

21. The Committee also acknowledges the view of the Special Rapporteur appointed by the International Law Commission that objections by States are not only a means of exerting pressure on reserving States, but also serve as a useful guide for the assessment of the permissibility of a reservation by the Committee itself.

The role of the Committee

22. The Committee has an important role to play, one which has been mandated by the Vienna Declaration and Programme for Action, which, in paragraph 39, states that the Committee should continue its review of reservations.
23. The Committee concludes that it has certain responsibilities as the body of experts charged with the consideration of periodic reports submitted to it. The Committee, in its examination of States' reports, enters into constructive dialogue with the State party and makes concluding comments routinely expressing concern at the entry of reservations to articles 2 and 16 or the failure of States parties to withdraw or modify them.
24. The Special Rapporteur considers that control of the permissibility of reservations is the primary responsibility of the States parties. However, the Committee again wishes to draw to the attention of States parties its grave concern at the number and extent of impermissible reservations. It also expresses concern that, even when States object to such reservations there appears to be a reluctance on the part of the States concerned to remove and modify them and thereby comply with general principles of international law.

Conclusion

25. Fifty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the great majority of Member States have signified their commitment to the Convention by ratification or accession. It is now time to re-examine States' self-imposed limitations to full compliance with all the principles in the Convention by the entry of reservations. Removal or modification of reservations, particularly to articles 2 and 16, would indicate a State party's determination to remove all barriers to women's full equality and its commitment to ensuring that women are able to participate fully in all aspects of public and private life without fear of discrimination or recrimination. States which remove reservations would be making a major contribution to achieving the objectives of both formal and de facto or substantive compliance with the Convention B a laudable and appropriate contribution to the commemoration of 50 years of compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as implementation of the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

Annex H

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

The States parties to the present Protocol,

Noting that the Charter of the United Nations reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women,

Also noting that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁶⁰ proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, including distinction based on sex,

Recalling that the International Covenants on Human Rights⁶¹ and other international human rights instruments prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex,

Also recalling the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women⁶² (“the Convention”), in which the States parties thereto condemn discrimination against women in all its forms and agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women,

Reaffirming their determination to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and to take effective action to prevent violations of these rights and freedoms,

Have agreed as follows:

Article 1

A State Party to the present Protocol (“State Party”) recognizes the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (“the Committee”) to receive and consider communications submitted in accordance with article 2.

Article 2

Communications may be submitted by or on behalf of individuals or groups of individuals, under the jurisdiction of a State Party, claiming to be victims of a violation of any of the rights set forth in the Convention by that State Party. Where a communication is submitted on behalf of individuals or groups of individuals, this shall be with their consent unless the author can justify acting on their behalf without such consent.

Article 3

Communications shall be in writing and shall not be anonymous. No communication shall be received by the Committee if it concerns a State Party to the Convention that is not a party to the present Protocol.

Article 4

1. The Committee shall not consider a communication unless it has ascertained that all available domestic remedies have been exhausted unless the application of such remedies is unreasonably prolonged or unlikely to bring effective relief.
2. The Committee shall declare a communication inadmissible where:
 - (a) The same matter has already been examined by the Committee or has been or is being examined under another procedure of international investigation or settlement;
 - (b) It is incompatible with the provisions of the Convention;
 - (c) It is manifestly ill-founded or not sufficiently substantiated;

⁶⁰ Resolution 217 A (III).

⁶¹ Resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

⁶² Resolution 34/180, annex.

- (d) It is an abuse of the right to submit a communication;
- (e) The facts that are the subject of the communication occurred prior to the entry into force of the present Protocol for the State Party concerned unless those facts continued after that date.

Article 5

1. At any time after the receipt of a communication and before a determination on the merits has been reached, the Committee may transmit to the State Party concerned for its urgent consideration a request that the State Party take such interim measures as may be necessary to avoid possible irreparable damage to the victim or victims of the alleged violation.
2. Where the Committee exercises its discretion under paragraph 1 of the present article, this does not imply a determination on admissibility or on the merits of the communication.

Article 6

1. Unless the Committee considers a communication inadmissible without reference to the State Party concerned, and provided that the individual or individuals consent to the disclosure of their identity to that State Party, the Committee shall bring any communication submitted to it under the present Protocol confidentially to the attention of the State Party concerned.
2. Within six months, the receiving State Party shall submit to the Committee written explanations or statements clarifying the matter and the remedy, if any, that may have been provided by that State Party.

Article 7

1. The Committee shall consider communications received under the present Protocol in the light of all information made available to it by or on behalf of individuals or groups of individuals and by the State Party concerned, provided that this information is transmitted to the parties concerned.
2. The Committee shall hold closed meetings when examining communications under the present Protocol.
3. After examining a communication, the Committee shall transmit its views on the communication, together with its recommendations, if any, to the parties concerned.

4. The State Party shall give due consideration to the views of the Committee, together with its recommendations, if any, and shall submit to the Committee, within six months, a written response, including information on any action taken in the light of the views and recommendations of the Committee.
5. The Committee may invite the State Party to submit further information about any measures the State Party has taken in response to its views or recommendations, if any, including as deemed appropriate by the Committee, in the State Party's subsequent reports under article 18 of the Convention.

Article 8

1. If the Committee receives reliable information indicating grave or systematic violations by a State Party of rights set forth in the Convention, the Committee shall invite that State Party to cooperate in the examination of the information and to this end to submit observations with regard to the information concerned.
2. Taking into account any observations that may have been submitted by the State Party concerned as well as any other reliable information available to it, the Committee may designate one or more of its members to conduct an inquiry and to report urgently to the Committee. Where warranted and with the consent of the State Party, the inquiry may include a visit to its territory.
3. After examining the findings of such an inquiry, the Committee shall transmit these findings to the State Party concerned together with any comments and recommendations.
4. The State Party concerned shall, within six months of receiving the findings, comments and recommendations transmitted by the Committee, submit its observations to the Committee.
5. Such an inquiry shall be conducted confidentially and the cooperation of the State Party shall be sought at all stages of the proceedings.

Article 9

1. The Committee may invite the State Party concerned to include in its report under article 18 of the Convention details of any measures taken in response to an inquiry conducted under article 8 of the present Protocol.
2. The Committee may, if necessary, after the end of the

period of six months referred to in article 8.4, invite the State Party concerned to inform it of the measures taken in response to such an inquiry.

Article 10

1. Each State Party may, at the time of signature or ratification of the present Protocol or accession thereto, declare that it does not recognize the competence of the Committee provided for in articles 8 and 9.
2. Any State Party having made a declaration in accordance with paragraph 1 of the present article may, at any time, withdraw this declaration by notification to the Secretary-General.

Article 11

A State Party shall take all appropriate steps to ensure that individuals under its jurisdiction are not subjected to ill treatment or intimidation as a consequence of communicating with the Committee pursuant to the present Protocol.

Article 12

The Committee shall include in its annual report under article 21 of the Convention a summary of its activities under the present Protocol.

Article 13

Each State Party undertakes to make widely known and to give publicity to the Convention and the present Protocol and to facilitate access to information about the views and recommendations of the Committee, in particular, on matters involving that State Party.

Article 14

The Committee shall develop its own rules of procedure to be followed when exercising the functions conferred on it by the present Protocol.

Article 15

1. The present Protocol shall be open for signature by any State that has signed, ratified or acceded to the Convention.
2. The present Protocol shall be subject to ratification by any State that has ratified or acceded to the Convention. Instruments of ratification shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.
3. The present Protocol shall be open to accession by any

State that has ratified or acceded to the Convention.

4. Accession shall be effected by the deposit of an instrument of accession with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Article 16

1. The present Protocol shall enter into force three months after the date of the deposit with the Secretary-General of the United Nations of the tenth instrument of ratification or accession.
2. For each State ratifying the present Protocol or acceding to it after its entry into force, the present Protocol shall enter into force three months after the date of the deposit of its own instrument of ratification or accession.

Article 17

No reservations to the present Protocol shall be permitted.

Article 18

1. Any State Party may propose an amendment to the present Protocol and file it with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Secretary-General shall thereupon communicate any proposed amendments to the States parties with a request that they notify her or him whether they favour a conference of States parties for the purpose of considering and voting on the proposal. In the event that at least one third of the States parties favour such a conference, the Secretary-General shall convene the conference under the auspices of the United Nations. Any amendment adopted by a majority of the States parties present and voting at the conference shall be submitted to the General Assembly of the United Nations for approval.
2. Amendments shall come into force when they have been approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations and accepted by a two-thirds majority of the States parties to the present Protocol in accordance with their respective constitutional processes.
3. When amendments come into force, they shall be binding on those States parties that have accepted them, other States parties still being bound by the provisions of the present Protocol and any earlier amendments that they have accepted.

Article 19

1. Any State Party may denounce the present Protocol at any time by written notification addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Denunciation shall take effect six months after the date of receipt of the notification by the Secretary-General.
2. Denunciation shall be without prejudice to the continued application of the provisions of the present Protocol to any communication submitted under article 2 or any inquiry initiated under article 8 before the effective date of denunciation.

Article 20

The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall inform all States of:

- (a) Signatures, ratifications and accessions under the present Protocol;

(b) The date of entry into force of the present Protocol and of any amendment under article 18;

(c) Any denunciation under article 19.

Article 21

1. The present Protocol, of which the Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish texts are equally authentic, shall be deposited in the archives of the United Nations.
2. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall transmit certified copies of the present Protocol to all States referred to in article 25 of the Convention.

Annex I

Procedures for the Elaboration of Concluding Comments by the Committee during the 19th Session in 1998

The Committee decided to streamline those parts of the Committee's concluding comments relating to "factors and difficulties" and "positive aspects", while retaining flexibility in this regard. The sections relating to "principal areas of concern" and "recommendations and suggestions" of the Committee's concluding comments should be combined in a single section to be entitled "Principal areas of concern and recommendations".

Where appropriate, the Committee's concluding comments should include specific suggestions to the States parties with regard to obtaining technical assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other parts of the United Nations system. Recommendations relating to technical assistance could, for example, be directed to reservations and law reform, including review of legislation.

The Committee adopted the following procedures and format for the elaboration of concluding comments:

- (a) The Committee designates from among its members a country rapporteur for the report of each State party;
- (b) Assisted by the Secretariat, the country rapporteur seeks additional information on the situation of women in the State party under review. The findings of the country rapporteur are presented as a briefing on the report at a closed meeting before the State party's presentation. In the case of periodic reports, the rapporteur's report is sent in advance to the pre-session working group;
- (c) The Committee holds a closed meeting after the constructive dialogue to consider the main issues and trends to be reflected in the concluding comments relating to the report of the State party. Concluding comments drafted thereafter reflect only the views expressed at the meetings during which the report is presented, and not the views of the individual country rapporteurs;
- (d) The expert nominated as the country rapporteur drafts concluding comments in close collaboration with the general rapporteur of the Committee and with the support of the secretariat;
- (e) Concluding comments are preceded by a summary of the State party's presentation, which is prepared by the secretariat;
- (f) Concluding comments usually follow a standard format under four headings: introduction; positive aspects; factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention; principal areas of concern and recommendations;
- (g) The introduction contains comments on whether the report has followed the Committee's guidelines for the preparation of initial and periodic reports; whether it was sufficient or insufficient; whether it incorporates or refers to statistical information disaggregated by sex; and the Committee's general recommendations. Whether there are any reservations to the Convention; whether reservations have been withdrawn; whether the State party has objected to the reservations of other State parties; and whether the State party has mentioned the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action are issues which are addressed in this section, as well as the nature and relevance of the oral presentation. An objective indication of the strengths of the report and the strength of the delegation is generally included;
- (h) The "positive aspects" section is organized in the order of the articles of the Convention;
- (i) The "factors and difficulties" section describes major overarching reasons why the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has not been implemented fully by the State party. Any reservations to the Convention are also addressed in this section, as well as other legal impediments to the implementation of the Convention;
- (j) The "principal areas of concern and recommendations" section is organized in the order of the importance of the particular issues to the country under review and

provides concrete proposals from the Committee on the problems identified in the rest of the comments;

- (k) The concluding comments include reference to any commitments of the State party made at the Fourth World Conference on Women;
- (l) Where appropriate, the concluding comments include specific suggestions to the States parties with regard to possible technical assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other parts of the United Nations system. Recommendations relating to technical assistance could, for example, be directed to reservations, review of legislation and law reform;
- (m) Concluding comments close with a recommendation relating to dissemination, requesting the wide dissemination of the concluding comments in the State party concerned, in order to make the people in the State

party, and particularly its government administrators and politicians, aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure de facto equality for women and the further steps required in that regard. It also requests the State party to continue to disseminate widely, and in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention, the Committee's general recommendations and the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action;

- (n) Each concluding comment is internally balanced, and the Committee strives to achieve consistence and balance, particularly in terms of praise and expressions of concern, among the concluding comments elaborated at each session. Accordingly, the Committee considers concluding comments comparatively in an effort to ensure that they are even.

Selected Concluding Comments of the Committee⁶³

Initial reports

Belize

(a) Introduction by the State party

In introducing the combined initial and second periodic reports, the representative noted that the ratification of the Convention in 1990 had been a catalyst in bringing changes to achieve gender equality in Belize. Since that date, small but consistent steps had been taken to comply with the articles of the Convention. She also noted that the report reflected the combined effort of the Government and non-governmental organizations.

The representative placed the implementation of the Convention in the context that Belize operated a Church-State education system, and that the Church's role in influencing gender attitudes was important.

In presenting the status of implementation of the Convention, the representative noted that the Constitution provided protection against discriminatory treatment and required State policies to eliminate economic and social privilege and disparity among citizens on grounds that included sex. She underlined that the current Government was the first to have a women's agenda. No national laws or policies on affirmative action, temporary special measures or quotas existed in the country, and women continued to experience unequal access to opportunities and resources. The Government aimed at achieving a rate of at least 30 per cent women in senior-level positions in the public service. The Political Reform Commission was expected to submit recommendations on political reform in Belize by the end of the year, including on affirmative action and special temporary measures.

The representative drew attention to the National Strategic Plan on Gender Equity and Equality, which had been developed to promote implementation of the Government's commitments under the Beijing Declaration

and Platform for Action. It focused on five priority areas: family violence; employment; health; decision-making; and poverty. Belize would soon adopt the Commonwealth gender management system, as a major component of the Plan. A domestic violence task force had been established and was developing a national plan to address domestic violence and family violence in an integrated and coordinated manner. Legislation on sexual harassment and domestic violence existed and a legislative bill on marital rape was being introduced in the House of Representatives. A plan of action had been developed for instituting the gender management system in the health sector. She noted that there was growing concern about the level of prostitution in the light of the fact that Belize had the highest rate of transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) in Central America.

While women comprised 52 per cent of registered voters, and increasingly were candidates for public office, women's representation at the parliamentary level and local government level remained low. For example, out of 29 elected members of the House of Representatives, two were women, and out of 58 municipal representatives, eight were women. The number of women in appointed positions was also below that of men. The National Women's Commission had conducted a study on opportunities for women's political participation, and recommendations would be submitted to the Cabinet and to other governmental and non-governmental bodies.

Education in Belize was mandatory at the primary level for children between the ages of 5 and 14. While children under 14 showed a higher male enrolment rate (70.1 per cent) than female (67.2 per cent), the female transition rate from primary to secondary school was, in general, higher (90 per cent) than for male students (78.8 per cent). This pattern was reversed in rural areas, and regional differences were noted. More female students enrolled in tertiary education, with 65 per cent of the students at the University College of Belize being women. It was noted that pregnancy

⁶³ Contained in document A/54/38/Rev.1.

was a major cause of girls discontinuing their education. With individual schools under the Church-State system of education free to expel girls from school because of pregnancy, the Government recognized the need to develop a national policy on teenage pregnancy.

While there were no discriminatory labour laws, discriminatory attitudes persisted, resulting in a female workforce that was better educated than the male workforce but earned less on average. Women's participation in the labour force was lower than men's, and women were concentrated in lower-paying jobs, suffered twice the unemployment rate of men and were more likely to experience long-term unemployment. Different minimum wage regulations applied to different types of jobs, and certain types of female-dominated work were not covered by minimum wage regulations. Efforts were under way to improve the employment situation of women, including through training in non-traditional jobs. In contravention of existing labour regulations, schools operating under the Church-State system were allowed to dismiss unwed pregnant women before they qualified for maternity leave.

The representative noted that teenage pregnancy was high, with 23 per cent of births having been to women under 19 years of age. Abortion was illegal in Belize, and while the use of contraception was not prohibited, data suggested that the unmet need for contraception was high. Women's HIV/AIDS infection rate was higher than men's, and women affected by AIDS were a major target group of the awareness and prevention programmes of the Government's AIDS task force.

Belize had a high number of consensual and common-law unions as opposed to marital unions, but *de facto* spouses could not claim maintenance after the breakup of a relationship, and their claims to family property were limited, including on the death of the *de facto* spouse.

The representative noted that sexual harassment, access to continuing education for young mothers, equal pay for work of equal value, gender-neutral teaching materials and health services for women required greater effort. Increased compliance with existing laws and policies was also required in a number of areas, including domestic violence and sexual offences. The variety of family types and structures in Belize required that all segments of society take responsibility for narrowing the gap in family laws and practice. Concluding the presentation, the representative indicated that the reporting process had enabled the State party to identify areas of priority action to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

(b) Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Government of Belize for ratifying the Convention in 1990 without reservations, and for submitting its initial and second periodic reports, as well as supplemental information updating the reports to 1999. It commends the Government for its oral presentation, and for the comprehensive replies to the Committee's questions. It appreciates the open manner in which the report was prepared and presented, and in particular the consultative process with non-governmental and other organizations during the preparation of the report.

The Committee commends the Government of Belize for having sent a large delegation, headed by the Minister of Human Development, Women and Youth, and including the First Lady as President of the National Women's Commission, and a representative of the Women's Issues Network. Their participation in presenting the report and in replying to the Committee's questions enhanced the quality of the constructive dialogue between the State party and the Committee. The Committee notes that the report refers to steps taken by the Government to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

Positive aspects

The Committee notes that the Constitution of Belize contains, in its chapter on the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms, protection against discriminatory treatment on the basis of sex. It commends the Government on its commitment to achieving equality for women and the full implementation of the Convention, as reflected in its Women's Agenda 1998 on the legal, socio-political and economic status of women. It welcomes the Government's target of realizing at least 30 per cent women in the top positions of the civil service.

The Committee commends the fact that responsibility for women's equality issues rests with a Cabinet Minister. It welcomes the appointment of the National Women's Commission, an advisory body to the Government Minister responsible for women, as the main mechanism for monitoring governmental compliance with the Convention. It also commends the cooperation between governmental machinery and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Convention.

The Committee welcomes the legislative and policy measures already undertaken, as well as those that are being planned to translate its commitment to gender equality into practice. It welcomes the preparation of the National

Strategic Plan on Gender Equity and Equality to implement the Government's commitments under the Beijing Platform for Action. It also welcomes the Domestic Violence Act (1993), the Protection from Sexual Harassment Act (1996) and the Families and Children's Act (1998). It notes with appreciation the establishment of a domestic violence task force, and the Government's ongoing development of a multi-sectoral national family violence plan.

The Committee congratulates the Government on the high level of educational achievement by girls and women, as reflected in the female transition rate from primary to secondary school, and in the high enrolment rate of women (65 per cent) at the University College of Belize.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

The Committee is of the view that the Church-State system of education perpetuates an intermingling of the secular and religious spheres, which is a serious impediment to the full implementation of the Convention. The consequences of this system seriously affect girls' and women's right to education and to health, including reproductive health, protected under the Convention.

The Committee notes that the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural character of the population of Belize and the influence of religion in public affairs represent a particular challenge to the Government in the adoption and implementation of legislation for the achievement of equality for all women in Belize, and full implementation of the Convention.

Principal areas of concern and recommendations

The Committee is concerned about the lack of legislation implementing the constitutional provision of protection against discrimination into the civil code. In particular, the Committee is concerned that article 1 of the Convention, providing a definition of discrimination, covering both direct and indirect discrimination by public as well as private actors, is not fully reflected in legislation.

The Committee urges the Government to ensure that the Convention's definition of discrimination is fully incorporated in Belize's legislation, and in particular to ensure that women have effective remedies against indirect discrimination and discrimination by non-State actors.

The Committee is seriously concerned about the consequences of the Church-State system of education on girls' and young women's right to education. In this regard, the Committee is concerned that schools are free to expel girls

from school because of pregnancy, and that only a few secondary schools allow girls to continue their education after pregnancy. The Committee notes that this violates not only the Convention but also the Constitution of Belize. The Committee is further concerned that under the same system, schools are allowed to dismiss unwed teachers who become pregnant. The Committee considers this also to be in violation of the Convention. While noting with appreciation the Minister's commitment, expressed during the dialogue, to work for change in this regard, the Committee notes the absence of any kind of policy or legislative initiative to reverse this situation.

The Committee urges the Government to place the highest priority on eliminating discrimination against women and girls in education because of pregnancy, through both legislative provisions and adequate policy measures. It calls on the Government to strengthen the role of the National Council of Education in protecting girls' and teachers' rights in education. It urges the Government to formulate needed policy and legislative measures to ensure de facto adherence to articles 10, 11 and 12 of the Convention.

While welcoming the Government's commitment to establishing a single minimum wage, the Committee expresses its concern that female-dominated jobs currently have a substantially lower minimum wage than jobs held predominantly by men. The Committee is also concerned about the economic situation of women and, especially, their low and falling labour force participation rate, which is indicative of the denial of equal opportunities to women in the labour force. Sixty per cent of women are not in the labour force, and the unemployment rate of women is double that of men. The lack of childcare increases women's disadvantage in the labour market.

The Committee encourages the Government to implement a single minimum wage. It recommends that a national childcare policy be developed to support working mothers. It also urges the Government to assess the reasons for women's lower earnings, and for their voluntary departure from the labour market with a view to adopting adequate measures to reverse this trend. The Committee also encourages the Government to intensify its programmes for women entrepreneurs, including access to loans, credits and skill development, as well as to ensure that educational and vocational training opportunities for girls include non-traditional and emerging areas of the economy, such as the information and communications field. The Committee also invites the Government to ensure that women can fully exercise their right to unionize, and that all applicable legislation in this regard is enforced, including in special economic zones. The Committee urges the Ministry of Women's

Affairs to initiate dialogue with the Ministry of Labour, with a view to ensuring proper implementation and monitoring of existing labour laws, to enable women to benefit from the employment protection found in these laws.

The Committee is concerned at the high incidence of teenage pregnancy, with 23 per cent of births in 1998 being to women under 19 years of age, which, in combination with the prevention of teenage mothers from pursuing their education, is predestined to reduce women's economic opportunities and thus increase their level of poverty. The fact that 60 per cent of births to young women are unplanned is indicative of the lack of adequate family planning information and contraceptive use. The Committee is also concerned at the restrictive abortion laws in place in the State party. It is concerned that, in 1998, so-called "unspecified abortions" (abortions initiated outside the formal health sector) were the fifth cause of hospitalization, and hospitals discriminate against these women in the provision of services and care. In this regard, the Committee notes that the level of maternal mortality due to clandestine abortions may indicate that the Government does not fully implement its obligations to respect the right to life of its women citizens. The Committee is concerned that, while there are no legal barriers, the need for contraception remains unmet.

The Committee urges the Government to revise its abortion laws, in particular since according to the information, existing legislation penalizing abortion is not strictly enforced. It also urges the Government to include age-appropriate sex education in school curricula and to conduct awareness campaigns so as to reduce teenage pregnancy rates and to increase girls' and women's life choices. The Committee also urges the Government to implement programmes and policies aiming to increase knowledge about, and availability of, various types of contraceptives, with the understanding that family planning is a joint responsibility of both partners.

The Committee is concerned at the high incidence of HIV/AIDS infection in the country.

The Committee recommends that the Government implement awareness-raising programmes and policies about the prevention of HIV/AIDS and encourage the use of condoms.

The Committee invites the Government to assess the mental health status of women in Belize, and to include information thereon in its next report.

Noting the recent revision of the Criminal Code with regard to repealing the need for corroborating evidence in sexual offence cases, including rape, the Committee

remains concerned that the existing provision demands higher evidentiary requirements in these cases than for other crimes. The Committee is concerned that this constitutes a serious impediment to women seeking justice in sexual offence cases, and thus to the elimination of discrimination.

The Committee recommends that the Criminal Code be kept under review with a view to placing sexual offence and violence on a par with other criminal offences. It also urges the Government to ensure that investigation and prosecution of rape and sexual offence cases are conducted as rigorously as in other criminal cases. The Committee urges the Government to seek, as a priority, the repeal in the Criminal Code of the marital immunity relating to rape.

The Committee is concerned at the differential treatment of married, common-law, and "visiting" spouses under common law with regard to the distribution of matrimonial property following the break-up of the relationship.

The Committee recommends a revision of this situation, taking into account the examples of civil law systems and community of matrimonial property approaches.

The Committee notes a lack of data disaggregated by sex and age, including a breakdown by urban and rural categories, on health issues, illiteracy rates and the situation of immigrant women.

The Committee recommends that the Government improve data collection through its census to create a better basis for gender-sensitive policy-making, and to that end that it seek technical and financial support from international agencies.

The Committee commends the Government for the introduction of the Commonwealth gender management system to ensure that a gender perspective is reflected in all governmental policies and programmes, and requests that an assessment of progress made in this regard be included in the next report.

The Committee requests that the Government respond in its next periodic report to the specific issues raised in these concluding comments.

The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Belize of the present concluding comments, in order to make the people of Belize, and particularly government administrators and politicians, aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure *de jure* and *de facto* equality for women and the further steps that are required in that regard. It also requests the Government to continue to dis-

seminate widely, and in particular, to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention, the Committee's general recommendations and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Combined second and third periodic reports

Ireland

(a) Introduction by the State party

The representative of Ireland began his introduction by emphasizing Ireland's involvement of women in politics, giving the example of the election of their second successive woman President, which followed an election in which four of the five candidates were women. Although the number of women in Parliament was still lower than desired, the Second Commission on the Status of Women had made several recommendations to the Government and political parties were seeking to increase women's representation. The representative explained that the 1998 Employment Equality Act outlawed discrimination on nine grounds, including gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation and membership in the "traveller" community.

The representative described the role of women in the labour force, noting the participation of women in the civil service and policies with regard to sexual harassment, childcare, parental leave, work sharing and part-time work. He noted that childcare was seen as one of the most important ways of reconciling work and family life, and a working group had been established to report on that. He described the national development plan on equal opportunities between women and men.

The representative noted that the educational system enabled each person to fulfil her or his potential, and was reinforced by the Education Act of 1998, which made specific provisions for the promotion of equality of access to and participation in education. The Equality Committee of the Department of Education and Science had been established to monitor and coordinate activities relating to equality of opportunity for girls and boys in education. It was also developing strategies for mainstreaming gender equality and had also addressed the under-representation of women in decision-making positions in education. Following research and a series of pilot courses designed specifically for women interested in seeking promotion to decision-making positions, more women had been appointed to senior positions, but the Government recognized that more women in top management positions were still required.

The representative described the National Anti-Poverty

Strategy and its key objective of reducing inequalities and focusing on the gender dimensions of poverty. Single-parent and single-adult households were given particular attention in the Strategy. The representative noted that women in both urban and rural areas experienced problems arising from poverty and marginalization, and that women's and community groups had an important role in tackling those problems.

The Committee was informed that Ireland's five reservations to the Convention were being kept under regular review. The reservation to article 13 (b) and (c) concerning access to financial credit and recreational facilities would be lifted when an equal status bill, which would prohibit discrimination in areas other than employment, was enacted. The removal of the reservation relating to contracts entered into by women was also expected.

The representative informed the Committee that in 1993, the Government had established a task force to examine the needs of "traveller", which had resulted in a report containing over 300 recommendations. The report recommended the examination of gender implications in order to ascertain how policies and practices contributed to or hampered progress for "traveller" women. Proposals for future initiatives would be monitored and resources would be made available for the collection and collation of data. The representative noted that the health of "traveller" women was a priority area, that outreach services and on-site and special clinics had been introduced or were in the planning stages and that the Primary Health Care for Travellers Project established in 1994 trained "traveller" women in the delivery of primary health-care services.

The representative indicated that measures, including the Refugee Act of 1996, had been introduced to deter discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers. Measures to address vulnerable categories of refugees, such as victims of trauma, torture or rape, had also been introduced.

The representative informed the Committee about the new women's prison that had been built to replace existing inadequate accommodation. Education, work-training and physical education facilities for female prisoners had also been introduced.

The representative indicated to the Committee that in order to meet women's health needs fully, the Plan for Women's Health, 1997-1999, had been developed. Its four main objectives include maximizing the health and social gains for Irish women; creating a woman-friendly health service; increasing consultation with, and representation of, women in health services; and enhancing the contribution of the health services to promoting women's health in the

developing world. The plan had been supplemented by the establishment of a Women's Health Council, which provided for women's participation in the policy-making processes.

The representative noted that violence against women continued to be of grave concern to the Government, and had led to the establishment in 1997 of the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women. Its objectives included the development of public-awareness campaigns, criminal justice intervention, services and support. Regional Committees on Violence had been formed in the eight Health Board regions and were designed to draw together the services available to women to provide a sympathetic and consolidated approach to the treatment of victims of violence. Rape crisis centres were regarded as vital for the victims of rape and sexual abuse.

In concluding, the representative indicated that Ireland had supported a strong optional protocol during negotiations, and expected to ratify it as soon as the protocol was adopted and opened for signature, accession or ratification.

(b) Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Government of Ireland for submitting its combined second and third periodic report, containing data disaggregated by sex. It commends the Government for the comprehensive written replies to the Committee's questions and its oral presentation which provided additional information on the current situation of the implementation of the Convention. It appreciates the manner in which the State party identified areas for further progress.

The Committee commends the Government of Ireland for having sent a large delegation, headed by the Second Secretary of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and including officials from various branches of Government. Their participation enhanced the quality of the constructive dialogue between the State party and the Committee. The Committee notes that information was provided in the combined second and third periodic report, as well as in the written replies, on Ireland's follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Positive aspects

The Committee commends the Government on its steady progress in withdrawing reservations entered to the Convention upon ratification, and on the fact that remaining reservations are kept under review.

The Committee welcomes legislative changes since the consideration of the initial report in 1989, including the adoption of the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act (1990), the Criminal Justice Act (1993), the Domestic Violence Act (1996), the Parental Leave Act (1998), the Education Act (1998) and the Employment Equality Act (1998) and the forthcoming entry into force of the Equal Status Bill, published in April 1999. In particular, the Committee welcomes the amendment to the Constitution allowing for the introduction of divorce, and the subsequent adoption of the Family Law (Divorce) Act of 1996. The Committee also notes the pending establishment of an independent statutory-based Human Rights Commission, as well as consideration of the incorporation of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms into Irish law.

The Committee notes with appreciation the appointment, in 1993, of a Cabinet Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, responsible for institutional, administrative and legal reform and for coordinating and monitoring government policies with regard to women's equality. It welcomes the Government's commitment to mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes, and the regular scrutiny of all governmental proposals for their impact on women. It also welcomes the issuance of guidelines for dealing with sexual harassment in the civil service, and the adoption of a plan of action on elderly women.

The Committee notes with appreciation that women have benefited from a strong economic growth rate in recent years and have entered the labour market in unprecedented numbers. The Committee welcomes the Government's commitment to reaching the target of a minimum of 40 per cent of women on each State board, and the increase to over 33 per cent of Irish women in the elections to the European Parliament in June 1999.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

The Committee considers that the persistence of the emphasis on the role of women as mothers and caregivers tends to perpetuate sex role stereotypes and constitutes a serious impediment to the full implementation of the Convention. The lack of emphasis, in public perception and in State policy, on the shared responsibility of men for family and caring work further compounds the situation of de facto inequality of women.

Principal areas of concern and recommendations

The Committee notes that although Ireland is a secular

State, the influence of the Church is strongly felt not only in attitudes and stereotypes but also in official State policy. In particular, women's right to health, including reproductive health, is compromised by this influence. The Committee notes that Ireland did not enter a reservation to article 12 upon ratification of the Convention. The Committee recommends implementation of this article in full.

The Committee expresses its concern that, notwithstanding recent favourable economic growth, which has led to women's labour force participation reaching 40 per cent, there is a considerable age gap in that participation, with almost no women over the age of 50 years in paid employment. It is also concerned that women hold the majority of part-time jobs and earn less than men, and that little progress is being made in assessing and valuing work of comparable value.

The Committee urges the Government to ensure that legislation and policies create the structural and systemic framework that will lead to women's long-term participation in the labour force on a basis of equality with men. In particular, the Committee urges the Government to take further measures to reduce the pay gap in women's earnings, taking into account developments that have refined the concepts of equal pay for work of comparable value, and to assess the impact of cultural stereotypes and women's reproductive responsibilities on the continuing pay gap.

While welcoming the Government's recent focus on developing and adopting family-friendly, childcare and parental leave policies to facilitate women's participation in the labour market, the Committee expresses its concern that these policies continue to place primary responsibility for family work and childcare on women, rather than emphasizing the shared responsibility of men and women.

The Committee urges the Government to monitor and review its work and family life policies and legislation so as to ensure that they create incentives and opportunities for women and men to share, equally, paid work outside the home and unpaid family work. In particular, the Committee recommends that such regulations and policies be accompanied by awareness-raising and educational efforts aimed at changing attitudes concerning women's traditional roles and responsibilities for child and family care. It also recommends that parental leave regulations be assessed with a view to providing for paid parental leave so as to create an incentive for men to take advantage of their legal entitlements.

While noting with appreciation the existence of a Plan for Women's Health, 1997-1999, and the establishment of a Women's Health Council, as well as the wide availability of

various programmes to improve women's health, the Committee is concerned that, with very limited exceptions, abortion remains illegal in Ireland. Women who wish to terminate their pregnancies need to travel abroad. This creates hardship for vulnerable groups, such as female asylum seekers who cannot leave the territory of the State.

The Committee urges the Government to facilitate a national dialogue on women's reproductive rights, including on the restrictive abortion laws. It also urges the Government to further improve family planning services and the availability of contraception, including for teenagers and young adults. It also urges the Government to promote the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Noting that a National Steering Committee on Violence against Women has been established to develop a national strategy to this issue, the Committee is concerned that no comprehensive and multidimensional strategy has yet been adopted to prevent and eliminate violence against women.

The Committee requests the inclusion in the next report of comprehensive statistical information on the types and frequency of violence against women, including domestic violence, the number of complaints brought by women and the results of investigations. The Committee also requests detailed information on sexual harassment against women in the workplace, and on means of redress available to and used by women and the results thereof.

The Committee notes with concern that women continue to be under-represented in public and political life, and that structural and attitudinal reasons, including limiting cultural and social values, difficulties in reconciling family life, paid employment and political tasks, have been identified among the reasons for this low representation.

The Committee urges the Government to make full use of temporary special measures in accordance with article 4.1 of the Convention to increase women's participation in politics and decision-making. It also recommends that the Equal Status Bill (1999) be implemented to provide for temporary special measures to overcome systemic and indirect discrimination against women. The Committee recommends awareness-raising and educational measures to redress cultural stereotypes, increase men's sharing of domestic work and encourage mentoring, networking and support systems to facilitate women's entry into public life.

The Committee recommends that the impact of such legislation and policies on achieving equality for women be rigorously monitored and regularly assessed and evaluated with a view to taking corrective action when and if necessary. The Committee requests that detailed information on

these policies, including data disaggregated by sex, a discussion of methodologies and of indicators used and of their impact on women's equality, be included in the next report.

The Committee encourages the Government to ensure that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is included in the terms of reference of the Human Rights Commission, and that the Commission is made up of a balanced number of women and men.

The Committee expresses its concern about the continuing existence, in article 41.2 of the Irish Constitution, of concepts that reflect a stereotypical view of the role of women in the home and as mothers. It is aware that amendments to this article are being considered by the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reform. The Committee also notes with concern that the constitutional guarantee of non-discrimination does not extend to private, non-State actors.

The Committee emphasizes that article 5 of the Convention stipulates that all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women be taken, with a view to the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices that are based on stereotyped roles for men and women. The Committee calls upon the Government to ensure that the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reform is fully aware of Ireland's obligations under the Convention, including article 5.

The Committee requests that the next report provide comprehensive information, including statistical data covering life expectancy, literacy rates, employment and property rights, on the situation of rural women. Noting with concern that a recent poverty survey did not provide data disaggregated by sex, the Committee requests that a detailed analysis be included in the next report of the causes, forms and extent of women's poverty and its intergenerational perpetuation, as well as of the impact of measures to reduce and eliminate women's poverty in general and that of vulnerable groups of women in particular.

The Committee is concerned about the lack of sex-disaggregated data on members of the academic profession with respect to different fields and levels. This is necessary to assess women's advancement in higher education. It is also concerned about the inadequacy of information provided on women's studies in tertiary education in Ireland.

The Committee requests that the next report provide sex-disaggregated data on academic personnel in the universities, as well as information on the activities and pro-

grammes on women's studies centres, particularly with respect to whether or not they grant degrees and to what extent gender and women's studies courses are integrated into the curricula of conventional disciplines in tertiary education.

Noting the recent and extensive legislative developments in Ireland as they pertain to women's equality, the Committee also notes that there is a need for continuing and ongoing training of the judiciary, including magistrates, on gender sensitivity.

The Committee encourages the Government to ensure, through various means and channels, that gender training is not only an integral part of Law School curricula but that it is also part of the continuing education of legal professionals and the judiciary. It also encourages the Government to ensure that an adequate number of women are selected for appointment to specialized courts, such as family courts.

The Committee requests that the Government responds in its next periodic report to the specific issues raised in these concluding comments.

The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Ireland of the present concluding comments, in order to make the people of Ireland, and in particular government administrators and politicians, aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure *de jure* and *de facto* equality for women and the further steps that are required in that regard. It also requests the Government to continue to disseminate widely, and in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention, the Committee's general recommendations and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Second and third periodic reports

Chile

(a) Introduction by the State party

In her statement, the representative of the Government of Chile described the social, cultural and political context in which the Government of Chile was implementing the Convention and informed the Committee of the institutional arrangements made since the restoration of democracy. She recalled that Chile had established the first governmental mechanism for women in the Office of the President of the Republic in 1949. She stressed that the establishment of the National Office for Women's Affairs (SERNAM) in 1991 had been a decisive factor in incorporating a gender perspective into public policy and consolidating the principle of

the equality of Chilean women, with effect throughout the country through regional offices.

Referring to the activities carried out by SERNAM in the legislative sphere, the representative stressed that one of the milestones of the century in terms of the status of Chilean women was the recently approved reform of the Constitution which established the legal equality of women and men at the highest legislative level by amending articles 1 and 19. With regard to family law, she referred to the adoption of the Domestic Violence Act of 1994; in order to facilitate the implementation of that Act, an inter-ministerial commission on the prevention of domestic violence, coordinated by SERNAM, had been established. She drew attention to the Act issued in October 1998 which, in an important reform for the future of the boys and girls of today, amended the Civil Code and other pieces of legislation with respect to filiation.

The representative said that, in order to guarantee equality between husbands and wives at the personal level and in respect of property, the 1994 Act established the sharing of assets acquired during a marriage as an alternative marital property regime.

The representative drew attention to the implementation of the Equal Opportunity Plan for Women, 1994-1999, which had been incorporated into the Government's programme in 1995 and had become the main tool for implementing the Convention and the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, in 1995. She also singled out for mention the proposals for policies on equal opportunities for rural women which SERNAM had drawn up in conjunction with civil society.

The representative of Chile stressed the commitment of the democratic Governments to overcome extreme poverty in Chile and in that respect reported that SERNAM had initiated a vocational training programme for low-income women, particularly women heads of household, which had helped to reduce the number of poor households in Chile, through the economic contribution of women.

The representative also stressed that significant legal changes had been made and major programmatic action carried out in the labour sphere, both in respect of access and improvement of the conditions for the entry of women into the labour market, and in the promotion of shared family responsibilities and the protection of maternity. She said that SERNAM was continuing to carry out the programme for temporary women workers in order to bring the public sectors into line with their needs and provide them with leadership training so as to increase their visibility. Among the legislative advances, she mentioned the amendment of the Labour Code to provide day care serv-

ices to working women and the protection of maternity leave for domestic workers.

The representative drew attention to the considerable progress made as regards the health of Chilean women and girls, stressing the reduction in maternal mortality to 0.2 per 100,000 live births. She acknowledged the incidence of teenage pregnancy and mentioned the special days for community dialogue on emotional health and sexuality, based on a new educational approach, which SERNAM had launched, in cooperation with other State bodies, for the purpose of preventing such situations. She also said that induced abortion was a public health problem in Chile, where it was estimated that one abortion was performed for every four pregnancies, and where abortion was the second leading cause of maternal mortality, even though Chilean law prohibited and penalized all types of abortions.

The representative also informed the Committee of the progress made in the political participation of women in various bodies and institutions in the three areas of State power, especially the grass-roots level, although that participation remained very limited in decision-making bodies, such as the Supreme Court or the Senate. She referred to the efforts made by various groups with a view to ensuring the increased participation of women in the Congress. She also reported that the criteria of equality of opportunities for male and female employees had been incorporated in various government ministries.

The representative referred to the efforts made by SERNAM to achieve the institutionalization of the gender dimension in the public policies of the State. In that respect, she indicated that SERNAM had carried out a growing task of sensitization and training in the gender perspective for public officials and had implemented programmes for the dissemination of women's rights by establishing women's rights information centres in all regions of Chile.

In conclusion, the representative pointed out that the Government of Chile was in the process of elaborating another Equal Opportunity Plan for Women, which would cover the 10-year period 2000-2010, in order to ensure that policies on equality were not dependent on the Government in office but rather became policies of State. She stressed that the Plan would be prepared with the participation of all sectors of Chilean society.

(b) Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

The Committee expresses its appreciation to the

Government of Chile for its second and third periodic reports, and, in particular, for including in the third periodic report data requested by the Committee during its consideration of the initial report. The Committee commends the comprehensive and detailed replies to its questions, which were accompanied by statistical data prepared with input from the ministries and government offices responsible for the areas in question and from a group of women's non-governmental organizations and thematic networks. The Committee also appreciated the oral presentation, which demonstrated with transparency and sincerity the progress achieved, the obstacles encountered and the constraints which have still to be overcome before the *de jure* and *de facto* equality of Chilean women is achieved. In both cases, the Committee gained a broader picture of the overall status of the implementation of the Convention.

The Committee pays tribute to the Government of Chile for its decision to send a delegation headed by the Director-Minister of the National Office for Women's Affairs and composed of experts in the areas of the Convention. The Committee notes that both the third periodic report and the answers given to Committee members' questions include information on fulfilment of the commitments under the Beijing Platform for Action.

Positive aspects

The Committee congratulates the Government of Chile on the adoption of a number of legislative reforms, including the amendment of articles 1 and 19 of the Constitution of the Republic on the equality of women and men; the Domestic Violence Act; reforms to improve the conditions of access to employment and training, working hours and social benefits for female workers, including domestic workers; and reforms of the Civil Code pertaining to family law. These reforms improve legal equality between husband and wife by establishing a regime of shared assets, introduce a joint family estate and provide for equal treatment of children, whether or not they are born in wedlock.

The Committee commends the Government for the political will it has displayed in implementing the Convention; in strengthening SERNAM by continuing its programmes as a decentralized government office in the country's 13 regions and granting it, in addition, budgetary autonomy; and in adopting the Equal Opportunity Plan for Women and implementing it nationally.

The Committee also commends the adoption of policies and the implementation of a number of government actions and programmes with a view to ensuring the equality of the girl child and of women in education, resulting in a national literacy rate of 94.6 per cent. The Committee commends

policies aimed at improving the living conditions of temporary female workers and providing job training to youth of both sexes; the scholarship programme for women heads of household; and the high level of primary health-care coverage. The Committee welcomes the Government's decision to mainstream the gender perspective in all social programmes in order to integrate it in the definition and adoption of government policies and to incorporate the principle of equality in various spheres, thereby creating a solid basis for gender equity.

The Committee commends the efforts made by the Government of Chile both to disseminate information concerning women's human rights in the various social spheres and to uphold those rights. It also notes with satisfaction the actions taken with the participation of all governmental sectors and civil society aimed at preventing and combating domestic violence and which include the establishment of a special unit in the Department of Police and the creation of 17 specialized offices in the judiciary.

The Committee notes with satisfaction the follow-up to the implementation of the recommendations and decisions of the world conferences of the 1990s, including the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

The Committee notes that despite the important role Chilean women have played in the defence of human rights and in the restoration of democracy in their country, the persistence of stereotypes and traditional attitudes that were aggravated by the after-effects of 20 years of military dictatorship has slowed down the full implementation of the Convention.

Principal areas of concern and recommendations

The Committee is concerned at the failure to protect women under family law, which restricts, *inter alia*, women's ability to administer their own or joint property. The Committee is also concerned at the absence of any provision for dissolution of marriage. These are seriously discriminatory of women both in their family relations and in the full exercise of their economic and social rights.

The Committee recommends that the Government introduce and support vigorously legislation which permits divorce, allows women to remarry after divorce, and grants women and men the same rights to administer property during marriage and equal rights to property on divorce. It also recommends that women be granted the right to initiate divorce on the same terms as men.

The Committee is concerned at the persistent stereotypes of the role of women and men in society. It notes with concern that such prevailing social patterns, including adolescent girls dropping out of school because of early pregnancy, domestic tasks allotted to girls and women and the differential obligations assigned to women and men, reveal that deep-rooted social and cultural prejudices persist so as to negatively affect the achievement of equality for women. The Committee is concerned that changes in legislation, although positive, have been insufficient to bring about full de facto equality between women and men.

The Committee is concerned at the low level of participation by women in politics and governmental administration, especially at the decision-making level.

The Committee urges the Government to strengthen actions undertaken through comprehensive strategies, including temporary special measures, in accordance with article 4.1 of the Convention, intended to encourage greater participation of women in public life, particularly in political decision-making, and to promote changes in attitudes and perceptions both of women and of men, with regard to their respective roles in the home, the family, the workplace and society as a whole. In particular, the Committee recommends that the Government take into account general recommendations 21 and 23 on equality in marriage, family relations and public life, and that it strengthen and intensify actions aimed at raising awareness of the importance of the multiple roles, activities and contributions of women in the community and family, and in general to promote equality of rights and opportunities between women and men.

The Committee expresses concern at the high rate of teenage pregnancy and the fact that a large percentage of those young women are single mothers and many of these girls are in early adolescence. The Committee notes that a substantial number of teenage pregnancies can be linked to acts of sexual violence against adolescent girls. It also notes that many girls are made pregnant by adolescent boys. The Committee further notes with concern that only pregnant girls are expelled from private schools at the secondary and preparatory levels.

The Committee recommends that the Government and SERNAM give priority to an examination of the situation of adolescents, and urges the Government to adopt various measures to address effectively the sexual and reproductive health services and information needs of adolescents, including through the dissemination of family planning and information on contraceptive methods, through, inter alia, the introduction of effective sex education programmes. It also urges the Government to make all efforts to ensure the passage of a law explicitly prohibiting that adolescent girls

be expelled from private and public schools because of pregnancy.

The Committee is concerned at the inadequate recognition and protection of the reproductive rights of women in Chile. The Committee is especially concerned at the laws prohibiting and punishing any form of abortion. This law affects women's health, increases maternal mortality, and causes further suffering when women are imprisoned for violation of the law. The Committee is also concerned that women can only undergo sterilization in a public health institution. It is also concerned that a husband's consent is required for sterilization and a woman who wishes to be sterilized must already have four children. The Committee considers these provisions to violate the human rights of all women.

The Committee recommends that the Government consider review of the laws relating to abortion with a view to their amendment, in particular to provide safe abortion and to permit termination of pregnancy for therapeutic reasons or because of the health, including the mental health, of the woman. The Committee also urges the Government to revise laws which require health professionals to report women who undergo abortions to law enforcement agencies and which impose criminal penalties on these women. It also requests the Government to strengthen its actions and efforts aimed at the prevention of unwanted pregnancies, including by making all kinds of contraceptives more widely available and without any restriction. The Committee recommends granting women the right to undergo sterilization without requiring their husband's — or anyone else's — prior consent. In that connection, the Committee suggests that the Government take note of general recommendations 21 on marriage and family relations and 24 on article 12, "Women and health".

The Committee notes with concern that many women employed by small businesses and in the informal sector earn low wages, which makes it difficult for them to enter the current social insurance system. The Committee is also concerned that despite the efforts of SERNAM, women seasonal workers find themselves in a particularly precarious situation as regards working conditions, remuneration and childcare.

The Committee requests the Government to include in its next report data on the content and implementation of the new plan for equal opportunity 2000-2010, which is under preparation, as well as statistics on the status of women workers, improvements in their living conditions, childcare facilities and the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace.

The Committee requests the Government to include in

its next report data on progress in the situation of rural and indigenous women, especially as regards their health, employment and educational status.

The Committee requests information on the incidence among women of all ages of tobacco use, and on abuse of alcohol and other substances in the next report.

The Committee recommends that the Government of Chile describe in its next periodic report the measures it adopts to meet the concerns expressed in these concluding comments.

The Committee recommends that these concluding comments be widely disseminated in Chile so that Chilean society as a whole, and the Government, administrators and politicians, in particular, are aware of the measures taken to guarantee *de jure* and *de facto* equality for women and the further measures necessary in that respect. The Committee also requests the Government to continue its wide dissemination of the Convention, the general recommendations of the Committee and the Beijing Platform for Action, particularly among women's and human rights organizations.

