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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**  
Pre-session working group  
Thirty-second session  
10-28 January 2005

**Responses to the list of issues and questions for  
consideration of the combined second, third and fourth  
periodic reports**

**Gabon\***

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\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

## **I. Status of the Convention, Constitution, national machinery and preparation of the report**

### **Question No. 1:**

Article 2 of the Constitution provides that the Gabonese Republic ensures to all its citizens equality before the law without distinction as to race, sex, opinion or religion.

Consequently, the word “discrimination”, which is reflected in the word “distinction”, has not been introduced into the Constitution.

However, women who are allegedly victims of discrimination or unfair treatment resulting from a law, following its promulgation, or of an order or a statute which has not been reviewed by the Constitutional Court, and which contravenes their fundamental right, may be successful in bringing a plea of unconstitutionality before the courts either *in limine litis* (meaning, at the start of litigation) or during the exercise of the right of appeal.

Once the plea is before the courts, a decision is referred to the Constitutional Court, which first considers whether a violation of the complainant’s fundamental rights occurred.

If the Constitutional Court declares the text in question to contravene the Constitution, the text ceases to be valid from the time the decision is handed down.

When the Court determines that a law, an order, or a statute is unconstitutional, the Parliament, the President of the Republic, the Government and the Prime Minister (each of these authorities acting within its own field of competence) take measures to redress the legal situation resulting from the decision.

Articles 45 to 49 of the Constitutional Court Organization Act (Act No. 9/91 of 26 September 1991, as amended by Organization Act No. 13/94 of 17 September 1994).

Regrettably, women rarely avail themselves of this prerogative despite the awareness-raising carried out by the Observatory for Women’s Rights and Equality during their various activities on behalf of women.

### **Question No. 2:**

The Convention takes precedence over national laws. It took effect at the time of its ratification and publication (articles 113 and 114 of the Constitution.) As provided in articles 14 et seq. of the Civil Code, international treaties come into force upon completion of the formal requirements set out in articles 113 et seq. of the Constitution of the Republic. Having been ratified, the Convention has entered into force.

### **Question No. 3:**

The evaluation of the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was a two-stage process conducted under the aegis of the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women.

In the interests of presenting a report that would reflect the true situation of Gabonese women, the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women began by hiring a national consultant, Ms. Honorine Nzet Biteghe. She studied the situation of women in the various areas covered by the Convention, in collaboration with experts from various administrative areas (Education, Health, Justice, Economic and Social Council, Social Affairs, Presidency, Finance, Family, Employment, Human Rights, Planning, et al.) and approximately ten non-governmental organizations and women's associations (Gabonese Association of Women Educators, Gabonese Movement for Family Welfare, Association of Gabonese Women Lawyers, Association for the Defence of Women's and Children's Rights, and the Observatory for Women's Rights and Equality, et al.).

The national consultant, Ms. Honorine Nzet Biteghe, a judge by profession, is deeply involved in women's rights and the advancement of women and engages in various relevant activities, including:

- A radio show on Radio Africa No. 1 dealing with gender and women's issues.
- A social and legal study on the status of Gabonese women.
- The preparation of many publications in the area of women's rights (cohabitation, customary marriage, how to lodge a complaint, widows and orphans, etc.).

She is the President of the Observatory for Women's Rights and Equality and a member of a number of women's organizations (Association of Gabonese Women Lawyers, Christian Women for Peace, et al.).

At the end of the first stage, a workshop to assess the report was held by the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), from 11 to 15 March 2002 at the Rapontchombo Novotel Hotel in Libreville.

This workshop had two facilitators, Ms. Nzet Biteghe, the national consultant, and Ms. Odile Boulie Nunkwa Mubiala, the international consultant for UNICEF Congo, as well as governmental representatives and members of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and other associations.

During those sessions, the experts considered the second, third, fourth and fifth combined draft reports on the implementation of the Convention. Numerous amendments were formulated and considered.

#### **Question No. 4:**

The ties between the National Commission for the Family and the Advancement of Women and the Observatory for Women's Rights and Equality are complementary. When the Commission is considering a question of law related to the family, it works together with the Observatory to find a solution.

With respect to the links between the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women and the Observatory for Women's Rights and Equality, the latter is a non-governmental organization whose community

leaders are resource persons for the Ministry, which is responsible for its supervision. They work together on questions relating to women.

**Question No. 5:**

Following the presentation of the social and legal study on Gabonese women before the Council of Ministers, a decision was taken to set up an inter-ministerial committee chaired by the Minister of Justice, for the purpose of reviewing the discriminatory aspects of the various codes as regards women. But this committee has not yet begun any work.

In the meantime, a bill on sexual abuse was put forward and discussions have begun in both chambers of Parliament on a law prohibiting traffic in children. In addition, under the new Nationality Code, a man who marries a Gabonese woman may now acquire Gabonese nationality, formerly acquirable only by a woman who married a Gabonese man.

The provisions of the Constitutional Court Organization Act referred to in the answer to question No. 1 can be counted among the results.

A committee to explore the situation of widows and orphans was initiated by the Government.

**Question No. 6:**

The Convention was ratified by Gabon in 1984. One of the first measures taken by the Government at the time was the establishment, in 1983, of a governmental structure: the Department for Women's Issues. This department, believing that information was paramount in the defence of women's rights, created an information bulletin, which describes its activities and informs women of all that is occurring on the national and international level affecting their situation.

Furthermore, on the occasion of International Women's Day (8 March), the Ministry published and distributed free of charge a pamphlet describing the genesis of the daylong celebration and reproducing a copy of the Convention.

As for civil society, such non-governmental organizations as the Association pour la Défense des Droits de la Femme et de l'Enfant (ADDFE) have published pamphlets to spread word about the Convention. The Observatory for Women's Rights and Equality also disseminated the Convention on broadcasts of Radio Télévision Gabonaise 1 and during seminars organized with the Teachers' Union (SEENA).

It should be noted that in Gabon, non-governmental organizations are considered to be inalienable partners of the Ministry responsible for the advancement of women.

In addition, campaigns to disseminate the Convention will be carried out later this year throughout the national territory with the financial support of UNICEF.

## II. Stereotypes

### Question No. 7:

Although the law prohibits dowry marriage, the practice continues. Nevertheless, at the time of separation or divorce, some men hold that the marriage is not dissolved until the dowry has been repaid. Judges, when such situations are brought to their attention, invoke the provisions of the law.

#### *Impact of measures taken to combat stereotypes and traditional attitudes and cultural practices*

- Awareness-raising about the gender approach at all levels (Government, non-governmental organizations, the public and private sectors);
- Mandatory school attendance for children up to the age of 16;
- Criminal sanctions against any parent who does not send to school a child between the ages of 0 and 16;
- Education free of charge in State facilities up to the age of 16;
- Equal pay for equal educational qualifications (Labour Code);
- Ability of women freely to engage in a profession unless prohibited from doing so by a court on the ground that the profession impairs the equilibrium or morals of the family;
- Access of women to high-ranking leadership positions;
- Awareness-raising for women, by the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women and by non-governmental organizations, through conferences, seminars, colloquiums and the like, with the objective of changing their attitudes and freeing them from a sense of resignation.

### Question No. 8:

There is a certain amount of resistance, based on tradition, to article 3 of Act No. 20/63 of 31 May 1963, which bans dowries. The reason is simple: under pressure from the West, the Gabonese legislature forbade dowries on erroneous grounds, namely, that the dowry is the purchase price for a woman. The resistance arises from that interpretation, since the dowry is a symbol which marks a woman's departure from her natural family and the entry into that of her husband.

Although the Act provides for a term of imprisonment from three months to one year and a fine of 33,000 to 300,000 CFA francs, or one of those two punishments, for any person who demands or accepts gifts in cash or in kind in the form of a dowry, it should be noted that the law is not enforced since the practice is frequent and accepted by all.

Efforts were made to alter this text, by way of a bill entitled "Legalized customary marriage", which thus far has been unsuccessful because some of its provisions clash with those contained in the Civil Code. However, such a change is necessary in order to gain acceptance by all.

**Question No. 9:**

As a result of many awareness-raising seminars and workshops involving public and private partners, the Gabonese Government and civil society are in the process of adopting the gender approach as a tool in programming and planning for sustainable development:

- From 8 to 10 March 1996, a seminar was held in Libreville on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women. One part of the seminar was devoted to a broad implementation of the gender approach.
- From 18 to 22 October 1999, a seminar entitled “Introduction to gender” was held by the Minister for the Family with the assistance of such development partners as UNICEF, UNFPA and UNDP.
- From 13 to 15 December 2000, another seminar, entitled “Awareness-raising and implementation of strategies for integrating gender into development programmes” was held by the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women. This seminar basically targeted the senior ranks of public administration and the private sector.
- On 7 March 2001, an important “Awareness-raising workshop for members of the Government on the importance of the gender perspective in national concerns” was held by the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women, with the assistance of UNICEF, the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNFPA and UNDP.
- Also in 2001, Gabonese civil society began to play an active role in support of the Government’s efforts. In particular, the Network of Gabonese Women Ministers and Parliamentarians, in collaboration with UNFPA, held an “awareness-raising workshop for political leaders on the gender approach, with a view to attaining greater representation by women in elective posts and decision-making positions”.
- During 2003, the Gabonese Confederation of Free Trade Unions organized a gender seminar for its members, which was chaired by the Minister for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women.

**III. Violence against women****Question No. 10:**

Violence plays an ever-greater role in the social and cultural environment of Gabon. Complaints concern various milieux: the home, the workplace and the community.

(1) It is not always easy to acquire information on the extent of violence in the home. On the one hand, the often private and intimate nature of violence in the home along with social and cultural influences, and, on the other, the relations between the protagonists, prevent the victims from coming forward. Unfortunately, most victims are women. Furthermore, acts of violence within the family are sometimes justified on cultural grounds.

(2) In the broader community, women are victims of violence of every description, physical, psychological and sexual.

Complaints concern professional, public and academic spheres.

(3) In view of the continual growth of this phenomenon, the alarm has begun to be sounded, on all levels:

On the governmental level: many governmental departments have institutional mechanisms that permit victims of violent acts to bring complaints, to be heard, to receive support, to request compensation, and so on.

These departments are judicial, medical, social, charitable.

Awareness-raising and information campaigns, including conferences and seminars, are of paramount importance since the victims shed light on the subject for the Government, which is then able to provide them with better assistance.

For the commemoration of the Day to Combat Violence against Women in 2004, the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women plans to organize a daylong open house on the issue of family and domestic violence.

Various partners will participate in the Day, including governmental and private administrative bodies, non-governmental organizations, and development partners that take an interest in the problem of violence, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), ILO, UNICEF, and others.

The Day will enable the Ministry to familiarize the members of the public with the services available to them if they become victims of violence, and to have qualitative and quantitative data on this question.

Acts of violence of a sensitive nature, such as rape, require an approach which respects the equilibrium of the families of both victims and perpetrators.

Very few cases are brought to the attention of the courts.

1. Forms of violence

(a) Physical violence:

- Bodily injury between spouses or with relatives, such as in-laws
- Bodily injury between others
- Domestic rape and incest
- Sexually transmissible diseases
- Early pregnancies
- Arranged marriages
- Abortions

(b) Psychological and moral violence:

- Objectification of women
- Infidelity
- Female sterility
- Incest

- Female celibacy
  - Verbal abuse and slander
  - Switching between monogamy and polygamy during the marriage
  - Abandoning a wife
- (c) Violence by the State
- Texts which discriminate against women despite the constitutional prohibition
  - Poor representation of women in decision-making bodies
  - Laxness or tardiness in making decisions to protect the rights of women, such as obtaining alimony payments, protection against violent threats, and so forth

2. Scope of the problem

Instances of domestic rape and incest are known, but talking about them is taboo; the problem is real and has become widespread. The other forms of violence really occur, and the perpetrators and victims belong to all social categories.

3. Legal considerations

Acts of physical violence are subject under articles 230 et seq. of the Penal Code to criminal penalties and sanctions according to the type of offence (two months to five years imprisonment or long-term rigorous punishment).

Psychological violence such as verbal abuse and slander are punishable under articles 283 to 288 of the Penal Code (3 months to 12 months imprisonment or a maximum fine of 500,000 CFA francs).

Under the Civil Code, any form of discrimination may be invoked during a divorce trial as grounds for divorce.

**Question No. 11:**

Statistics on persons prosecuted for violence against women are not available because the courts do not differentiate among the victims.

The Government intends to fill this gap, both at the level of victims (awareness-raising and information) and at that of the public and private facilities which help them.

**Question No. 12:**

Women are brought up to feel extreme humility towards and respect for their husbands. They are so resigned to their fate that they are afraid and ashamed to report the acts of violence to which they are subjected.

*Measures*

- Awareness-raising in the local community, talks, meetings and radio and television broadcasts by the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women on the topic of violence against women (rape, inheritance rights, etc.) and



- The listening unit of the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women, the social services programme of the Ministry of Justice, the legal clinic of the Observatory for Women’s Rights and Equality, and the dissemination of legislative texts penalizing the various types of violence help women to be liberated from a sense of lethargy.

The Observatory:

- urges women to obtain a medical certificate following an act of violence;
- formulates complaints for women who cannot afford to hire a lawyer;
- informs the Government Prosecutor of cases that are brought to its attention;
- encourages women to communicate with their husbands rather than to resolve problems by coming to blows.

Services offering attention and assistance to women are provided by non-governmental organizations, social services and the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women, but there are no shelters for women. Some churches are able to shelter women for short periods.

The services are of a legal, health-related, social or religious nature.

Applying the gender approach, they denounce violence against women by men, and also violence against women by other women.

The listening unit is an example of a facility created in order to hear complaints from the general public; the statistics for the facility show that the majority of the complainants are women and children.

**Question No. 13:**

In order for a wife who abandons the marital home to protect herself, the combined provisions of the Civil and Penal Codes, the Code of Penal Procedure and the Code of Civil Procedure provide:

- that she should prepare a statement explaining the serious grounds which compel her to abandon the home;
- that she should urgently notify the Government Prosecutor of those same facts;
- that she may request, on an urgent basis, the presiding judge to authorize her to live away from the home while awaiting the reconciliation hearing, in the event that she wishes to divorce after leaving the marital home.

The real problem is that women, despite existing legislative measures, are afraid to act; they are therefore at a disadvantage, even though the legal arrangements described above provide protection against legal action should they abandon the marital home.

#### **IV. Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution**

**Question No. 14:**

Under articles 260 to 263 of the Penal Code, procuring and prostitution are punished by terms of imprisonment from three months to two years. If the offence

involves a minor under the age of 18, and if there is duress, or if the perpetrator is the husband, father, mother or legal guardian of the victim, the punishment is a prison sentence of from two to five years. Fines range from 50,000 to 2 million CFA francs.

*Measures taken*

As such acts are punishable, it goes without saying that they are carried out clandestinely in such legal establishments as restaurants, hotels, theatres, dance halls or other premises of such establishments.

The temporary or permanent closing of the establishment or the removal of its licence may be declared by the competent jurisdiction.

*Measures applied to provide support for the social reintegration of prostitutes*

Non-governmental organizations (religious or medical, or involved in the defence of women's rights, or that encourage women to carry out income-generating activities) are making efforts to meet with prostitutes in order to inform them about the dangers of their profession and the legal consequences deriving from it; they also provide, with the financial assistance of certain agencies, small sums of money for healthy activities.

**Question No. 15:**

The traffic in women is not as usual or frequent in Gabon as it is in some countries. It is probably conducted in secret, like prostitution.

**V. Participation in public life and decision-making**

**Question No. 16:**

- Notwithstanding the backward thinking or reactionary attitudes often attributed to men, the President of Gabon took a political decision in 2003 imposing a quota of at least four women as advisers in each of the ministerial Cabinets, and this decision has already been implemented.
- With regard to women's lack of political education, the President of Gabon had the political will to request the leaders of political parties of all tendencies to reserve at least one third of the posts on each list for women candidates.

It should be noted that Gabon is one of the few countries in sub-Saharan Africa where a woman is the leader of a political party.

- In view of the absence of solidarity and a sense of common purpose among women, the Government has in recent years encouraged the creation of women's associations and non-governmental organizations. In addition, the Minister for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women is increasingly advocating the development of networks between those associations and organizations.
- There is nothing new to report regarding the development of legislation in this area.

**Question No. 17:**

The Network of Gabonese Women Ministers and Parliamentarians is a young association, founded on 20 May 2000. Its objective is to mobilize all Gabonese social classes and to carry out a campaign with a view to accelerating the placement of women in decision-making bodies. It does its work through talks, workshops and awareness-raising and training seminars for women, various social groups and government personnel.

With a view to reversing the negative trend towards decreasing representation by women in the National Assembly, the Network:

- held, in collaboration with UNFPA, an awareness-raising workshop for political leaders (in elective and decision-making positions) on advocacy, lobbying and the gender approach, in Libreville from 24 to 26 May 2001;
- organized a seminar on women's involvement in politics from 24 to 25 June 2002;
- campaigned the Government with a view to obtaining parity on electoral lists and affirmative action in decision-making positions. The President of Gabon, who is always attentive to the needs of women, arranged for special measures to be taken by the political parties. During the most recent elections (legislative and local, 2002), he decreed that each list should contain at least 30 per cent women, and that a sufficient number should appear at the top of the list. With regard to decision-making positions, he requested each ministerial cabinet to take on at least four women advisers.

**Question No. 18:**

Unmarried women do not require the consent of a relative to participate in international activities.

*Measures envisaged to remove the requirement of marital consent for participation in activities at the international level*

With a view to protecting the family and marriage (article 1, paragraph 14, of the Constitution) article 254 of the Civil Code empowers the husband to choose the family residence, obliges the wife to live with him, and requires him to provide for her.

Only when the residence chosen by the husband poses a physical or psychological danger to the family may the court authorize the wife to live elsewhere with her children.

There is no other measure allowing the separation of a woman from her husband. However, if a woman is asked to carry out particular duties at the international level, an understanding may be reached between the spouses. It should be noted that such an understanding is easy to achieve when it is the wife who follows a husband who has been assigned to international duties.

## **VI. Nationality**

### **Question No. 19:**

The Nationality Code may be applied only by legal officers and members of other relevant governmental departments.

To ensure appropriate application, the procedure originates with the Ministry of Justice, and, for cases of acknowledgement and naturalization is channelled to the Office of the President where the dossiers are handled by legal counsellors, or, in cases of nationality by birth or by marriage, are directed to the courts, where professional judges consider the dossiers.

In addition, enforcement decrees have been issued to clarify grey areas.

## **VII. Health, education and employment**

### **Question No. 20:**

Women are informed of the importance of prenatal visits in maternal and child health clinics. There are, however, accessibility problems, which are geographical, financial and cultural.

Twenty-eight percent of Gabonese women live less than 5 kilometres, 17 per cent between 5 and 29 kilometres, and 7 per cent more than 29 kilometres from a clinic. The principal reasons for not visiting health facilities are distance (29 per cent), the high cost of services (11 per cent) and the excessive waiting time (5 per cent).

Since training for health personnel in the area of family planning has now begun, women will have access to family planning services.

A pilot clinic for reproductive health was opened in the 3rd arrondissement of Libreville, with financial support from UNFPA.

### **Question No. 21:**

In the programme of the Plan of Action in Social and Health Matters, the construction of maternal and child health clinics is given high priority.

Owing to lack of funding, not all of the plan's provisions have been carried out.

### **Question No. 22:**

The diseases that most affect women are problems related to pregnancy and childbirth:

- risky pregnancies
- abortions
- malaria
- arterial hypertension.

**Question No. 23:**

To reverse the current trend and tackle problems faced by female students, government programmes aim to influence: the abdication of parental responsibility, domestic duties and early pregnancies.

*Abdication of parental responsibility*

The Government is organizing a number of consultations and discussions (round tables, radio broadcasts, and conferences) to be held during the commemoration of a number of events: Mother's Day, Father's Day, the International Day of Families, the Day of the African Child. The purpose, often, is to persuade parents to reconsider their responsibilities towards their offspring, despite the difficulties.

The parent associations and other non-governmental organizations, such as the Gabonese Association of Women Educators, Agir pour le Gabon, and the Association for the Defence of Women's and Children's Rights, are also conducting awareness-raising campaigns on this topic. In addition, the Ministry has a listening unit which facilitates family reconciliation through personalized psychological care.

*Domestic duties*

The Government initiated a broad programme on gender: training programmes were organized by the department responsible for issues involving women in leadership positions in civil society, and for a non-sexist perception of family members, with a view to the equitable distribution of housework, especially between girls and boys.

The purpose is to encourage the public to understand the negative impact of stereotyping on the development of girls, and its implication for the development of the country.

*Early pregnancies*

The Ministry of National Education established an information, education and communication programme (IEC), one of whose facets, education in population matters, addresses the question of early pregnancies. A pilot programme on sexual education is currently being conducted in several schools.

Awareness-raising campaigns are under way in the schools, to help young people understand the risks related to early pregnancy.

Medical staff working in health units in schools and non-governmental organizations working on reproductive health play a significant role in seeking behavioural changes.

Although access to contraception is now permitted under Act No. 001/2000, particular emphasis is placed on preventing early pregnancies. In addition, since such pregnancies are indicators of unprotected sexual relations, young girls who become pregnant are at high risk of transmitting HIV/AIDS.

**Question No. 24:**

To improve women's access to family planning, programmes are conducted providing training for health personnel. There is a plan to provide training sessions to encourage women to visit clinics offering family planning services.

With regard to the causes of maternal mortality, the survey on urgent obstetrical care carried out in 2003 identifies the following as principal causes of maternal mortality:

- complications from abortions
- haemorrhages
- prolonged or difficult labour
- pre-eclampsia or eclampsia.

**Question No. 25:**

The reply to this question will be provided during the presentation of the report in January 2005, since the competent departments did not supply us with the statistical data in time.

## **VIII. Equality in civil matters and in marriage and family relations**

**Question No. 26:**

(Response the same as that to question 5)

No measure has been taken to put an end to polygamy. Measures have been taken, however, to weaken monogamy, by allowing a husband to change his choice when already married with the consent of his first wife (Civil Code, article 178).

With the assistance of UNFPA, non-governmental organizations have urged Parliament to redress provisions that contravene the principle of equality among citizens before the law, in particular women. Only the Government and the Parliament are empowered to remedy that problem.

**Question No. 27:**

In addition to the ratification of the Convention, and the campaigns conducted by non-governmental organizations regarding the marriage age for girls and the banning of customary marriage or the forced marriage of girls under age 15 (Penal Code, article 264), as well as awareness-raising for parents and daughters on the dangers of marriage for young girls, the Government is contemplating bringing national law into line with the Convention with regard to the establishment of a legal minimum age for the marriage of girls.

**Question No. 28:**

There are many inconsistencies. The most egregious are:

- The marriage dissolves on the death of one of the spouses, but the widow is obliged to marry within the family of her husband if she wishes to benefit from

her right of usufruct (article 692, paragraph 3). The husband is not subject to this obligation;

- The Family Council (Civil Code, articles 699 to 707): this institution is becoming an instrument by which the husband's relatives take vengeance on the surviving wives. If the parents-in-law refuse to uphold it, the inheritance may be prevented from passing to the widow, even though she is the legal heir. Normally, the widow takes precedence over the family heirs;
- This plundering of the widow's inheritance is not clearly codified in the Penal Code as an offence;
- The failure to respect a will that benefits the widow;
- The difficulty of dissolving co-ownership, in particular, for widows who married under the option of monogamy.

*Measures taken*

- The President of Gabon has questioned the various departments concerned regarding the abuses to which widows are subject;
- Legislation of a general nature regarding the protection of widows exists, but the Government Prosecutor and the courts are not sufficiently severe with respect to offences committed against widows by family heirs;
- Even when a decision is made, assistance from the police is always needed to carry it out, because of the aggressive conduct of the relatives of the defunct, who go unpunished despite laws forbidding their behaviour.
- Recommendations were made during World Population Day, in collaboration with UNFPA, with a view to addressing this problem;
- The Observatory for Women's Rights and Equality and several non-governmental organizations are working in the field to disseminate the principles of widows' and orphans' rights and to encourage women to stand up for their rights by bringing their cases to court.

Done at Libreville, 20 September 2004

Angélique Ngoma

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