in relation to occupational pension schemes. In relation to the age of entitlement to a State pension, the Government was considering the matter.

578. In response to an additional question about hidden unemployment and the unrealistically low unemployment rate of women, the representative said that it was clear that some women who wanted to work did not register themselves as unemployed. The number was, however, very hard to calculate. With regard to whether allowances were too low for survival, she said that in addition to unemployment benefits, which were a pure income-replacement device, there were other income-related benefits, which were sufficient when they were combined.

579. Members asked whether the Equal Opportunities Commission had special provisions regarding immigrants, who were usually more vulnerable and had less

access to the labour market than others. The representative from the Home Office stated that the Government was very much aware of the problem and of the cultural barriers those people faced. There were special programmes for immigrants, who often experienced double disadvantages. In addition to the Equal Opportunities Commission, there was the Commission for Racial Equality, which was responsible for enforcing the Race Relations Act and further promoting equal rights. In addition, activities at the local level, grants for training and education, English teaching, and urban programmes such as Safer Cities were directed to immigrants.

580. With regard to women's participation, members asked whether the Government intended to translate various affirmative action programmes into legislation. The representative replied that the results of programmes were being carefully monitored, and that much depended on the goodwill of employers and their ability to recognize the benefits of fully utilizing the talents of women. Cooperation was the primary goal, and legislative measures were seen to be useful only if no positive results were otherwise achieved.

581. Asked whether discrimination against those who had HIV/AIDS was prohibited, the representative replied that the mandate of the Equal Opportunities Commission allowed it to pay attention only to discrimination based on sex, although the Government was very conscious of such serious impediments to entering the labour market.

## Article 12

582. Asked about the social considerations in setting a 24-week limit in the new Abortion Act, the representative replied that the limit was medical and not social. A clinical judgement of two registered medical practitioners was required to terminate a pregnancy. Members asked about the reaction of women's organizations to health-care reform. The representative said that the reforms in the National Health Service had clarified each local authority's responsibility to provide appropriate health care for those within its jurisdiction. The reaction had been both favourable and less favourable. The Government had, moreover, adopted a strategy, consisting of five key areas for preventive action on improving the health of the country. No answer was provided to the question whether treatment institutions were maintained in the same way as formerly. Instead, information was given on family planning.

583. Concerning a question on the effects of HIV/AIDS on women and on the action taken, the representative said that, according to the latest figures from September 1992, there were 2,174 (12 per cent) reported cases of women with the HIV virus, as against 15,887 reported cases of men, and 579 (5 per cent) reported cases of women with AIDS, as against 9,940 reported cases of men. Although the proportion of women was lower, the situation was alarming as the rate of increase for women for both HIV and AIDS was higher than for men over the previous

years. An amount of £200 million had been provided in 1992/93 for both preventive and treatment services. Preventive work included a booklet for those working with HIV/AIDS and research on drug-using prostitutes. A suggestion had been made that health authorities should offer antibody testing to all women receiving antenatal care. HIV/AIDS was one of the five priority areas for action in the health promotion programme of the Government.

#### Article 14

584. In answer to a question on the problem of unpaid labour in family businesses in rural areas, the representative stated that the proportion of paid women employees in agriculture had been increasing. Training for women in agriculture recognized the role of unpaid family members in the administrative and financial aspects of farm management. In Northern Ireland, a programme was being funded to assist women in developing rural businesses.

585. Concerning the findings of the research financed by the Rural Development Commission on women's employment in rural areas, the representative said that the study highlighted problems - low pay, lack of services, poor transportation and housing - and suggested innovative local solutions to them. Transportation had been deregulated and subsidies provided for services that were socially necessary. Training for work in rural areas was supported by the Commission with locally based Training and Enterprise Councils and community councils.

#### Article 16

586. Asked about Government measures to ensure that family responsibilities were carried out, considering the high number of single-parent families, the Committee was informed that 17 per cent of families with dependent children were single-parent families. The Child Support Act of 1991, and equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland, was intended to provide a consistent and fair approach to child maintenance through administrative procedures rather than the courts. The Act would provide an income to single parents.

587. Regarding the impact on children of the high incidence of free unions and separation, the representative said that consideration was being given to reforming the divorce law to require conciliation before granting divorce. The smooth transition of and assurance of continuity for responsibilities for children were the main purposes of conciliation, and it might also lead to reconciliation. In addition, the Government supported the work of marriage guidance councils.

588. The Committee pointed to the trend of family dissolution and wanted to know if it was a deliberate trend, if there had been any surveys about it and what was the position of the Government. In her reply, the representative said that there seemed to be a trend towards an increase in the number of single-person households

and that it reflected a person's free choice. Additional information on that matter could be provided in the next periodic report if the Committee so requested.

#### Concluding observations

589. The Committee remarked that, irrespective of the development status of a country, women seemed to encounter obstacles to the full enjoyment of their rights. Members stated that women in developed countries faced new types of problems, related to entry to the labour market, professional skills, part-time work and violence, which was a most serious concern. Therefore, although a great deal had been accomplished in the United Kingdom, there was still room for improvement.