

24.1.2001

Third and fourth periodic reports of States parties Finland

1. The Committee considered the third and fourth periodic reports of Finland (CEDAW/C/FIN/3 and CEDAW/C/FIN/4) at its 494th and 495th meetings, on 22 January 2001 (see CEDAW/C/SR.494 and 495).

(a) Introduction by the State party

2. In introducing the third and fourth periodic reports, the representative of Finland expressed her appreciation to Finnish non-governmental organizations for their contributions to the preparation of the reports, and expressed the Government's commitment to open dialogue with non-governmental organizations. She informed the Committee that the Finland of today represented a modern and equalitybased gender model, and emphasized the significant impact of the Convention on the development of national legislation and measures to promote the status of women. Finland was committed to strengthening the Convention and, accordingly, had signed its Optional Protocol on 10 December 1999, the date it had been opened for signature, and had ratified it in December 2000.
3. The representative indicated that Finland had been the first country in the world to give women full political rights, that is, the first country that gave simultaneously both the right to stand for elections and the right to all women to vote. Women were currently represented at all levels of political life, with 37 per cent of members of Parliament and 34 per cent of counsellors being women while, for the first time, a woman had been elected President. Thanks to a legislative provision requiring a minimum quota of 40 per cent of both men and women in governmental and municipal bodies, the participation of women had dramatically increased in appointed bodies, especially at the local level.
4. The representative informed the Committee that the economic independence of women was one of the cornerstones of the Nordic idea of equality, and that the participation of women in the labour market was almost as high as that of men, with women being highly educated and generally employed. Women constituted the majority of top professionals in some areas, such as the media and biotechnology, and there were a large number of female university professors. However, gender segregation persisted in other areas of employment, with only 16 per cent of the labour force working in occupations in which there was a balanced participation of women and men, and few women occupying higher level public sector posts. Finland had launched a wide-scale strategic project in order to address gender segregation in employment.
5. The representative informed the Committee that the removal of pay inequality was one of the challenges facing the Government, because although preconditions for equality in working life existed, women's wages remained at 81 to 85 per cent of those of men. The wage gap had resulted from sex-based job segregation in the labour market, the larger amount of paid overtime work carried out by men and women's greater use of non-paid leave, which had led to a reduction in employment seniority. The representative said that gender wage differentials had narrowed during the 1990s, including as a result of the development and implementation of job-evaluation systems that establish wages in an objective and gender-sensitive manner.
6. The representative noted that the economic recession of the early 1990s had proved the vital importance of the Nordic welfare system by providing a safety net and ensuring basic protection and services for citizens. The adequate and comprehensive social security system had maintained society's internal cohesion during the difficult employment situation. Turning to violence against women, which was described as a very serious problem of human rights, the representative drew attention to steps taken by Finland at both the national and international

levels to address that issue. Pursuant to the Beijing Platform for Action, Finland had addressed violence against women through a project for the prevention of violence against women, a multi-media “zero tolerance” campaign and various studies, including an extensive survey on women victims of violence, a study of the costs of violence against women in Finland and a survey of the violence experienced by immigrant women. Several legislative measures to address violence against women had been introduced, including the introduction of the Act on Restraining Orders, which had entered into force in 1999, and the 1997 Criminal Procedure Act, which provided victims of sexual and domestic violence offences with the right to a legal assistant or support person free of charge during the pre-trial investigation and trial stage. An extension to the scope of the Act on Restraining Orders had been proposed under which a family member acting violently towards his or her family members could be evicted from the family home. Steps had also been taken to address trafficking of women and prostitution. A project for the prevention of prostitution had been initiated and the buying of sexual services from persons under 18 years of age had been criminalized. An amendment to the Penal Code allowed for the prosecution of Finnish citizens for sexual offences committed abroad, and in December 2000 Finland had signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.⁶ An interesting example of the positive change of atmosphere was that the oldest and largest evening paper in Finland had decided not to publish advertisements for sex phone lines.

7. The representative informed the Committee that the number of immigrants was growing rapidly and that the Act on the Integration of Immigrants had entered into force in 1999. The Act harmonized measures taken by authorities and strengthened their mutual cooperation at all levels, including the local level, and aimed to improve and accelerate the integration and employment of immigrants.
8. The representative underlined that the achievement of equality between women and men called for men to participate in the promotion of equality, and that the Government of Finland aimed to provide parents with more opportunities to share parental leave. In that regard, she noted that, in 2000, the Prime Minister of Finland had taken parental leave.
9. In concluding her presentation, the representative of Finland emphasized that mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes, a philosophy that underpinned the Beijing Platform for Action, was vital for the achievement of gender equality. She indicated that the tools that had been developed to measure equality, including comparative statistics, indicators and benchmarking, were critical, as they provided new opportunities to choose the right policy tools and make the right political commitments. She noted that the Finnish Act on Equality between Men and Women had been in force for slightly more than 13 years and that its impact was currently being assessed and proposals for its amendment were being made. It was hoped that those proposals, which included the extension of provisions on expanding the notion of sexual harassment to encompass educational institutions, would result in legislation that would prevent discrimination on the basis of sex and provide stronger remedies and protection to those who had suffered from its effects.

(b) Concluding comments of the Committee Introduction

10. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Government of Finland on its third and fourth periodic reports, which comply with the guidelines for the preparation of periodic reports. It commends the Government for involving non-governmental organizations in the preparation of the reports. The Committee also expresses its appreciation for the extensive information provided in response to the issues raised by the pre-sessional working group and in the oral presentation.
11. The Committee commends the Government of Finland for its large delegation, which enabled a constructive and frank dialogue with the members of the Committee.

Positive aspects

12. The Committee commends the Government of Finland for having been one of the first States parties to the Convention to sign and ratify its Optional Protocol, and to accept the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1.
13. The Committee also commends the Government for placing objections to those reservations that are incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention.
14. The Committee congratulates the Government of Finland for its important achievements in the promotion of equality between women and men.
15. The Committee commends the Government of Finland for the positive changes in the Finnish Constitution that entered into force on 1 March 2000, which, inter alia, provide that, in case of conflicting legislation, fundamental rights, including women's right to equality, shall prevail, and explicitly provide for temporary special measures.
16. The Committee also commends the Government for its ongoing efforts to combat violence against women, in particular domestic violence. It welcomes the Act on Restraining Orders, which entered into force in 1999.

Factors and difficulties affecting implementation of the Convention

17. The Committee notes that there are no significant factors or difficulties that prevent the effective implementation of the Convention in Finland.

Principal areas of concerns and recommendations

18. While acknowledging the efforts undertaken by the Government in solving the problem of discrimination faced by women in the workplace through the Equality Act, the Committee expresses its concern over continuing discrimination in employment. In particular, the Committee is concerned about the wage gap that exists between women and men owing primarily to the "horizontal" and "vertical" gender segregation of the labour market.
19. The Committee urges the Government to increase its efforts to eliminate stereotypes in women's education as well as biased perceptions in job evaluations and pay relating to traditional areas of employment for women. In particular, it recommends efforts to encourage cross-vocational training in typical female and male-dominated areas, and to address the issue of the negative impact on women of policies of time-fixed contracts. The Committee also urges the Government to increase incentives for men to use their rights to parental leave and to set up stronger monitoring mechanisms for the plans under the Equality Act.
20. The Committee expresses its concern about the low percentage of women in high-ranking posts in many areas, particularly in academia, where the presence of women has been declining as they move up the academic ladder and where they currently hold only 18.4 per cent of professorships. The Committee is concerned that the current system of hiring professors by invitation instead of open competition places women at a disadvantage.
21. The Committee urges the Government to make efforts to facilitate an increase in the number of women in high-ranking posts. It recommends the adoption of proactive measures to encourage more women to apply for high-ranking posts and to implement temporary special measures, such as quotas, where necessary. The Committee also urges the mainstreaming of gender studies in all areas of education as a way to raise the awareness of students of all disciplines to gender issues. Such mainstreaming should be in addition to promotion of specific gender study and research programmes.
22. The Committee expresses its concern about the high incidence of violence against women in Finland. It notes that a recent survey conducted by Statistics Finland in cooperation with the Council for Equality revealed that 40 per cent of women had experienced physical or sexual

violence or the threat thereof. The Committee also expresses its concern about the high level of sexual harassment in the workplace.

23. The Committee urges the Government to increase its efforts to implement effectively the current policies aimed at combating violence, to pay more attention to prevention efforts and to take steps to turn the “zero tolerance” campaign into a legally binding State policy. The Committee also urges the Government to implement all necessary measures in order to empower individuals and non-governmental organizations to take action with regard to sexual harassment.
24. Notwithstanding the extensive measures already undertaken by the Government, the Committee expresses its concern at the increased incidence of trafficking of women and exploitation of prostitution of women.
25. The Committee urges the Government to intensify its efforts to increase cooperation between national and international authorities, particularly from the Russian Federation and the Baltic States, in order to encourage common action to prevent and combat trafficking and to use the Internet in order to disseminate information on the Government’s actions to combat trafficking. The Committee also urges the Government to encourage a positive change of atmosphere regarding sex phone lines as they run counter to the efforts being made to portray women positively, and not as “sex objects”, in the media.
26. The Committee expresses its concern at the continuing discrimination against immigrant and minority women living in Finland, particularly Roma and Sami women, who suffer from double discrimination, based on both their sex and ethnic background.
27. The Committee urges the Government to undertake studies on the participation of minority women in society and to take effective measures to eliminate discrimination against them and strengthen efforts to combat racism and xenophobia in Finland.
28. The Committee expresses its concern that the policy of decentralization may have a more negative impact on women than men.
29. The Committee recommends that the Government introduce a gender-impact analysis as well as gendersensitive training in all its decentralization efforts, while strengthening the links between the central authority and the municipalities so that gains made through centrally administered programmes will not be lost during the transition to decentralization.
30. The Committee expresses its concern about the increase in smoking and in the use of drugs among young people, particularly girls, and urges the Government to intensify its efforts aimed at combating the use and supply of drugs and smoking.
31. The Committee requests the Government to respond to the specific issues raised in the present concluding comments in its next periodic report.
32. The Committee also requests the Government to disseminate widely in Finland the present concluding comments and to support their public discussion, in order to make politicians and governmental administrators, women’s non-governmental organizations and the public at large aware of the steps required to ensure de jure and de facto equality for women. It further requests the Government to continue to disseminate widely, in particular to women’s and human rights organizations, the Convention and its Optional Protocol, the Committee’s general recommendations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the results of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”.