

STATEMENT FROM THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE, H. E. MRS. MARÍA ESTHER REUS, HEAD OF THE CUBAN DELEGATION AT THE SUBMISSION OF CUBA'S COMBINED 7th AND 8th REPORTS TO THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

GENEVA, JULY 9TH, 2013

Madam Chairperson, distinguished experts of the Committee,

I have the honour of presiding over the Cuban delegation to the review of our country's Report, in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

This document we submit to the consideration of the Committee is the result of a wide and participative consultation process, which involved many governmental and state institutions, the Parliament, non-governmental organizations and other Cuban institutions which, as a whole, objectively assessed the application and compliance with the Convention. For this purpose, it was useful to have, as a starting point, the plan of measures designed to comply with the observations and recommendations made by the Committee to our report in 2006.

This process allowed us to systematize the information on the substantial progress made since the aforementioned year in the field of gender equality and women empowerment, as well as to identify with greater clarity the present challenges.

We attend this submission proud of being the first country that signed the Convention and the second that ratified it, as an expression of the Cuban Government's political will to raise to higher levels the role played by women within society.

In Cuba, legislation guarantees gender equality and explicitly establishes the proscription of any form of discrimination.

The Cuban government has implemented many laws, policies and programmes, which have allowed the true exercise of gender equality and the expansion of women

empowerment. The achievements made with regard to this matter are outstanding. Today, our society, without being perfect, is an example of inclusion.

However, Cuba has had to face the blockade imposed by the US government for over five decades, which due to its negative impact on all the aspects of life of the Cuban population, and of its women in particular, is, without a doubt, the main hindrance to the realization of Cuban women's human rights and the most injurious form of violence against them.

The country has also been seriously affected by the impact of climatological events with adverse consequences for our economic development. Today, reconstruction works of the eastern side of the country are still underway, a region which was hit by Hurricane Sandy in October 2012.

Mrs. Chairperson,

Ever since Cuba's previous report submission to this Committee, significant changes have taken place in its Cuban economy and society, which have contributed to the progress made with regard to women empowerment and gender equality and lay the foundation for further future progress. In this regard, the adoption of the Economic and Social Policy Guidelines by the National Assembly of People's Power had a great significance. These guidelines are a group of essential decisions aimed at updating the Cuban economic and social model.

This process was a genuine experience of democracy and direct consultation to citizens, in which we women were active participants. The addition of over 400 thousand amendments to the original project was a demonstration of how to obtain the people's consensus on government policies aiming at addressing such complex objectives as achieving a sustainable development with equity and social justice, and overcoming the effects of the global economic crisis and the problems of the Cuban economy without planning neo-liberal prescriptions of austerity or budget cuts to dismantle the social protection of the majorities.

In this context of strengthening the democratic and participative institutionality, new norms have been adopted in the past years which expand the legislative basis for human rights, such as those relating to social security, housing, family, employment, the non-state or freelance employment, the increasing establishment of cooperatives in non-agricultural and livestock fields and the handing over of lands in usufruct, among others.

Progress is still being made in the improvement and updating of the country's legal system through the application of a group of modifications which corresponds with the necessities of Cuban society and the highest international standards.

The norms adopted take into consideration the gender perspective and seek to decrease the gaps of inequality between men and women, which have been historically imposed through patriarchal patterns and stereotypes.

Work is being done to update the legal norms that regulate the Criminal Justice System, the Security, the Domestic Order and the Protection of Minors.

Another essential event, which demonstrates the will of the Cuban State and Government to achieve further progress with regard to gender equality and the consolidation of an inclusive society, was the Third Seminar to assess the compliance with the National Action Plan of the Republic of Cuba to follow up on the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, held on 28-29 May 2013.

This seminar made it possible to analyze the state of our commitment as to the compliance with the CEDAW.

It was preceded by an evaluative analysis process on the fulfilment with the 90 measures of the Action Plan by all the State bodies at a national level, the provincial governments and other national and local authorities.

The debates held in the committees were characterized by their objectivity and allowed to update 46.6% of the Action Plan's measures. Not only were the advancements of Cuban women in the past eleven years since the second review in Beijing analyzed, but also 49 recommendation proposals were approved to address the current challenges on this matter.

The Council of State of the Republic of Cuba, one of the governing authorities of the Cuban State and the main responsible body and guarantor of the public policies in favour of equality, worked very closely with the Federation of Cuban Women, a national mechanism for the advancement of women in the country.

This organization played a leading role in the methodological advice in each of the committees and ratified the acknowledgement and prestige gained as an active interlocutor with the government on matters relating to women.

Mrs. Chairperson,

As one analyses the aspects that are part of the articles of the Convention, Cuba's commitment with its compliance is to be highlighted.

The elections held on February 2013 experienced the highest all-time number of women elected to Parliament. The representation of women in Parliamentary seats rose by 48.86%, an increase of 5.5 % when compared to the previous legislative body. Thus, the goals set by the Beijing Action Platform are over-fulfilled.

Two women were elected Vice-presidents of the State Council and the number of this body's female members increased to 13, which represents a 41.9%. Likewise, in the leading positions of the National Assembly of People's Power (the Cuban Parliament), out of 3 decision-making positions, 2 are occupied by women: the Vice-president and its Secretary.

Also, in the elections held at the end of 2012, 10 women were elected presidents of the Provincial Administration Councils, reason why more than half of the country's provinces (out of a total of 15 provinces) are led by women and the 35.9%, that is 531 women, are presidents of the People's Councils, a structure of local government.

The number of female ministers increased to 8, which represents 38% of the total of ministers, and the number of deputy ministers rose by 42 thus making up 35.6% of the total of persons occupying that position.

Higher numbers of female enrolment have been achieved in the different university degree courses and therefore, in the different employments based on the principle that ensures the right to a free and universal education for all. We women represent the 62% of university graduates and the 66% of technicians and professionals throughout the country.

We women have moved forward breaking stereotypes, in non-traditional degree courses with massive enrolment. We make up 49.8% of the students who finish degree courses in Natural Sciences and Mathematics, the 70% in Economic Sciences and the 74.7% in Medical Sciences. On the other hand, it is to be highlighted that 57% of the teaching staff in higher education is made up of women as well.

The participation of Cuban women in the main sectors of the economy is outstanding, such as in the system of Sciences, Innovation and Technology, where we comprise the 53.5%.

In the judiciary, a sector traditionally predominated by men, women stand out significantly. We represent 77.8% of the country's district attorneys, and the 76% of the professional judges.

We women have the right to guaranteed employment, including ~~the~~ access to work in the non-state or freelance employment sector. Women represent over 29% of those workers who have recourse to work in this sector and actions are being taken to increase access to this modality and to avoid the manifestation of any kind of labour discrimination in this context.

Cuban women receive equal wages for works of equal value that men, a conquest reached many years ago. In the education, health and judiciary sectors, women make up the highest percent of the overall labour force, thus exceeding 70%.

Measures are being promoted for a greater women participation in non-traditional employments.

On the other hand, an advanced legislation guarantees and protects working mothers, who enjoy the rights of Maternity Leave and social protection up to a year with the possibility of sharing it between the father and the mother.

Like men, we women can have access to credit, loans, services and social security programmes, on equal terms and without discrimination.

Health care services, which are free and universal, are ensured to all citizens, including women. The life expectancy of Cuban women at birth is 80. 2 years. The Infant mortality rate in 2012 was 4.6 per thousand live births and maternal mortality rate (due to direct causes) was 21.6 per each 100 000 live births.

Programmes are being developed to guarantee mother and father participation in the education and care of their children and of the elderly, as well as the specialized care for adolescents and HIV/AIDS fighting, among many other sectors. According to the achievements reached in the health field, Cuba is among the countries with the best conditions to fully meet the objectives set in the Millennium Developing Goals.

Sexual and reproductive rights for women, including the right to abortion and the free and responsible choice over their fertility, are guaranteed and are part of the universal and free health care services. The measures adopted have never been to the detriment of women's right to decide on their sexual and reproductive health, the number of sons and daughters and the number of years between them. Both women and men enjoy the necessary and specialized services for family planning. Work is being done to achieve the country's access to high quality contraceptives.

Undoubtedly, these are important factors to achieve gender equality and women empowerment, as they gradually contribute to a greater responsibility within the family and to share duties and rights on equal terms in this field, including the education of sons and daughters.

Women in rural areas have made significant progress. The number of women in the agricultural and livestock sector has increased in 20.9% (2.4% more than in 2009). Endeavours have been made to increase the number of managers in cooperatives by

26%. Also, women make up 43% of the leaders in the National Association of Small Farmers.

Nowadays over 10 900 Cuban women own lands.

In order to favour food production, more than 17 thousand women have been granted ownership of the land, with full access to credits, technical assistance and other opportunities.

Another step forward has been the increase of women's participation as leaders in risk management to reduce vulnerabilities and in disaster prevention. 66% of the country's Civil Defence leaders are women, many of whom are Heads of the Centres for Risk Reduction Management and responsible for the Early Warning Points of their territories. Other women have responsibilities in their own communities in disaster circumstances to avoid, as a priority, the loss of human lives and economic goods.

The role of Cuban women has also been outstanding in their participation in projects of international cooperation and the assistance in solidarity with other peoples of the world, particularly in the education and health sectors. 52% of the members of the Cuban medical brigades that render services in different regions of the world are women.

Mrs. Chairperson,

The political will of the Cuban State to achieve full gender equality and women empowerment in all spheres of society is beyond question. However, we are not satisfied with the achievements made so far. We need to make further progress in the adoption of measures to ensure all the normative and material precisions prescribed by the Convention.

It is necessary to continue adopting measures to address women's problems and needs and to continue working in all sectors, from the Government with the active participation of civil society organizations, whose measures include: the elimination of sexist stereotypes that still persist, the creation of values, raising awareness about equality between genders, the elimination of inequalities in the distribution of responsibilities

within the household and fighting all forms of violence, undervaluation and vestiges of discrimination.

Among the challenges identified as a result of the 3rd Seminar on the Assessment of the Beijing Action Plan, is the need to increase the legal dissemination actions to reinforce the guidance, training and education of all Cuban society regarding equality and non-discrimination.

We shall continue working to improve the mechanisms that allow achieving a greater quality and scope in the statistics that allow us to better assess the impact of policies and to analyze in greater depth the causes or particular issues that could be bringing about the situations that affect women, as well as a number of actions to tackle them.

We shall also provide a greater follow-up on the impact that this will have on the prevention, attention and struggle against all violence manifestations, the appointment of this task to the Ministry of the Government charged with the coordination and development of the prevention, assistance and social work throughout the country

Likewise, it is necessary to continue developing coordinated actions to face limited manifestations of prostitution, a phenomenon that does not have structural causes in Cuba. Said causes were eliminated as from 1959.

Mrs. Chairperson,

Cuba has consolidated a positive dialogue with those organs established in accordance with human rights treaties. Since 2009, 5 national reports have been prepared, four of which have been already submitted to the relevant committees, including the one we are submitting today. Other three reports are in the review phase to be subsequently sent.

The country has fulfilled with the obligations entered into under the 42 international treaties on human rights of which it is a State Party.

We are pleased to announce that on June 20th, Cuba submitted to the United Nations the ratification instruments of the protocols to prevent, suppress and sanction the traffic in persons, specially women and children and those against the illegal traffic of migrants

through land, sea or air, which complement the so-called Palermo Convention. Such ratification increases the number of instruments of which Cuba is a member and this evidences the will of the Cuban State to fully realize human rights.

Cuba has always taken on with much seriousness, responsibility and respect, the recommendations made by this important committee, as part of our commitment with the true role that women shall play within society and the international obligations assumed on human rights.

We are open to a constructive and respectful dialogue, which is attached to the truth on the exercise of women's human rights, gender equality and women empowerment in Cuba. We are ready to provide the Committee with the necessary information and clarification.

Thank you very much