



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

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

**Summary record (partial)\* of the 1346th meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 3 November 2015, at 3 p.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Hayashi

**Contents**

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

*Combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Lebanon (continued)*

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\* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

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

*Combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Lebanon* (continued)  
(CEDAW/C/LBN/4-5; CEDAW/C/LBN/Q/4-5 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Lebanon took places at the Committee table.*
2. **The Chairperson** invited Committee members to continue with their consideration of the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Lebanon (CEDAW/C/LBN/4-5).

*Articles 10 to 14* (continued)

3. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** asked the delegation of Lebanon how the State worked with the private sector in the field of health care. She asked whether guidelines and protocols designed to ensure the consistent provision of quality care relating to maternal health, breast and cervical cancer prevention and reproductive health had been established and whether a central health-care statistics system had been put in place. According to one alternative report, around half of all women did not have access to health care. Additional information on the coverage of health-care services would be welcome, in particular with regard to rural and poor areas. The Committee required up-to-date statistics in order to carry out its work.
4. She asked what the main causes of morbidity and mortality among women were in the State party, in particular among women above reproductive age. Given the high rate of undesired pregnancies in Lebanon, the issue of sexual health should be incorporated into the National Reproductive Health Programme.
5. **Ms. Azouri Jamhuri** (Lebanon) said that enrolment rates were higher among girls than among boys at all levels of education and were more or less uniform across the country. On the question of compulsory free education and the distribution of textbooks, she referred Committee members to the information contained in paragraphs 118.1 and 118.2 of the State party's report. The Ministry of Social Affairs had launched a National Literacy Programme that had been of great benefit to women over the past decade and illiteracy rates were now extremely low.
6. **Mr. Karam** (Lebanon) said that the National Commission for Lebanese Women was campaigning for national labour legislation to be extended to cover migrant domestic and agricultural workers. However, no official response had been received to date. The Ministry of Labour had taken temporary measures to ensure that migrant workers' contracts made provision for a basic level of social security and insurance and employment agencies were closely monitored to prevent trafficking in persons. The national courts had issued a number of rulings ordering employers guilty of mistreatment of migrant workers to pay substantial amounts of compensation to the injured parties and the Lebanese media had highlighted such incidents. The National Commission for Lebanese Women was currently carrying out a comparative study of different approaches to the protection of foreign women domestic workers, with the aim of establishing best practices.
7. **Ms. Azouri Jamhuri** (Lebanon) said that due to the current political situation, discussions within the Council of Ministers on the bill on accession to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) and on the bill on decent work for domestic workers had been suspended.

8. **Ms. El-Sayed** (Lebanon) said that the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs were working closely with the private sector to set up health-care units across the country. However, the health system was mainly private and focused on care provision, rather than on prevention. In 2014, 28 new primary health-care centres had been established in heavily populated areas and poor districts. Civil society organizations in Lebanon played a key role in health-care provision. In 2014, the Ministry of Health had launched a programme for maternal and infant care, designed to rationalize services, improve their quality and cut costs. A committee had been set up to examine the issue of maternal mortality and guidelines were currently being developed in that regard by the Ministry of Health. Under the Primary Health-Care Programme, contraceptives were provided to primary health-care centres and to clinics offering reproductive health services to Syrian refugees. Mortality rates among infants, children under 5 and mothers had fallen between 2009 and 2014, as could be seen from the reply to question 19 contained in the replies of Lebanon to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/LBN/Q/4-5/Add.1). In 2014, the Ministry of Health had launched the National Mental Health Programme, with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Medical Corps (IMC). A programme providing postnatal follow-up for mothers had been put in place. In 2011, a sexual and reproductive health unit had been set up. As to abortion, she referred the Committee members to the information provided in the reply to question 19 contained in the replies of Lebanon to the list of issues.

9. **Ms. Zou Xiaohua** asked whether the State party had set up any programmes encouraging young women and men to move into non-traditional areas of study. She asked whether steps had been taken to ensure access to education for refugee children and women, whether refugee children were covered by compulsory free education and whether there were sufficient schools in refugee camps.

10. **Ms. Patten**, returning to the issue of the rejection of the national trade union federation's application to create a union for domestic workers, asked for information on the legal requirements that must be met in order to obtain permission from the Ministry of Labour to set up a trade union. She asked whether an inquiry had been conducted into the recent deaths of domestic workers and whether any steps had been taken to abolish the *kafala* (sponsorship) system. Referring to the written replies to question 17 and 18, she asked which of the States that currently prohibited their citizens from working in Lebanon had signed agreements with the State party relating to women domestic migrant workers.

11. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** asked for information on HIV/AIDS testing procedures and on prior informed consent, in particular with regard to vulnerable groups such as prisoners, women sex workers and drug users. She asked how the authorities ensured that women sex workers operating clandestinely were covered by public health policies on HIV/AIDS, although she noted that such policies focused on care, rather than on prevention. She would welcome information on steps taken to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among less vulnerable groups, such as clients of women sex workers, and their wives.

12. **Ms. Riachi Assaker** (Lebanon) said that Syrian refugee children in Lebanon had access to education, health-care services and accommodation. The Ministry of Education had issued a decree dividing the schoolday into two six-hour shifts, in order to accommodate refugee children and exempting them from payment of school enrolment fees.

13. **Ms. Azouri Jamhuri** (Lebanon) said that Syrian refugee children followed the national curriculum and were taught by Lebanese teachers. In the Beirut area, the school enrolment rate for Syrian refugee children was 90 per cent and the school dropout rate was very low. However, dropout rates for Syrian refugee boys in northern

Lebanon and the Beqaa were much higher, possibly owing to the ongoing conflict in Syria.

14. Barriers to women's and men's access to non-traditional careers had largely been broken down. There was no legislation in place restricting access to certain jobs on the basis of gender.

15. The Ministry of Labour had been unable to accept the national trade union federation's application to create a domestic workers' union because the majority of domestic workers were foreign nationals, and foreign workers were prohibited by law from forming unions.

16. **Ms. Chdid** (Lebanon) said that information leaflets in English and Arabic were handed out to foreign domestic workers upon their arrival in the country, giving the contact details of the police and other social services and setting out their rights as migrant workers. Foreign domestic workers were employed under the *kafala* system, which tied them to one place of work. They must obtain prior approval from the Ministry of Labour before changing their employer or address. The Directorate General of General Security received and investigated complaints of violence against domestic workers and referred cases to the courts for prosecution where appropriate.

17. **Ms. Azouri Jamhuri** (Lebanon) said that Executive Decree No. 9082 of 10 October 2012 established the requirements for concluding service agreements with institutions and associations to assist and protect human trafficking victims. The Caritas Confederation had been the only organization to meet the eligibility requirements to date. The Government hoped to conclude service agreements with other associations in the near future.

18. **Mr. Karam** (Lebanon) said that the Penal Code expressly prohibited all forms of harassment. In addition, the Government had recently drafted a specific bill to combat sexual harassment against women in the workplace, including migrant women workers.

19. **Ms. Azouri Jamhuri** (Lebanon) said that women arriving under the artiste visa scheme were given regular medical check-ups including HIV/AIDS testing.

20. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked how many memorandums of understanding on migrant workers had been concluded between the State party and migrant workers' countries of origin.

21. **Mr. Karam** (Lebanon) said that the Government had signed a memorandum of understanding on migrant workers with the Philippines and hoped to conclude agreements with other countries in the future. The embassies concerned were responsible for drawing up contracts and setting salaries and most women migrant workers earned around the minimum wage.

22. **Ms. Pomeranzi** asked what action had been taken to ensure equality between women and men in employment and to promote the concept of shared family responsibilities so that women could balance family and work life. She also wished to know what policies were in place to ensure that women could open their own bank accounts and access microcredit facilities in order to launch their own businesses.

23. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** asked whether measures had been taken to uphold the labour rights of rural women, particularly temporary seasonal workers. Detailed information on the impact of policies to reduce poverty in rural communities and to increase rural women's access to health-care services would also be welcome. What efforts had been made to guarantee rural women's right to land and property ownership? She would like to know what action had been taken on the matter of early marriage, and also to

ensure that refugee women were able to fully exercise their rights, in particular the right to freedom of movement and the right to work.

24. **Mr. Karam** (Lebanon) said that considerable efforts had been made to increase the duration of maternity leave and improve social security protection for women, but more remained to be done. The Government remained committed to addressing gender inequality in all areas and was considering, for example, amending bankruptcy legislation by repealing provisions that restricted a woman's property rights in the event of her husband being declared bankrupt. As to women's economic empowerment, the Lebanese Central Bank had made loans available to a significant number of women entrepreneurs at favourable rates. Housing and transport subsidies had also been provided with a view to strengthening women's economic empowerment.

25. **Ms. Azouri Jamhuri** (Lebanon) said that social security legislation was intended to cover men and women in all sectors without discrimination. The system had initially covered permanent workers and the hope had been to extend coverage to other categories. However, the upheavals in Lebanon since 1974 had meant that financial and administrative resources still did not permit extension of coverage to seasonal or temporary workers in the agricultural sector, whether men or women.

26. **Ms. El-Sayed** (Lebanon) said that there was a shortage of data on women agricultural workers. The Government had conducted a survey to gather additional information on the situation of rural women and had established a national observatory to promote rural women's economic empowerment and facilitate their political and public participation. Some €3.5 million worth of loans had been made available to young farmers and women farmers and steps had been taken in cooperation with civil society to improve access to education and health-care services for rural women.

27. **Mr. Karam** (Lebanon) said that the number of early marriages had steadily increased over recent years following the large influx of refugees. The Government remained committed to addressing the issue and had taken steps to regulate the practice through the courts.

28. **Ms. Ameline** asked what efforts had been made to include specific provisions for women in the national refugee strategy and to maximize the assistance to refugee women provided by international organizations.

29. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that, while there had been various programmes to provide microcredit for women and support micro-enterprises, she wished to know what steps were being taken to enhance women's entrepreneurial capacities. She also wondered what measures were being taken or were envisaged to mainstream gender in social policies.

30. **Mr. Karam** (Lebanon) said that measures to strengthen women's entrepreneurial capacity included programmes to encourage women's start-ups, aimed at women with significant work experience. The provision of microcredit had been outsourced to an ad hoc credit management institution as part of a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) project. A new award had been established, indicators developed and a panel of experts convened to reward companies that actively integrated the gender perspective into their work. It was hoped that that approach to raising gender awareness would encourage other companies to follow suit. An agreement had recently been struck among banks in Lebanon to enable a woman to open a bank account in her child's name without needing her husband's consent. Amending the current personal status laws in Lebanon to reflect that change was, however, fraught with difficulties.

31. **Ms. Riachi Assaker** (Lebanon) said that, while multidimensional strategies to deal with the refugee crisis in Lebanon were in place or being developed with international help and assistance from NGOs, it was important not to forget that Lebanese citizens also needed help. In that connection, a study had been conducted and a detailed four-year plan and budget devised to solve some of the country's pressing domestic and refugee-related problems. Armed with that information, government representatives had attended various international forums where participating Heads of State had all promised to provide substantial financial resources to Lebanon. Sadly, much of that funding had yet to materialize, while the refugee crisis was only deepening, as exemplified by the numbers now risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Lebanon could no longer bear the refugee burden without international assistance and she urged the international community to provide the funding it had promised.

32. **Mr. Karam** (Lebanon) said that the National Commission for Lebanese Women and UNFPA were implementing a joint project to distribute essential supplies to women refugees.

*Articles 15 and 16*

33. **Ms. Patten** asked what was being done to prevent the prevailing sectarian system from unduly influencing the implementation of civil law and being used to justify or rationalize discrimination against women. In that connection, she would welcome information on the measures being taken to promote equality before the law and ensure that women could access the religious courts to exercise their rights, limited though they were. Referring to a Human Rights Watch report that had found a pattern of gross discrimination against women in judgements handed down by the religious courts, she asked whether there were plans to establish an independent mechanism to monitor personal status cases and ensure that judgements were not discriminatory. What role did the Court of Cassation currently play in terms of monitoring and oversight?

34. It was regrettable that the State party continued to maintain that personal status matters should be left exclusively to the sectarian system to regulate. The Committee had recommended the adoption of a unified personal status code, but the Government was effectively relinquishing its obligations in that regard. Judicial pluralism was promoted as essential to protect religious diversity, but in reality the multiplicity of laws resulted in gross discrimination against women within their own sect and inequality among women belonging to different sects in key aspects of their lives. What serious consideration had been given to the adoption of an optional civil personal status code, to operate alongside religious laws, and based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination and the right to choose one's religious affiliation? It was a compromise supported by women's organizations and many religious leaders. What was preventing the Government from launching a participatory process to draft such a code?

35. While some legal development such as the codification of the Coptic personal status law were welcome, piecemeal reforms were insufficient to address systemic discrimination against women. She would like to know what was being done to ensure that any religious communities that had yet to codify their laws did so forthwith, and that all sectarian personal status laws were in compliance with the Constitution. She would be interested to know whether the State party regularly reviewed its reservations to article 16 of the Convention.

36. **Ms. Azouri Jamhuri** (Lebanon) said that proposals for a civil personal status law had been gathering dust for several years, largely due to objections from the religious authorities. The ongoing challenges posed by the personal status laws and

issues surrounding civil marriage were difficult to resolve. Clearly, the optimal solution would be to introduce an optional civil personal status law but it was unlikely that there would be any agreement on that in the near future.

37. **Ms. Patten** said that, in view of the numerous different minimum ages for marriage — from 9 to 18 depending on the religious sect — she wished to know whether the Government intended to enact legislation to harmonize those laws. Were there plans to establish minimum educational and training requirements for judges in religious courts? Were there plans to appoint women judges to those courts?

38. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, said that she would like specific information on what steps had been taken to withdraw the State party's reservations to article 16 of the Convention.

39. **Mr. Karam** (Lebanon) said that all religious sects had their own legal age for marriage that took account of the onset of puberty, the age of majority and the age at which marriage was considered appropriate by the head of the sect. In practice, however, heads of sects could not always be relied upon to perform the requisite due diligence to ensure that an early marriage was not being conducted for the purposes of trafficking or for financial gain. An analysis of other countries' marriage laws had revealed that regulation rather than prohibition of such marriages was what was required. As such, all prospective marriages of persons under 18 now also required the approval of a juvenile court judge. Where there was a disagreement between the head of sect and the judge, the civil authorities would have the final say.

40. **Ms. Ameline** said that she wished to make it clear that such marriages were wholly incompatible with the Committee's view of consent and parental responsibility. She urged the Lebanese Government to review the practice, along with the personal status laws, and assess their impact on the situation of women and girls in Lebanon and their ability to be truly independent.

41. **Mr. Karam** (Lebanon) pointed out that exceptions were permitted under French legislation, for example, whereby a minor could be married with the approval of the public prosecutor. It was not possible to completely ban such marriages.

42. **Ms. Ameline** said that the age of marriage for girls and boys had been harmonized in France. Furthermore, where minors wished to marry it was at their own request; it was not a transaction or an agreement between their parents.

43. **Ms. Acar** said that the comments made by the delegation on the issue of early marriage had been deeply worrying and somewhat unexpected. Whether or not something was covered by the legislation of another State party was not the point. The current dialogue was between the Committee and the delegation of Lebanon, and concerned the application of article 16 of the Convention. If another State party had discriminatory provisions, then those would be examined under the Committee's periodic review of that country's implementation of the Convention.

44. **Mr. Karam** (Lebanon) said that, in the light of the confessional situation not only in Lebanon but across the region in general, the withdrawal of his country's reservations to the Convention would be extremely difficult. Efforts would continue to be made, however.

*The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 5.15 p.m.*