



# Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Seventy-fifth session

### Summary record of the 1755th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 14 February 2020, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Gbedemah

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention** (*continued*)

*Sixth periodic report of Eritrea* (CEDAW/C/ERI/6; CEDAW/C/ERI/Q/6 and CEDAW/C/ERI/RQ/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Eritrea took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Ms. Tesfamichael** (Eritrea), introducing her country's sixth periodic report (CEDAW/C/ERI/6), said that the current meeting was taking place at a historic moment for Eritrea following the signing of the peace agreement with Ethiopia and the lifting of United Nations sanctions against the country. In a context of emerging peace in the region, the Government had adopted a development strategy built around internal engagement and international cooperation. It believed that such recent developments would promote the advancement of women's equality and empowerment.
3. The National Union of Eritrean Women, which led efforts to promote women's rights in her country, currently had over 350,000 members. As part of its coordination role in guiding implementation of the Convention at the national level, it had overseen the preparation of the sixth periodic report to the Committee. Representatives of ministries, local government authorities, national associations, the private sector, academic institutions, civil society and United Nations agencies had all contributed to that process. Between 2015 and 2019, the actions of the National Union had been based on the Gender Action Plan. In accordance with that plan, a gender mainstreaming programme had been put in place and, as a result, seven government ministries had already incorporated gender issues into their development strategies. Since the country's previous report, a national consultation workshop and an intersectoral training programme had also been organized on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. It had been concluded that more efforts were needed to consider the provisions of the resolution in the developing national and regional contexts, and further consultations were therefore scheduled to be held before the end of the year.
4. The Government's development policy was designed to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth, resources and opportunities among the population and, in particular, vulnerable social groups and rural communities. Thanks to measures that had been taken under the policy, girls and women in rural areas were benefiting from new health facilities, schools, transport services and sanitary facilities. Moreover, the gender parity index had risen at all levels of education and had reached 0.91 for secondary school for the period 2016–2017. Various measures had also been taken to reduce school dropout rates, including the opening of boarding schools in remote areas, the promotion of mobile schools and the organization of awareness-raising campaigns.
5. Making credit and loans available to female entrepreneurs was considered to be an important driver of the economic empowerment of women. As such, approximately 66 per cent of all beneficiaries of the national Saving and Microcredit Programme were women. Women in rural areas had the right to equal access to land and were provided with agricultural tools, technical assistance and outreach services to improve productivity. Moreover, an increasing number of women now owned commercial farms. A total of 45 organized women's cooperatives had been established with a total membership of 1,141 female farmers.
6. With regard to increasing the participation of women in political and public life, a series of temporary special measures – including the imposition of quotas – had been taken and had delivered promising results. Following the local elections in 2019, women accounted for 56.2 per cent of elected officials at the village level, 37.3 per cent of elected officials at the locality level and 49.4 per cent of elected community court judges. The number of women appointed to senior decision-making positions was also on the increase.
7. The elimination of all forms of discrimination, stereotyping and harmful practices against women was a national priority. An entrenched patriarchal system and lack of economic development had been behind such attitudes and practices. As a result, the

Government was tackling the issue by taking measures to bring about a broader socioeconomic, sociopolitical and sociocultural transformation on the basis of progressive values. Such a transformation was already under way at the community level, as demonstrated by the establishment of committees to combat female genital mutilation, underage marriage and other forms of violence against women. Women's equality and empowerment could be realized through the continued strengthening of national institutions and the promotion of socioeconomic and sociopolitical development. Her Government would continue to make every effort to achieve that aim by implementing pragmatic policies and strategies such as those detailed in its report.

#### *Articles 1 to 6*

8. **Ms. Verges** said that she thanked the State party for having submitted its report in a timely manner and that she welcomed the contribution made by civil society to its preparation. However, although she commended the efforts taken by the Government to promote gender equality, the Committee had received information suggesting that the current situation in the State party was a matter of grave concern.

9. First and foremost, she wished to know what concrete action had been taken since the end of the armed conflict in 2018 to establish a society that was based on the rule of law and characterized by a separation of powers, in which human rights were guaranteed and protected. She would also be interested to know what steps had been taken to ensure that the process initiated in 2015 to revise the Constitution was consensual and inclusive. Confirmation as to whether the new text was going to include a definition of discrimination modelled on article 1 of the Convention would be of particular interest to the Committee, as would clarification as to the measures the State party had taken to organize democratic elections benefiting from the strong participation of women. It would also be useful to know what action was being taken, in the light of the peace agreement with Ethiopia, to reform the existing system of mandatory national service and to put an end to the human rights abuses suffered by conscripts.

10. She wished to know whether the Government intended to ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol). Further information on the measures that were being taken to incorporate provisions related to women's rights into national legislation would also be appreciated. It would be useful to have an account of what was being done to harmonize the country's three legal systems – civil law, customary law and religious law – in order to surmount obstacles to implementation of the Convention. It would also be helpful to learn which steps were being taken to establish an independent and effective judiciary equipped with a sufficient number of courts and staffed by officials trained on gender-related issues. She would also like to know what action the State party was taking to provide women with complaint mechanisms and legal aid and to restore the rights of victims of sexual abuse, sexual harassment, slavery, torture and rape. In that regard, the Committee would welcome further information on the action that was being taken to bring the perpetrators of such acts to justice. Statistics related to the number of complaints, investigations, prosecutions and convictions would be of particular interest, including specific details of any proceedings initiated against military officials.

11. **Ms. Ameline** said that she congratulated the State party on the peace agreement that it had signed with Ethiopia and hoped that it would offer fresh impetus to the realization of women's rights in the country. However, it could not be ignored that Eritrean women had suffered greatly in recent years. She would therefore like to know what measures the Government intended to take to ensure the rule of law in the State party. Did it envisage establishing an independent human rights mechanism with the power to investigate the human rights violations of recent years?

12. In the light of the stated commitment of the Government to implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), she wished to know whether the State party intended to establish a national plan for women and peace and security. By incorporating the provisions of the Committee's general recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations into such a plan, the State party could create a powerful instrument capable of promoting sustainable development, national unity and reconciliation

from the perspective of women's rights. Furthermore, incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals into national policies on women's empowerment could be another way of offering fresh impetus to development while protecting the rights of women. She wished to know whether the Committee could count on the Government's willingness to engage in a genuine dialogue with civil society and women in the diaspora to ensure that women's rights in Eritrea were the product of a broad consensus. Similarly, it would be helpful to know whether the Government was open to international cooperation and prepared to accept greater assistance from United Nations agencies on subjects including the integration of specific provisions of the Convention into national legislation.

13. **Ms. Lijam** (Eritrea) said that women were not discriminated against in any way in her country. National legislation and government's policies did not permit discrimination against women of any kind and no discriminatory acts resulted from their implementation. It was important to understand the current context of women's rights in the light of the country's struggle for liberation. As a result of the heroic actions of women during the years of conflict, the situation of women in Eritrea had been transformed. All patriarchal customs and attitudes had been abandoned and the notions of discrimination against women and the restriction of women's rights had been forgotten. Following independence, it had therefore been very easy for the Government to repeal any laws that had previously belittled, obstructed or discriminated against women. The definition of discrimination in article 1 of the Convention had been fully incorporated into national legislation. As in any society, there might still be occasions when individuals misunderstood or misinterpreted laws. However, it was necessary to look back to the situation before the struggle to emancipate the country in order to understand the progress that had been made in relation to women's rights.

14. **Mr. Osman** (Eritrea) said it was important for treaty body reviews to take into account the historical and current reality of Eritrea rather than relying too heavily on reports negating that reality. Eritrean women had themselves initiated the process of women's empowerment some 60 years previously, during the country's struggle for independence – a struggle that could not have been won without them. The past 30 years had been characterized not by peace but by armed conflict and hostility. Over that period, the Government had been forced to introduce measures to deal with that and other challenges, including those imposed by external actors. However, the country had now entered a new era of peace and cooperation, giving hope to women and the country as a whole.

15. **Ms. Ameline** said that the Committee was at once conscious of the country's history and aware of the need to focus on the future and, in particular, the establishment of the rule of law. She would therefore be grateful for responses to her questions, namely whether the Government planned to create a national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), whether it envisaged establishing an independent human rights mechanism, what steps had been taken to fully incorporate the provisions of the Convention into domestic law and what specific legislative measures had been taken or were envisaged to promote and protect women's rights.

16. **Ms. Verges** said she wished to emphasize that, while legal provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex existed in Eritrea, it was vital to ensure that a definition of discrimination against women in line with article 1 of the Convention was incorporated into national law. She wondered whether specific legislation on women's rights had been introduced and would be interested to hear about women's access to justice and any legal reforms undertaken.

17. **Mr. Tekle** (Eritrea) said that, while the law clearly provided for the independence of the judiciary in the exercise of its functions, ensuring the full independence of the justice system was an ongoing and challenging process, not only for Eritrea but for all countries. The Ministry of Justice had conducted an extensive capacity-building programme in cooperation with the country's School of Law. Encouraging progress had been made, as demonstrated by an increase in the number of judges, courts and women law graduates, who now outnumbered men.

18. Article 8 of the Transitional Civil Code of Eritrea and article 4 of the Transitional Penal Code of Eritrea were clear examples of provisions prohibiting any form of discrimination, including on the basis of sex. While it was possible that historical remnants

of discrimination or inequality remained, possibly in legislation or in certain cultural or traditional practices, the Government was working diligently to eliminate them, including by engaging in rigorous awareness-raising campaigns. The Government's commitment to equality was clear; after independence, immediate action had been taken to enshrine the principle of equality in the legislation and amend any legal provisions that were discriminatory towards women.

19. **Ms. Lijam** (Eritrea) said that the Government was committed to rooting out discrimination against women, irrespective of whether it was direct or indirect, multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination. However, the values, culture and traditions of individual nations, who each had their own ways of tackling discrimination, should be respected.

20. As had been explained in her country's replies to the list of issues ([CEDAW/C/ERI/RQ/6](#), paras. 2–6), Eritrea had acknowledged women's role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution and had been involved in international and regional forms on the topic, long before the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), the principles of which it fully embraced. In preparation for the development of a national action plan to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), workshops and training had been held, in partnership with the United Nations country team, in order to evaluate its applicability to the national context and to the newly established era of peace and cooperation in the region. It was envisaged that those consultations would continue throughout 2020. One of the pillars of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was women's equal and full participation in peace and security. Given the crucial role played by Eritrean women during the armed struggle, during which they had accounted for 33 per cent of the People's Liberation Front, the Government was fully committed to maintaining women's contribution to peacebuilding and nation-building. It firmly believed that women should enjoy equal participation in every area of life, including in the national service, the armed forces and the security sector. There should be no double standards in that regard.

21. **Ms. Bethel** said that she welcomed the State party's National Gender Action Plan 2015–2019, which had been developed and implemented by the National Union of Eritrean Women. She recalled that, in its previous concluding observations ([CEDAW/C/ERI/CO/5](#), para. 15), the Committee had recommended that the State party should strengthen the National Union's capacities to coordinate and interact with civil society organizations. She would therefore be interested to know what measures had been taken to that end and which civil society organizations were currently working with the National Union. An impact assessment of the National Gender Action Plan was currently being conducted and wondered whether the delegation could provide details of any initial findings on the targets achieved.

22. The National Union had established regional committees to implement regional action plans for the period 2018–2022 and to assess the status of women in their respective regions. She wished to know what gaps those regional committees had identified with regard to gender inequality and women's rights and what mechanisms had been established or were envisaged to ensure that the State party's priority goals for women were implemented in a coordinated manner. She would also like to know how the regional administrations implemented gender mainstreaming strategies in all areas covered by the Convention, with reference to the most vulnerable groups of women, such as rural women. It would also be useful to know how often regional targets and priorities for women's and gender-related issues were reviewed and assessed, whether indicators had been developed for benchmarking performance and progress made in achieving gender targets and whether a systematized process for monitoring performance and assessing impact was in place.

23. She would appreciate information on crisis centres and shelters for women and wondered whether NGOs and women's representative organizations were involved in the services provided in such centres. Lastly, she would like to know whether any measures had been taken to establish a national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles and, if so, whether that institution would be mandated to address violations of women's rights.

24. **Ms. Tisheva** said she welcomed the measures that had been taken by the State party towards the achievement of substantive equality between women and men, including by establishing a 30 per cent gender quota to foster women's participation in political life and

implementing a number of measures to encourage women to pursue higher education and technical or vocational training. She wished to know whether the State party had established clear legal provisions allowing and facilitating the adoption and implementation of temporary special measures; whether it had assessed the impact of the temporary special measures already introduced and, if so, whether relevant statistics could be provided; and what had been the impact of credit and loan schemes for women entrepreneurs.

25. Despite the 30 per cent gender quota, women's participation in public and political life remained low. She wondered what temporary special measures had been introduced or were envisaged to increase women's representation in high-level political and decision-making posts, in the judiciary, in international roles and in any other spheres in which women were disadvantaged or underrepresented. She would be interested to know what measures the Government intended to take to increase the participation of women from vulnerable groups, such as women with disabilities, minority women, demobilized women, migrant women and women returning from third countries.

26. **Ms. Senait Mehari** (Eritrea) said that, alongside the National Union of Eritrean Women, a broad range of organizations had participated in drafting the periodic report, such as the National Union of Eritrean Youth, organizations representing young professionals, businesswomen and women in handicrafts, the United Nations country team, the United Nations Development Programme and even individuals with an interest in women's rights.

27. In 2017, the regional committees of the National Union had conducted assessments to identify any gender inequalities and gaps in different sectors. One of the issues repeatedly highlighted by young women was the lack of local facilities, such as childcare centres, to enable them to continue in education or employment following the birth of a child. A five-year plan had now been established to address such gaps, with annual progress reporting.

28. **Ms. Lijam** (Eritrea) said that an impact assessment of the National Gender Action Plan 2015–2019 would be completed by the end of 2020 and its findings reported to the Committee in the next periodic report. The six priority areas contained in that Plan had been based on the strategic priorities established in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and appropriate indicators had been defined. The priorities of the next national action plan would be defined in conjunction with the National Union of Eritrean Women.

29. The six regional administrations, which were the leading authorities throughout the country, including in rural areas, had identified gaps in the legislation such as underage marriage. Although the minimum age for marriage was 18 years, girls in some villages had married at an earlier age. The 2017 symposium had therefore decided that village administrations would in future demand proof of each girl's age in the form of verified documents. Unregistered village births had been identified as another gap when babies were delivered in the family home. Some villages also ignored the 30 per cent gender quota for elections to village assemblies on account of prejudicial attitudes. Village administrations were therefore required to raise awareness of the quota. The National Union of Eritrean Women monitored progress in addressing the gaps based on recommendations issued at the regional symposiums and on annual reports concerning the National Gender Action Plan.

30. The establishment of shelters for women victims of gender-based violence or institutions for orphan children did not form part of her country's traditional values, laws and practices. Persons who were unable to remain within the community would feel alienated. Orphans were therefore adopted by village families and women victims were offered care and embraced by the communities. Leaving aside the issue of criminal liability, offenders were also asked to provide victims with compensation.

31. **Mr. Osman** (Eritrea) said that a National Coordinating Body had been established to monitor implementation of the universal periodic review recommendations. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare was tasked with monitoring compliance with the provisions of the Convention and other human rights treaties without discrimination on any grounds. The National Union of Eritrean Women had established village community committees to identify gaps in the law and take concrete action to remedy the situation. The statistics requested by the Committee would be provided as soon as possible.

32. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that she understood the points made regarding community care: there were no orphans because people took care of them; there were no battered women because the community watched over them. However, urbanization presented a challenge to traditional support systems and created the need for a more institutionalized response.

33. **Ms. Verges** said she wished to know whether the State party had considered establishing an executive body, such as a ministry, that would be responsible for women's affairs. It was also unclear whether the State party intended to establish a national human rights institution. She was interested in hearing about any temporary special measures adopted to promote women's representation in high-level regional and national positions and in the diplomatic service.

34. **Ms. Tisheva** said she wished to know whether the State party had assessed the impact of temporary special measures, for instance in the educational and business sectors, and whether statistical data were available on the number of beneficiaries of such measures. She would also appreciate information concerning the legal basis of temporary special measures, the procedures for specifying objectives and time frames for their achievement, and the underlying policies. What steps were taken to encourage the participation of vulnerable groups of women in such activities?

35. **Ms. Lijam** (Eritrea) said that temporary special measures were introduced to ensure equality of opportunity for women. The policies were based on the National Charter and the legislation in force. For instance, as women's professional capacity was based on education and training, special measures had been adopted to facilitate girls' enrolment in higher education.

36. She agreed that an institutionalized response to gender-based violence was required but did not consider the need for the establishment of institutions. Appropriate action in that regard had been taken at the community level. As women's issues were social issues, all members of the community were responsible for taking the necessary action.

37. The National Union of Eritrean Women had not been endowed with ministerial status but its powers were equivalent to those of a ministry, since its work was coordinated with all existing ministries and the six regional governors. The National Union had been established in November 1979, one month before the adoption of the Convention by the United Nations General Assembly. Eritrea had ratified the Convention in 1995 without reservations.

38. At its First Congress in 1977, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front had decided to encourage Eritrean women to establish a national organization. Study groups had been established and the National Union of Eritrean Women had been established two years later. One of the resolutions adopted at the founding congress in 1979 was to abolish female genital mutilation.

39. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** said that she wished to commend the State party's strategy aimed at addressing patriarchal stereotypes. However, the Committee remained concerned about practices that pointed to the persistence of harmful stereotypes. For instance, certain forms of sexual violence against women were tolerated when the perpetrators were members of the armed forces performing their national service. She wished to know whether legal proceedings against members of the armed forces were still conducted by military tribunals rather than criminal courts. What steps were taken to prosecute soldiers or public officials who perpetrated violence against women?

40. Female genital mutilation and child marriage had a discriminatory and dangerous impact on children's lives. They would not occur if patriarchal stereotypes were abolished. She therefore wished to know what measures were proposed in the strategic plan 2020–2024 to eradicate such phenomena.

41. The Committee had expressed concern in its previous concluding observations (paras. 12–13) concerning the obstacles faced by women in gaining access to justice in cases involving violence. She wished to know whether the State party had amended its criminal legislation to include all forms of violence against women, as recommended by the Committee.

42. While she welcomed the fact that female prisoners were guarded by female wardens, their difficult conditions of confinement and their subjection to forced labour were matters of concern. Many women had been deprived of their liberty for having resisted sexual abuse by army officers and, according to the records, women had been imprisoned for having disobeyed orders. She wished to know whether measures had been taken to facilitate women prisoners' access to justice, in accordance with the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), especially women victims of sexual violence perpetrated by male wardens.

43. She would also appreciate information concerning measures taken to reduce the dissemination of small arms.

44. **Ms. Leinarte** said that, although the State party had ratified a number of international instruments concerning trafficking in human beings, the report contained very little information on practical action to combat trafficking. The Committee would appreciate information concerning existing structures, such as a national referral mechanism tasked with identification of victims, the services available to victims and the number of perpetrators who had been prosecuted. According to the Trafficking in Persons Report issued by the Department of State of the United States, most of the victims were Eritrean nationals who had been trafficked within the country and abroad. Moreover, at the end of 2018 at least half a million Eritrean refugees were receiving protection from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Strict exit regulations, such as limited issuance of passports, compelled many Eritreans to leave the country illegally. They were then particularly vulnerable to trafficking abroad. For example, numerous Eritrean refugees had been kidnapped by Bedouin tribes in the Sinai Peninsula and reportedly subjected to torture and organ trafficking. The Committee would be grateful for information concerning action taken by the State party to rescue Eritreans who had been taken hostage in the Sinai Peninsula.

45. As prostitution was legal, aside from some restrictions, women were allegedly at risk of being abused by police officers. She wished to know whether the State party had introduced any programmes to help women exit prostitution.

46. **Mr. Osman** (Eritrea) said that numerous Eritreans had fled abroad from 2001 onwards for political and economic reasons. Many of them had been smuggled across the border and were then subjected to human trafficking. The Government had therefore ratified the relevant United Nations agreements to prevent trafficking in persons and had joined in the African Union Horn of Africa Initiative (the Khartoum Process), which provided for cooperation between countries of transit and destination.

47. He would, however, dispute the figures, which had been exaggerated. There were large numbers of asylum seekers in Europe who claimed to be Eritrean but were not Eritrean nationals. Nevertheless, the fact that UNHCR had gone on to establish camps in Ethiopia, Sudan and Libya, for example, had only encouraged Eritreans to leave. It was understandable: no one living on an income of US\$ 200 would stay if they were promised US\$ 1,000. But once they had crossed the border they had no protection and easily fell prey to traffickers.

48. His Government had now joined forces with other Governments in the region to share information and tackle the situation in countries of destination and transit. The numbers of Eritreans leaving had fallen sharply. He agreed that there were gaps in the legislation, but ultimately the issue was one of migrant smuggling rather than human trafficking.

49. **Mr. Tekle** (Eritrea) said that, traditionally, persons who suffered abuse were cared for in their communities. Moreover, under customary law, sexual violence and rape were completely unacceptable and once a woman had accused a man of rape, she was not required to give further evidence. When women were interviewed in crisis centres, on the other hand, their own behaviour in the context of a rape situation, for example, was called into question. Thus, urbanization called for other approaches, one of which was to incorporate the more progressive components of customary law into civil law.

50. At the same time, even though practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation had been outlawed, they persisted, showing that legislation alone could not eliminate them: public support was needed if real change was to come about. For that reason



his Government made efforts to publicize the risks inherent in such practices and also to raise awareness of the problem of gender-based violence. The military courts dealt only with matters arising in the course of official functions and duties; since rape did not fall into that category, it was outside military jurisdiction.

51. Women prisoners were held separately from men and guarded by female warders. Public prosecutors and judges had access to women's prison wings and could monitor the conditions there. Educational and day-care facilities were provided for women prisoners' children.

52. **Ms. Tsigereda Mehari** (Eritrea) said that the Ministry of Health had conducted a nationwide survey in 2013 in which 8.3 per cent of respondents had reported experience of gender-based violence and 1.3 per cent experience of sexual assault specifically. Those figures might be an underestimate, as victims were often reluctant to disclose such information.

53. In 2019, the Ministry had issued clinical guidelines on dealing with victims and had organized a meeting with all stakeholders to discuss ways of helping those who did come forward, enhancing health workers' ability to deal with them, and collecting data in a systematic way in order to assess the prevalence of the problem. Capacity-building for health workers would take place over the next few years to ensure equal access for all victims to primary health care and counselling throughout the country.

54. **Ms. Senait Mehari** (Eritrea) said that a strategy on harmful practices had been developed for the period up to 2024 based on an integrated preventive approach that brought together all line ministries and the National Union of Eritrean Youth. Awareness-raising efforts had included meetings with religious leaders in 2016, for example, aimed at reaching a common understanding of gender-based violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation, which had led to the publication of a statement to the effect that female genital mutilation was not a religious practice.

55. **Ms. Lijam** (Eritrea) said that it took time to change attitudes to traditional practices. Scarification and the preference for boy babies were both now a thing of the past but the change had been a slow process.

56. Prostitution was legal and was not restricted. Women had the choice to adopt it as a livelihood, but State institutions in the areas of social welfare and health, as well as the National Union of Eritrean Women, encouraged women to seek technical or vocational training as a means of changing their lifestyle.

57. **The Chair** said that she wished to clarify her earlier comments on shelters. She understood that shelters might not be necessary in a traditional context but, in urban settings, victim care required methods of a more institutional nature that applied certain standards, notably human rights standards, and were subject to monitoring and oversight. For that matter, it would also be helpful to the Committee to have some statistics on the numbers of women who sought help from traditional sources and to learn about the circumstances under which traditional methods of care were triggered.

#### *Articles 7 to 9*

58. **Ms. Tisheva** said that peace and demilitarization were conditions for improving women's rights and advancement. As alternative sources indicated, women's recruitment into the army alongside men had had less to do with gender equality than with the State's need for able-bodied soldiers and gender inequalities had persisted, with women being required, unlike men, to continue with their roles as mothers, wives and daughters as well as to take on the new role of freedom fighters. They had subsequently found it very difficult to adapt to civilian life and earn a living; moreover women had disappeared from the social, economic and political scene in Eritrea.

59. Accordingly, she would like to hear about any measures taken or planned with a view to organizing free and fair elections to the National Assembly in which all women would be able to vote and stand for election. She would also like to know what measures the State party planned to take to ensure the increased participation of women at a high political level and

in the judiciary, for example, and to provide leadership training for women, including those from remote and rural areas.

60. She would welcome information on measures taken to guarantee the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly of women human rights defenders and journalists and women's non-governmental organizations – rights which, though enshrined in the Constitution, were reportedly not guaranteed in practice. What measures were in place to prevent the arbitrary detention and harassment of women leaders who expressed dissenting opinions and women's rights defenders, and to ensure the release of women detained for political reasons? She invited the delegation to mention any independent women's associations active in the substantive areas covered by the Convention that were acting freely and with which the Government cooperated in implementing the Convention.

61. **Ms. Bethel** recalled that the Committee had twice recommended that the State party should guarantee that all children were registered at birth in order to minimize the risk of statelessness and maximize access to services and noted that the Committee on the Rights of the Child had recently made a similar recommendation. She said that it seemed that persons living in remote areas were still not properly registered and were therefore unable to receive certain State services, and she would like to hear what strategies the State party had in place to ensure civil registration of all births, whether such strategies covered internally displaced persons and what methods were used to inform the public at large throughout the country of the nearest registration centres.

62. **Mr. Osman** (Eritrea) said that it was true that the number of women in senior positions in Eritrea did not reflect the struggle the country had gone through. Nevertheless, there were women in senior administrative and ambassadorial posts and it was hoped that more would make their way into political and decision-making positions. The holding of fair elections was one component of the country's political road map, which the Government was currently revisiting with a view to adapting it to the realities of broader economic integration and peace in the region.

63. There was no risk of statelessness or lack of access to services for persons lacking a birth certificate in Eritrea. There were other means for a person to prove citizenship, for example demonstrating that one or both of their parents were Eritrean nationals.

64. **Mr. Tekle** (Eritrea) said that birth registration was compulsory. There were civil status officers throughout the country, albeit not in all remote areas, for logistical reasons. Early registration was encouraged as the process was speedier; after more than three months it took longer, as there were other elements to be taken into account.

65. **Ms. Tsigereda Mehari** (Eritrea) said that the birth registration process was facilitated by the Expanded Programme on Immunization. With 98 per cent uptake and coverage of all geographical areas, registration for that programme amounted to virtually universal registration of birth.

66. **Ms. Lijam** (Eritrea) said that one of the gaps that had been identified in regional symposiums was the lack of any role for village administrations in the registration of births and deaths. Village administrations were now empowered to support other administrations in that task. Moreover, the National Statistics Office would be setting up a comprehensive database to support registration.

67. With regard to the rights of women with disabilities who were also members of ethnic minorities, she said that there were nine ethnic groups in Eritrea, but the concept of "ethnic minorities" was not accepted. All women with disabilities were respected; they had their own independent associations to defend their rights.

68. Recalling that the National Union of Eritrean Women was a 350,000-strong association with branches in around 80 per cent of the country's 1,800 villages, she said that there were indeed other independent organizations for women, representing groups such as teachers, doctors, pharmacists and agricultural workers.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*