

**COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
36TH SESSION (NEW YORK, 7 TO 25 AUGUST 2006)**

CAPE VERDE (COMBINED INITIAL, 2ND, 3RD, 4TH, 5TH AND 6TH PERIODIC REPORTS)

Information submitted to the Committee

On 18 August 2006, Cape Verde submitted its combined initial 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th periodic reports¹ under the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (the Convention) to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Committee) during its 36th session. The report, along with the written responses² to the Committee's list of issues and questions,³ offered a realistic picture of women's rights in Cape Verde and the Government's efforts to implement the Convention and combat discrimination. The report identified programmes, laws and initiatives introduced by the Government in economic, political, legal and social areas to advance equality and combat discrimination. It also provides some statistical data to illustrate the situation of women in the country.

The Committee commented on the lateness of the report, which was submitted more than 25 years after Cape Verde ratified the Convention in 1980, and its failure to address the Committee's general recommendations⁴ on the implementation of the Convention. In the report, Cape Verde stated that an earlier submission had been hindered by the process of building a new political and State structure after independence from Portugal in 1975 and the Government's limited resources. Despite the delay, Cape Verde remains committed to the advancement of women's rights and the implementation of the Convention, indicating that equality is enshrined in the Constitution and that the Convention has been fully integrated into domestic law. It notably pointed to the Institute for the Status of Women created in 1994 with the purpose of promoting equality between men and women, creating effective and visible participation of women in all areas of social, economic and political life, and introducing strategies to enhance the quality of women's lives.

In the list of issues and questions, the Committee probed the State Party on its various campaigns to disseminate information on women's rights and steps to combat violence against women and increase female participation in the public life. In its responses, Cape Verde stated that since its independence in 1975, it has undertaken a significant transformation with regard to human rights and women's rights in particular. The State Party used television and radio programmes to educate the population about women's rights. Weekly programmes such as *Femina* and *Mudjer* address issues of women's rights, domestic violence, poverty and reproductive rights. The responses also acknowledged the importance of violence against women and indicated that the Government has introduced legislation to combat this phenomenon.

¹ For full report see <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/451/81/PDF/N0545181.pdf?OpenElement>.

² Responses are available <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/352/84/PDF/N0635284.pdf?OpenElement>.

³ For list of issues and questions see

<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/249/74/PDF/N0624974.pdf?OpenElement>.

⁴ The Committee is empowered to make general recommendations to State parties. These usually further clarify the Committee's view of the obligations of States under the Convention. For more information, see:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/index.html>.

Themes and Issues⁵

Violence against women

The Committee expressed its concern over continuing violence against women, particularly domestic violence, despite the State Party's efforts to criminalise violence and prosecute perpetrators. According to the report, a *Legislative Decree* of April 1997 and the 2004 *Penal Code* criminalise domestic violence and mistreatment of spouses. In order to break the cycle of domestic violence, the Government initiated a campaign entitled: 'Are you a victim of domestic violence? We can break the silence' to prompt victims to report their ordeal and facilitate the punishment of perpetrators. Cape Verde noted that combating domestic violence is difficult due to the persistence of traditional views of women and cultural stereotypes.

Labour and Education

Cape Verde is a developing society with a struggling economy with levels of unemployment close to 20 per cent and widespread poverty that seems to impact women in particular. Women work primarily in the informal sectors and continue to face discrimination and sexual harassment at work. The Committee questioned the State Party on measures employed to promote equality and help women living in poverty. The delegation stated that poverty among women is mainly due to lack of education and explained that the Government had therefore initiated programmes aimed to increase adult literacy and increase access to higher education and to micro-credits. The delegation also highlighted that over the past ten years, girls' enrolment and literacy rates have increased and are now similar to boys' rates. To combat illiteracy rates among women, in particular older women, the Government also introduced adult literacy programmes and provides scholarships and grants for women seeking to continue their education.

Political Participation

All citizens have the right to vote and seek elected office under the Cape Verde Constitution. Under the *Electoral law*, the State provides a subsidy to political parties that have successfully elected at least 25 per cent of women in both national and municipal levels. Despite the law, women continue to be underrepresented and only few seek public office. The Committee questioned the State Party about the political reality and urged it to strengthen women's political participation and their presence in the diplomatic community. The delegation acknowledged that women only made up 20 per cent of political offices and stated that this reality is mainly due to a lack of information among women about the political process and the fact that other responsibilities, such as taking care of children, still take precedence over seeking a political office.

Traditional stereotypes

While the Constitution clearly states that men and women are equal and entitled to the same rights, women continue to be discriminated against. Patriarchal gender stereotypes remain a major obstacle to

⁵ For a summary record of the session, see <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/472/30/PDF/N0647230.pdf?OpenElement> and <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/472/39/PDF/N0647239.pdf?OpenElement>.

achieving full equality and in this context, the Committee urged the State Party to disseminate information on the Convention in educational, judicial, governmental and work settings and provide training to educate the population on women's rights.

Conclusions and next steps

The Committee commended the State Party for its efforts to mainstream gender equality. In particular, the Committee praised the close cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organisations in the implementation of the Convention, the provision of vocational training, access to micro-credit and awareness-raising initiatives.

The major criticisms of the report focused on its late submission and the lack or inadequacy of statistical data. The Committee recommended that the next report be submitted in 2010, with more statistical data and an overview of efforts taken to address the Committee's Concluding Comments.⁶ The Committee further called on the State Party to increase the dissemination of the Convention and women's rights, strengthen its efforts to combat domestic violence, increase women's representation in elected positions and Government bodies and ensure that Government agencies and judicial courts fully understand the Convention and apply its provisions whenever relevant. The Committee also urged the State Party to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention at the earliest possible time and adopt special temporary measures to accelerate *de facto* equality between men and women.

The Committee highlighted concerns that were previously raised by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee on the Rights of Child. These Committees acknowledged that despite laws guaranteeing equal rights and protection, racial minorities, women and children continue to be discriminated against and deprived of their rights. They urged the State Party to launch a widespread information campaign to educate the population about the international human rights instruments it has ratified and inform Government officials and judicial bodies about their obligations under these treaties. Furthermore, the Committee on the Rights of Child also raised concerns about domestic violence, an issue that was focused on extensively during this discussion.

The discussion between the Committee and State Party was productive, with the State Party acknowledging that despite all its efforts, women in Cape Verde continue to face discrimination. Cape Verde re-affirmed its commitment to the Convention and promised to further advance the process of establishing equality between men and women.

⁶ See <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/482/51/PDF/N0648251.pdf?OpenElement>.