



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

Distr.: General
4 November 2015

English only

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Sixty-second session**

Summary record of the 1339th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 29 October 2015, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Hayashi

Contents

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention

Combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Liberia

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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

Combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Liberia (CEDAW/C/LBR/7-8; CEDAW/C/LBR/Q/7-8 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Liberia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that she wished to report on some of the progress made by Liberia since the consideration of its previous periodic report to the Committee in 2009. In 2011, Liberia had adopted the Children's Act, which, among other things, prohibited female genital mutilation, provided for equal access to education for girls and made children's rights a compulsory component of teacher training programmes. At the seventieth session of the United Nations General Assembly, the President of Liberia had made a six-part commitment to eliminating all forms of violence against women in Liberia, and the steering committee for the National Human Rights Action Plan had been mandated to include in the plan efforts to enforce the prohibition of female genital mutilation. Other positive achievements included: the endorsement by the Cabinet in June 2015 of a preliminary bill on domestic violence, which was currently before the legislature; the criminalization of aspects of early and forced marriage under the law on rape; and the endorsement during the Constitutional Review Conference held in March 2015 of a proposition to set the legal age of marriage at 18 and the decision to put the matter to a national referendum, which was scheduled to be held in 2017.

3. Liberia had been the first country in the Mano River Union subregion to eradicate the Ebola virus disease and had set up a system to track and contain any future recurrence. She reaffirmed the commitments undertaken by the Government during the recent launch of a global study on the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), entitled "Preventing conflict, transforming justice, securing the peace". The commitments included improving women's access to justice, information and land acquisition; and decentralizing Criminal Court "E" — which had exclusive original jurisdiction to hear cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence — to all counties of Liberia, thereby ensuring access to justice for all victims of those offences. In order to fulfil the commitments, Liberia planned to implement the joint government and United Nations programme to prevent and respond to sexual or gender-based violence, as well as to allocate funds from the national budget to the implementation of resolution 1325 throughout the country, with the aim of supporting women's economic empowerment programmes and extending coverage to women and girls in rural areas.

4. Lastly, the 1973 law on aliens and nationality, which prohibited children who were born abroad to Liberian mothers from acquiring Liberian citizenship, was currently being reviewed with a view to bringing it into line with article 28 of the Constitution, which did entitle such children to citizenship. In the meantime, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection was promoting efforts to inform Liberian women of their right to transfer their citizenship to their children under the terms of that article. With a view to the inclusion of women in the country's development, the Government was committed to ensuring that the outcome of the constitutional review process would guarantee and institutionalize women's full and equal participation in governance and national affairs.

Articles 1 to 6

5. **Ms. Patten** (Country Rapporteur) commended the State party for the many positive steps it had taken during the reporting period, while noting that many of the Committee's recommendations had yet to be carried out. In that connection, she asked whether consideration had been given to the adoption of a four-year national action plan on implementing the Convention. It was regrettable that the Committee had not received the requested follow-up report from the State party on its implementation of the Committee's earlier recommendation concerning the adoption of a definition of discrimination against women that was consistent with article 1 of the Convention. Although such a definition had been incorporated into the text of the proposed new constitution, the national referendum on its adoption would not take place until 2017.

6. With regard to the law reform process that was under way in the State party, she asked whether the delegation could provide a time frame for the adoption of the various pieces of draft legislation that were being prepared, such as the bills on decent work and fairness. In relation to reports that traditional leaders often rejected statutory laws that were designed to protect women and girls and obstructed police investigations into transgressors of those laws, she wished to know what measures were envisaged by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to prevent such leaders from taking the law into their own hands. Lastly, she wished to know whether consideration was being given to the urgent need to harmonize the two systems of law applied in the State party and whether such harmonization was included in the constitutional review process.

7. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** requested information on any special measures the Government was taking to address the greater vulnerability of women in the aftermath of the Ebola crisis, notably in terms of maternity, childbirth and girls' lower school enrolment as a result of their being given responsibility for caring for orphans. She wished to know whether the Government took a gender-sensitive approach when assigning budget allocations to crisis response efforts.

8. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that the Government was in the process of developing a national action plan to implement the Convention across all government ministries and agencies. With regard to pending legislation, the decent work bill had already been enacted and had entered into force; the Cabinet had endorsed the domestic violence bill, and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection was working to promote it in both the House and the Senate in order to ensure its adoption when the legislature reconvened.

9. All traditional leaders had participated in the constitutional review, which had covered the harmonization of traditional and statutory laws and proposed amendments to ensure the use of gender-sensitive language in the new text. Women's organizations were working closely with lawmakers to ensure that women's issues were taken into account in the new constitution.

10. The outbreak of the Ebola virus disease had had a devastating impact on Liberia, in particular on women and children, who were still feeling traumatized as a result of it. Under the President's leadership and with the assistance of the international community, the Ministry of Health was working to revamp the health system in the wake of the crisis, taking into account the special needs of women survivors, including women who were pregnant or breastfeeding. In conjunction with the Ministry of Education, the Government was carrying out a programme to ensure the delivery of water, sanitation and hygiene services to all schools in the country, as part of the WASH-Liberia initiative. A number of joint projects had been undertaken with various regional and international partners in order to address the specific needs of women affected by the Ebola crisis. They focused on the promotion of women's

empowerment, women's active participation in WASH-Liberia, the provision of cash transfers and agricultural revitalization. The Ministry's work involved cross-cutting issues in such fields as education, health, agriculture and justice, and was inherently gender-sensitive.

11. **Ms. Patten** asked how the Government was addressing the problem of the stigmatization of Ebola survivors and their families, and the discrimination practised against them, such as the denial of housing, health services and participation in community activities. With regard to access to justice, she wished to know whether Liberia had set up a system to provide legal aid to women and what measures were being taken to address judicial corruption and restore public trust in the judicial system. She requested examples of cases in which corrupt officials who had obstructed justice had been prosecuted and convicted, and asked whether the Government was willing to consider the establishment of an independent national commission for the investigation of the judiciary that would receive and investigate complaints against judges and other law officers. Lastly, she wished to know what plans were envisaged for implementing the various recommendations of the Human Rights Council concerning the strengthening of the National Independent Commission on Human Rights.

12. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that there appeared to be huge discrepancies between the de jure and de facto legal systems in Liberia. Despite the provision of information by the State party on the constitutional review process and the existing statutory law and envisaged reforms, the reality seemed to be that many, if not most, women in Liberia lived under a completely unregulated customary law regime in which the chiefs and elders pronounced, enforced and interpreted the law. The experiences of other countries had shown that there were a number of ways of confronting that reality in such a way as to gradually improve the situation. She asked whether the Government was planning to address that issue as part of the constitutional review process.

13. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that the Government was taking steps to address the problem of the stigmatization of Ebola survivors through education and awareness-raising campaigns in schools and communities. A large number of NGOs were working to improve women's access to justice. The joint programme to prevent and respond to sexual or gender-based violence included the provision of legal aid by the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia and their involvement in educating women in both urban and rural areas about access to information and their rights under the law.

14. One of the goals of the constitutional review had been to harmonize the two legal systems in Liberia, and traditional leaders had been an integral part of that process. They had also participated in the preparation of the current periodic reports of Liberia. Tradition was good, but tradition could be modified, and education in human rights at all levels played a crucial role in achieving that goal.

15. **Ms. Abdul-Baki** (Liberia) said that the Ministry of Internal Affairs had held meetings with traditional leaders and judges throughout the country to discuss the harmonization of statutory and customary law. As to legal aid, a unit had been created under the Ministry of Justice to provide support to victims of sexual or gender-based violence.

16. **Ms. Patten** asked whether the Government had set up a comprehensive State-funded legal aid system and, if not, whether it intended to do so. She also asked whether safeguards were in place to prevent violations of women's human rights by customary courts and whether legislation had been adopted to regulate the relationship between customary and statutory courts.

17. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** asked how many women from civil society and government bodies were involved in efforts to harmonize statutory and customary law.

18. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that women from all sectors of society and all parts of the country had participated in the constitutional review process and had attended meetings with traditional leaders. Under a joint programme that was being drawn up in cooperation with the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia, funding would be set aside for the provision of legal aid.

19. **Ms. Pomeranzi** asked if there were plans to increase the financial and human resources allocated to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, particularly given that, in 2014, its mandate had been expanded to cover all issues relating to women, children, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. She invited the delegation to elaborate on the Ministry's new responsibilities, to describe its role in the Government's long-term development strategies and in the national decentralization process, and to explain if and how the gender focal points mentioned in paragraph 8 of the replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/LBR/Q/7-8/Add.1) were equipped to negotiate with government ministers to ensure effective gender mainstreaming.

20. **Ms. Haidar** said that it was important to distinguish between temporary special measures, which were aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women, and general measures to promote women's rights. It would be easier to gauge progress in the area of gender equality if the Government set numerical goals and established specific time frames in which to achieve them. In addition, a better understanding of temporary special measures at all levels of government would enable the State party to achieve more concrete results.

21. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that the Government would take on board the Committee's recommendations with regard to temporary special measures. Although the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection had assumed additional duties in 2014, its budget had in fact decreased. Nevertheless, it was working with the Ministry of Finance to secure more funding. One of its duties was to chair the human development pillar of the Agenda for Transformation, which meant that it cooperated closely with the ministries of agriculture, education, finance and health.

22. There were plans to replace the gender focal points appointed pursuant to the National Gender Policy of 2009 with gender desks that would be operated by staff with the authority to engage with government ministers at the highest level. Since 2009, the Ministry had managed to increase the numbers of women employed by the Liberian National Police and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization.

23. **Ms. Abdul-Baki** (Liberia) said that the Government hoped to complete the midterm review of the National Gender Policy by December 2015.

24. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that the National Post-Ebola Recovery Plan failed to specify the role that women would play as agents of recovery. On another note, one way of strengthening the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection might be to request support for specific activities from other ministries, including the Ministry of Finance. She wished to know whether, following the outbreak of Ebola virus disease in 2014, the Government intended to take a fresh approach to gender mainstreaming that was based on the needs of local women.

25. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that, during the decentralization process, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection was working with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to engage with women at all levels. Moreover, as part of the task force for the phased drawdown of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, it was ensuring that the role of women in the process was clearly defined and understood.

26. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** enquired about the role of the Sande society in creating gender stereotypes and in convincing women and girls that female genital mutilation, teenage pregnancies and child marriages were normal. She asked whether the society remained active, how the general public viewed efforts to eliminate long-standing secret societies and how the leaders of those societies had reacted to measures to diminish their role in the initiation of girls into adulthood. She also requested the delegation to explain what was done to ensure that media outlets, teachers and community workers delivered a consistent message about the need to eradicate gender stereotypes.

27. **Ms. Patten** said that she would appreciate further details on the Government's plan to decentralize Criminal Court "E", particularly regarding the estimated time frame for the process. She wished to know whether the State party intended to increase the numbers of justice officials and law enforcement officers and to provide them with adequate training in the prosecution of sexual violence. In that connection, she asked what emphasis was being placed on the development of a strategy to prevent sexual violence, whether the Government had evaluated its response mechanisms, and what specific initiatives had been launched or were planned with regard to accountability, victim and witness protection, reparations and the provision of services to victims at the local and national levels.

28. Noting that hypermasculinity had been advanced as a reason for the high prevalence of sexual violence in Liberia, she asked what was being done to engage with men and boys as part of prevention efforts and what programmes were in place to help them adjust to their new roles in a post-war society.

29. **Ms. Hofmeister** asked what steps were being taken to put an end to the practice of female genital mutilation immediately, including in rural areas, whether comprehensive data were collected on all forms of violence against women and whether media campaigns had been organized to raise awareness of gender-based violence. She also invited the delegation to indicate whether victims of sexual offences, particularly minors, had access to justice and to describe how victims were treated by the judicial authorities.

30. **Ms. Haidar** enquired about the status of plans to establish a trust fund and special shelters for victims of human trafficking. Noting that there had been a recent drop in prosecutions for trafficking offences, she asked whether the State party intended to strengthen capacity-building and training for law enforcement officers and what steps were being taken to identify and protect victims. She said that any information on the outcome of the National Action Plan on Trafficking that had been launched in March 2014 would also be welcome.

31. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that the State party report contained virtually no information on the exploitation of women in prostitution or on legislation relevant to prostitution. She would like to know what policies were in place to protect women and girls from exploitation and prostitution, particularly in areas where poverty had been exacerbated by Ebola. Were there any laws or measures to prevent women and girls from entering prostitution? Was prostitution prohibited and, if so, at whose expense?

32. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that female genital mutilation was prohibited under the Children's Act of 2011, which banned all forms of violence and harmful practices against children. The Ministry of Internal Affairs was spearheading a process of engagement with community and traditional leaders, midwives and those who performed female genital mutilation, in order to enforce that prohibition. Missions had been sent abroad to learn best practices from other countries.

33. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection was working closely with the Ministry of Education to address the practice of female genital mutilation in the context of the Sande schools.

34. Before the creation of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, domestic violence had been considered normal and had been a taboo subject. Now it was discussed and there was greater awareness of the issue. Part of the approach adopted was to “name and shame” perpetrators, but also, rather than putting them in prison only to see them re-emerge some years later and repeat the behaviour, to engage with them to ascertain the root causes of the violence; a new programme to that end was due to start in February 2016. The Ministry also involved boys and young men in campaigns on the subject.

35. Another part of the approach was the “3 Ps”, namely prevention, protection and prosecution, with prevention beginning as early as grade school. All communities had voluntary child welfare officers who not only reported cases but also worked with families to help prevent incidents.

36. The UN-Women “He for She” campaign had got under way in Liberia and publicity campaigns had been run on the protection of women and girls, notably on the International Day of the Girl Child and the Day of the African Child.

37. She said that she would consult with the Ministry of Labour to ascertain the status of the trust fund for victims of human trafficking. She could not comment on the case of the 14 Liberian girls trafficked in Lebanon as it was still sub judice. Prostitution was not legal in Liberia.

38. Regional courts were being set up with the support of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund. Criminal Court “E”, for example, which had previously sat only in Monrovia, now had branches in other areas. In addition, whereas previously that court had had only one judge, it now had two, a development that had expedited proceedings considerably.

39. **Ms. Schulz** said that she would like to know what the timetable was for adoption of the domestic violence bill. Under the bill, female genital mutilation would be punished when inflicted by a family member on another person without consent, but it was not clear what the actual penalty would be. The Children’s Act did not appear to provide for any penalties. Moreover, it did not restrict the prohibition to female genital mutilation perpetrated by family members but banned the procedure in general, and made no mention of consent. She would like to know how the State party intended to harmonize the two pieces of legislation if the domestic violence bill was passed into law. Lastly, she wished to point out that consent was not something a minor was in a position to give in respect of such a grave violation of her physical autonomy and integrity. She wondered how the notion of consent had found its way into the bill on domestic violence.

40. Referring to the case of Ms. Ruth Berry Peal, which had been brought to the Committee’s attention by alternative sources, she said that the victim’s rights had been violated in part by the failure of the State party to arrest and jail the perpetrators in that case. It appeared that they had not been imprisoned even though their appeal against the lower court’s sentence had been rejected. Very few convictions were handed down against perpetrators of female genital mutilation; so if, when such a conviction was handed down, the perpetrators were not duly imprisoned, that created a climate of impunity. Notwithstanding the State party’s efforts and campaigns to engage with traditional leaders, if court decisions were not enforced, it sent a very negative message.

41. **Ms. Haidar** said that the National Action Plan on Trafficking had been in place for 20 months and she wondered if it had produced any results. She would also be interested to hear about the roles of the various ministries and other institutions engaged in implementation of the plan.

42. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said she understood that the Sande school system could not be dismantled overnight. However, she wondered whether the delegation believed progress was really being made: were there in fact fewer girls attending Sande schools, either under duress or voluntarily, and did the families understand the issue? The problem was effectively an aspect of gender stereotyping.

43. **Ms. Patten** said that there was currently no system requiring police, social workers or the victim's family members, for example, to report rape. Were there any plans to amend the law in that regard, to ensure that it was not left to the victim to report an offence?

44. She wondered what real progress was being made on the domestic violence and gender-based violence front. Alternative sources reported that, in cases of wife-beating in particular, traditional leaders and victims' families could easily obstruct the reporting process and police waived charges against perpetrators with little or no concern for the well-being and rehabilitation of the victims. In a case where members of the Poro society had gang-raped a woman, several of the perpetrators had escaped arrest and only the ringleader had been arrested; and he had not yet been put on trial.

45. She would like to know what specific measures were being taken to investigate and prosecute ritual murders and the practice of levelling accusations of witchcraft at elderly persons or persons with disabilities and subjecting them to trial by ordeal, given that in such cases it was apparently common for traditional leaders to prevent the police from doing their job.

46. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that a public hearing had been held on the domestic violence bill, and once Parliament returned from recess, work could begin to ensure that it was passed as soon as possible.

47. As to the issue of consent, the Children's Act prohibited the practice of female genital mutilation on minors. The domestic violence bill, on the other hand, concerned not just children but also adults over the age of 18. Under the bill, Ms. Ruth Berry Peal would have been protected from undergoing female genital mutilation against her will. The issue of consent had been raised at the public hearing and discussed by the legal experts who had drafted the bill.

48. The law, banned all forms of violence against women and children, and that included female genital mutilation and domestic violence. Once a case was brought to the authorities' attention, if the victim was a child, the authorities had the right to step in to protect the child; if the victim was an adult, it was up to that individual to decide whether they wished to take legal action or not. Under the new law, there was a system for holding the police, doctors, school authorities or family or community members accountable if they failed to report incidents.

49. She said that she had not heard of any new cases of witchcraft, trial by ordeal or ritual killing but she would verify that with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Ritual killing was often associated with the run-up to elections, and so, with elections planned for 2017, it might be necessary to re-emphasize that any such behaviour would be prosecuted.

50. **Ms. Schulz** said that she now understood that the requirement for consent applied only to adult women, but it should be borne in mind that someone who turned 18 in effect went overnight from being legally a child to being legally an adult woman and pressure could still be applied by parents and other authority figures. The question

remained, then, was there a place for the notion of consent in the domestic violence bill? Moreover, she still found it unclear whether female genital mutilation practised on minors was subject to criminal penalties under the Children's Act.

51. **Ms. Patten** said that she would like to know when Parliament was expected to return and begin work on the domestic violence bill. With regard to harmful practices, the problem had to do with reporting and prosecution. There was a vicious circle at work: if there was no prosecution then people were discouraged from reporting; if there was no reporting then the Government could apparently not take action. Prosecution was as important a component of the "3 Ps" process as prevention and protection. She would therefore like to know what reforms were envisaged in order to secure confidence in the judiciary.

52. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that the domestic violence bill addressed any use of controlling or abusive behaviour towards a person. A harmful traditional practice such as forcing someone to join a secret society would constitute violence under the bill. The hope was that Parliament would cut short its recess and return early. It could then start work on the bill. She did not think it was correct to say that the perpetrators in the Peal case had not been imprisoned, but she would verify that.

53. There were penalties for ritual killing and in certain cases perpetrators had been sentenced to life imprisonment. In addition, once a person had been sentenced for sexual or gender-based violence, it was possible to publish their name and their picture in order to name and shame them as a deterrent to others.

54. **Ms. Schulz** said she still needed clarification as to whether the Children's Act included criminal penalties for female genital mutilation.

55. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that female genital mutilation practised on minors was punished under the law. She would inform the Committee of the relevant provision in due course.

Articles 7 to 9

56. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that she welcomed the adoption of an amendment to the elections law to provide for gender equity in elections. According to the State party report, the amendment provided that the "candidate listing for elected offices shall contain no less than 30% and no more than 70% of any gender". However, in the course of adoption the words "no more than 70%" had been dropped. While that was not surprising in a male-dominated legislature, she found it quite disturbing that there were no sanctions in the elections law to ensure compliance with the quota provision by political parties. How did the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection intend to enforce the provision? Were there any plans to engage in advocacy to persuade the political parties to implement the quota?

57. Despite the State party having a female president, overall female participation in government was still low. In the 2011 elections, only 12 of the 102 women standing, or 11 per cent, had been elected. In terms of appointed positions, only in the appointment of county superintendents, ambassadors and Supreme Court judges had Liberia achieved the 30 per cent minimum representation of women. Representation was also low in the police, the Armed Forces and the immigration services.

58. Elections were capital-intensive, yet one of the obstacles to women's participation was lack of financial resources for campaigning. Was the Ministry considering providing financial assistance for women candidates in elections? Many countries had set up trust funds to assist women in election campaigns. Was that something the delegation would be willing to explore with international development partners?

59. The progress that had been made might not be sustained when the current president left office. Were there any plans in place to ensure that a quota system was established for appointed positions as a guide for future leaders?

60. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** asked what specific, practical steps the Government was taking to eliminate discriminatory provisions in the Liberian legislation on nationality, which contradicted the provisions of the Constitution. Was there a specific time frame for the drafting and adoption of any amendments to rectify that? Other than public declarations, had any other practical steps been taken in that regard?

61. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that among the proposed amendments to the Constitution were some that aimed to recognize three forms of marriage, namely statutory, customary and common-law marriage, in order to protect the rights of the child. Legislation had been enacted to amend the law on naturalization.

62. In order to continue promoting women's participation after the end of the current president's term in office, efforts were being made to introduce a 50 per cent gender quota for all public functions, and to ensure that provisions on equal access in the public and private sectors were incorporated into the new constitution. Moreover, measures were also being taken to promote the representation of men and women with disabilities. There was ongoing cooperation and consultation with political parties, and efforts were under way to find the relevant resources and partners to ensure that gender equality provisions were embedded in the Constitution. Once the proposed amendments had been adopted, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection would begin collecting signatures and raising awareness to ensure that a referendum was called on the issue before the next elections.

63. While it was true that only 6 of the 23 members of the Cabinet were women, a number of deputy ministers, assistant ministers and heads of government agencies were female. There were plans to set up a trust fund to support female political candidates. The Women's Political Forum had been asked to propose regulations and guidelines for such a fund.

64. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that the legislation on political parties contained no specific sanctions for non-compliance with the quota system. How did the State party intend to address that point?

65. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that non-compliance of political parties could be addressed by means of a constitutional provision, and that the National Elections Commission could monitor compliance. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection also planned to work together with political parties, the Women's Political Forum and civil society to resolve the problem and find ways to ensure compliance.

Articles 10 to 14

66. **Ms. Gbedemah** asked whether the State party had evaluated the impact of its progressive education policies. If successfully implemented and monitored, the Government's policy of providing free and compulsory education for all would address some of the problems raised by the Committee, such as the enrolment of girls in Sande schools. In that connection, she suggested that the schools inspectorate of the Ministry of Education could be more closely involved in efforts to arrest all persons complicit in the practice of female genital mutilation.

67. She asked what measures had been taken to mitigate the impact of the Ebola epidemic on girls' education.

68. Noting the shortage of female teachers in Liberia, she requested information on the number of women recruited, the subjects they taught, and the areas to which they

had been posted. She asked what policies the Government had in place to retain female teaching staff. She also asked whether counselling was available for girls and whether there were any mentoring schemes to ensure they achieved their full potential. How were policies to reintegrate girls into the education system monitored, given the high dropout and teenage pregnancy rates?

69. She requested information on the content of the sex education curriculum, and asked whether human rights were taught in schools. Speaking on the problem of widespread violence against girls in schools, she noted that girls reportedly lacked awareness of their rights, the complaints system and access to justice. She indicated that more guidelines and sanctions were needed to properly enforce existing legislation. Guidelines were required not only for teachers, but also for parents and students. She requested information on anti-harassment policies, the budget allocated for anti-discrimination measures, and the number of individuals sanctioned for harassment. She also asked about the availability of scholarships for girls, and expressed concern that they were targeted at urban dwellers and did not benefit girls in rural areas.

70. She encouraged the State party to review its scholarship system and special measures — including with respect to the gender balance of recipients — particularly in subject areas where girls were already underrepresented, such as the sciences. There was a lack of data in the report on the enrolment of girls in schools, as well as a lack of gender-disaggregated data on fields of study and pupils with disabilities.

71. **Ms. Nadaraia**, noting the serious impact on the economy of the Ebola epidemic, expressed concern about the lack of clarity in the information provided on labour law and labour policies, and on their implementation. She requested information on the status of the decent work bill, and clarification with regard to provisions on the minimum wage, the regulation of the private sector, labour inspectorates, protection for women working in the informal sector and benefits. She also asked about plans to introduce the minimum wage for all domestic workers. Noting that the decent work bill contained provisions on equal pay for work of equal value, she asked about mechanisms used for job evaluation.

72. The State party report lacked adequate information on gender segregation in the job market and the gender pay gap. She noted, for example, that women were less likely to be paid for informal work. There was also a lack of gender-disaggregated data on employment; further information would be appreciated on measures to achieve equal pay in the private and informal sectors. She asked whether the State party had developed a strategy to tackle the shortage of childcare facilities.

73. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that Liberia had one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world and had been trying to address the problem through accelerated action plans. Noting that the Ebola epidemic had disrupted the provision of basic medical services, with a particular impact on women and children, she asked about the status of those accelerated action plans, and the Government's plans to conduct an assessment of the impact of the crisis on women and children. She also requested further information concerning plans to establish, together with the World Health Organization, a national public health institute. What measures were being taken to mitigate the impact of the Ebola epidemic on the provision of HIV and AIDS treatment in Liberia? What specific measures were planned to reduce the HIV infection rate, particularly with regard to mother-to-child transmission?

74. She noted that abortion was illegal in Liberia, except if the life of the mother was in danger. In view of the State party's obligations under the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, she asked what measures

the Government was taking to protect women's rights to medical care, for example in cases of sexual assault, rape or incest, or in cases where the mental health or life of the mother or child were in danger. The Committee had recommended that abortion should be allowed in cases of serious foetal deformities: what steps was the Government taking to bring its domestic legislation into line with the relevant international instruments it had signed or ratified?

75. **Ms. Abdul-Baki** (Liberia) said that girls' sexual and reproductive rights were respected. In rape cases, they had access to one-stop centres, where they would be offered the option to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. In fact, abortions were provided in Liberia in certain circumstances. The policy on the integration of girls into the education system was being revised with a view to introducing provisions that would give girls who had fallen pregnant or dropped out of school the opportunity to attend night school, as well as economic empowerment programmes to equip adolescent girls with life and business skills.

76. **Ms. Duncan-Cassell** (Liberia) said that there were some special boarding schools for vulnerable girls in areas where female genital mutilation was prevalent. However, in view of the current shortage of such schools, and the impact of Ebola on the education system, the Government was looking into other possible measures, in certain cases in partnership with faith-based schools. In order to improve girls' access to scholarship programmes, action was being taken to give them access to information, so that they would be more aware of the opportunities open to them. Scholarships sponsored by the Economic Community of West African States were available for girls in the area of information and communication technology and the sciences. A code of conduct had been drafted for teachers and training was provided on sexual harassment, with sanctions imposed in cases of non-compliance. There were also national plans in place to tackle violence in schools and to encourage women to enter the teaching profession. A professional mentorship scheme for girls and boys had been established within the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. A new resource and data centre was also being set up, to ensure that the Ministry was able to compile its own data, rather than have to rely on information provided by other State entities.

77. She confirmed that the decent work bill had been adopted.

78. There was no widespread provision of childcare in Liberia, and existing centres were mainly privately owned. Ministries and government agencies did not have day-care centres attached. However, the Government was examining the matter.

79. The Government was working closely with its partners to produce a report on the impact of the Ebola epidemic on women and girls, and was focusing on rebuilding the health-care system in order to ensure safe access to treatment, even during periods of crisis.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.