



**Opening statement by Mr. Nasier Eskak on behalf of the Minister of Home Affairs for the consideration of the combined fourth to sixth Periodic Report of the Republic of Suriname to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**

**28 February 2018, Geneva, Switzerland**

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Madam Chairperson,  
Esteemed Members of the Committee,  
Civil Society representatives,  
Those following the proceedings via webcast in Suriname,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Suriname, I would like to extend my appreciation for this opportunity to have a constructive dialogue in the context of the presentation of our country's fourth to sixth periodic CEDAW report with the members of this Committee to discuss the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in Suriname.

This dialogue will certainly contribute to our commitment in implementing the convention and offers an opportunity to address remaining challenges and constraints in this regard.

Madam Chairperson,  
Before I proceed to introduce the delegation members, we would like to express our sincere condolences to the CEDAW Committee for the recent loss of Ms. Theodora Oby Nwakwo.

My name is Nasier Eskak. I am an Advisor in General Service at the Ministry of Home Affairs and I represent the Minister of Home Affairs, His Excellency Mike Mohamed Noersalim.

Allow me to introduce the members of the delegation to you:

- Ms. Melinda Reijme, Head Staff Member at the Bureau Gender Affairs of the Ministry of Home Affairs;
- Ms. Meryll Malone, Senior Desk Officer at the Multilateral Affairs Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;

And joining us via Video Conference the delegates in Suriname:

- Ms. Yvonne Towikromo Senior Policy Advisor to the Minister of Home Affairs;
- Ms. Miriam Mac Intosh, acting Deputy Director of Geopolitical Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- Mr. Rishi Akkal, Police inspector 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. Ministry of Justice and Police;
- Ms. Cher Lamsberg - Macnack, Staff member at the Department of Planning of the Ministry of Health;

We look forward to informing you about the follow-up to the recommendations emanating from our last dialogue in January 2007 and we hope to have a fruitful discussion and exchange of views with you, Madam Chairperson, and with the distinguished members of the Committee.

Let me from the very outset also inform you that Suriname highly values the work and recommendations of this Committee which strengthen our ability to address human rights violations and better protect vulnerable women and girls.

The preparation for this dialogue included a Mock session held in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in January 2018. It is noteworthy mentioning that the CEDAW committee for the Mock session consisted of representatives varying from NGO's, the University of Suriname and independent Human Rights experts.

Madam Chairperson,

Tomorrow, 1 March 2018, will mark the 25th Anniversary of Suriname's accession to CEDAW in 1993. Considerable work has been done since and continues to be done by

the Government to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. At the same time, we are mindful that this is, however, not without challenges.

In the implementation of the National Development Plan 2017-2021 the Government takes into account the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Suriname remains committed to leave no one behind and acknowledges that empowering those who are vulnerable, is essential in creating a society where the personal wellbeing of all is guaranteed.

The strategic goal in our National Development Plan 2017-2021 with regard to gender as a multidisciplinary policy area is as follows:

Laws and regulations and policy principles of private and public organizations should guarantee the right to personal security and freedom of men and women whereas opportunities to realize their ideals and talents should not be influenced by gender stereotyping.

In this context Suriname acknowledges that gender equality and women's empowerment are pre-conditions in achieving national development as well as the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Recently, the Council of Ministers approved a resolution to establish a Research and Planning Unit at each ministry. Furthermore, standardized forms will be developed for the submission of project proposals, as well as for the reporting thereof. These formats will meet the requirements of the Development Plan 2017-2021 chapter 10, which requires that each project must have a gender component for mainstreaming gender. This will take into account the needs, ambitions and desires of men, women and young people, leaving no one behind.

Following the submission of the third periodic report and subsequent dialogue with the Committee in 2007, the Government of Suriname continued its efforts to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and appreciates the support received from the international community and civil society organizations.

The combined fourth to sixth report and our replies to the list of issues of the Committee address the progress achieved, as well as the challenges we continue to face in the full implementation of the Convention.

Madam Chairperson,

After the submission of our replies to the List of Issues, the following progress can be reported with regard to legislation:

- With regard to the preparation of Equality of Treatment Act and Violence at the Workplace Act, hearings are being held at the moment with stakeholders including civil society about the content of both draft laws. The organizations which have already taken part in the hearings are: Ilse Henar Hewitt foundation, Women's Rights Centre, Double Positive, LGBT PLatform and Bureau Gender Affairs.
- With regard to the Equality of Treatment Act that is now being prepared by the Minister of Labor, I can inform you that the Bureau for Gender Affairs has submitted the draft law on "Equal treatment of women and men" to the Ministry of Labor in order to extract elements of this draft law to incorporate into the Equality of Treatment Act.
- With regard to the Establishment of a Bureau dealing with complaints on gender discrimination it can be noted that this is currently being considered by the Minister of Home Affairs.
- As of January 2018, the ID legislation has been revised and will be ready for approval by the National Assembly by the end of March 2018.

We can inform you that the staff of Bureau Gender Affairs has been strengthened with a judicial officer who is specifically tasked with the conducting of an evaluation in order to identify and address the challenges that causes the delay in the process of adopting pending laws. So far the focus has been on the following draft legislation:

- Equal Treatment of Men and Women
- Labor Law
- Holiday Act
- Amendment of Art. 4 of the Decree on Travel and Secondment
- Accident Regulation

## RATIFICATION OF CRPD

Madam Chairperson,

An important step taken by the Government of Suriname is the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in March 2017. In this regard, a CRPD training was organized in October 2017 in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Government officials and stakeholders were trained in subjects such as the Key principles and core obligations regarding the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the work of the CRPD Committee, Reporting cycle and guidelines on how to prepare the CRPD State party report. Subsequently awareness raising campaigns were launched in December 2017 at the Training Centre for adolescents with disabilities and a school for persons with a visual disability.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing is planning to conduct a research in 2019 with regards to residential and living conditions of people with disabilities.

## PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Madam Chairperson,

Another update is in relation to paragraph 34 on women participation in political and public life. In January 2018 there has been a slight increase from 28% to 29% of women in the National Assembly (Parliament). The aforementioned is a result of the project "more women in decision making 2015" from the National Assembly and the campaign "Ook Zij" implemented by the NGO STAS International with partial support of Bureau Gender Affairs.

In order to further increase the participation of women in political and public life towards and after the general elections of 2020, various activities will be undertaken in partnership with NGOs and international agencies. We are aware of the fact that ongoing efforts are required to ensure that women, on equal terms with men, can participate in political and public life.

## GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Madam Chairperson,

The Law on Combating Domestic Violence provides protection in an early stage. Protection takes place by the imposition of commands and prohibitions on the defendant, which is contained in a protection order. Protection orders are issued by the civil cases cantonal judge. Later this year an assessment will be conducted with regard to the outcomes of these measures.

On average, 1400 cases of domestic violence are annually registered at the police. These numbers do not cover the actual occurrence of domestic violence in the country. To register the cases of domestic violence adequately, an intake form has been developed, with support from the UNFPA, and will be piloted within the first quarter of 2018 in the district of Nickerie and in one (1) resort of the district of Paramaribo. After three (3) months this pilot project will be evaluated.

The policy plan on domestic violence which is currently being updated will contain measures to prevent and combat domestic violence.

## TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION OF PROSTITUTION

In paragraph 63 of the combined 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> CEDAW report it was stated that street prostitution is criminalized and that in practice only street sex workers who misbehave are being prosecuted.

First and foremost it must be stated that this is a policy of tolerance. Within the police force the term "commercial sex worker" is used instead of street sex worker and only behavior that fits a criminal offense for e.g. disruption of public order, is being sanctioned.

Data is not kept as such and difficult to trace, since the suspect is not arrested on the basis of profession, but on criminal act. This approach prevents, among other things, stigma.

The Ministry of Health collaborates with the NGO New Beginnings Consultancy Services on the initiation of an economic empowerment program among sex workers. This program is in the initial phase in which the sex workers who apply for the program are being screened. The screening withholds skills screening in order to select the applicants for jobs they fit most. The aforementioned program will be accessible to not only female sex workers, but also to men having sex with men and transgender persons.

The revised penal code includes an extension of the jurisdiction, implying that the Penal Code of Suriname is also applicable to Surinamese persons who commit trafficking in persons outside Suriname. The revision also includes the preclusion of criminal proceedings by laps of time.

Noteworthy is that women are not only victims of human trafficking, but they are also perpetrators.

In 2015, 6 females were in custody against 13 males, in 2016, 3 females against 8 males, and in 2017 there were 4 females against 1 male in custody.

From 2015 to 2017, 20 females and 2 males were victims of human trafficking; the highest number was in the age group 11-20 years with 16 victims, followed by 31-40 year with 10 victims and 21-30 years with 8 victims.

To tackle this issue the government has taken various measures. Preventive measures such as awareness programs are being carried out on a regular basis. Furthermore, shelter is available for male and female victims of human trafficking.

## DATA COLLECTION

Madam Chairperson,

While efforts have been made to strengthen data collection systems, we have to admit that the availability of appropriate qualitative and quantitative disaggregated data remains a challenge. Collecting data is an activity which impedes evidence based policy development, monitoring and evaluation.

The Beijing +20 review carried out in 2014 and our latest combined 4th to 6th CEDAW country report show that gaps remain in terms of gender statistics and therefore Suriname is not adequately able to measure progress on its national and international commitments.

It is against this background that the Ministry of Home affairs is pleased to announce that Suriname is one of four CARICOM countries, (Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica) to have agreed to pilot the CARICOM Gender Equality Indicators Model, which was endorsed by the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians, during its fortieth meeting held from 26th to 28th October, 2015.

Under the overall framework of monitoring the SDGs, the CARICOM GEI Model will support Suriname in addressing key policy concerns identified in the Beijing Platform for Action, the CEDAW and other international commitments. It is also seen as an opportunity to gain insight into the availability of data and data gaps with regard to indicators from in particular SDG 5 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls', as well as insights into the bottlenecks organizations experience during data collection.

In November 2016 the Letter of Agreement (LOA) was signed between the Ministry of Home Affairs and the UNWOMEN on the implementation of the Pilot of the Caricom Gender Equality Indicators in the Republic of Suriname. The LOA includes key activities such as informed and effective participation of stakeholders in user-producer dialogues, production of a National Report on the status of women and men in Suriname on the CARICOM Gender Equality Indicators and also the creation of a database for monitoring purposes. This project is currently being carried out.

Madam Chairperson,

Another challenge that we are facing in the implementation of CEDAW and gender policy is the insufficient gender awareness among policy makers.

In this regard with support of the UNWOMEN an Introductory presentation on gender and gender related issues will be held for the Council of Ministers and National Assembly in March of this year.

In spite of the challenging budgetary constraints, and challenges related to institutional capacity such as insufficient human resources, expertise in various fields and necessary equipment, the Government remained committed to promote and create conditions for gender equality and the full exercise of the rights of women in Suriname.

In this regard several activities and policies have been implemented with technical and/or financial support from the UNDP, UNFPA, UNWOMEN, UNRCO and PAHO.

Within the commemoration of 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the accession to CEDAW, the Bureau Gender Affairs in collaboration with other partners will conduct awareness-raising programs for various target groups to understand the scope of the Convention. In this regard the content of the treaty will be included in training sessions for women NGO's in the context of the International Women's Day in the districts of Nickerie and Marowijne in the first week of March.

The awareness-raising with regard to the CEDAW commemoration will continue in the last week of March with an Introductory Presentation on Gender for Ministers and The National Assembly.

Finally, madam chair, the Suriname delegation looks forward to a constructive and cooperative interaction and discussion with the committee and remains ready to respond to further inquiries.

I thank you.