

55th session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
(CEDAW)

Consideration of the Second and Third Periodic Report of the Republic of Serbia on the
implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against
Women

KEYNOTE SPEECH

by Brankica Janković
State Secretary at the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy
and head of the delegation of the Republic of Serbia

Geneva, 18 July 2013

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Serbia, I would like to express our pleasure of having the opportunity to present the Second and Third Periodic Report of the Republic of Serbia on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

First of all, I would like to introduce the members of the official delegation of the Republic of Serbia:

- Tamara Tripić, deputy in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia,
- Suzana Paunović, Director of the Office for Human and Minority Rights of the Government of the Republic of Serbia,
- Vesna Nikolić, President of the Multi-sectoral coordinating body for the implementation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, Ministry of the Interior
- Miroslav Milošević, Minister Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the United Nations and other international organisations in Geneva,

- Randel Milošević from the Ministry of the Interior,
- Dragan Knežević from the Directorate for Gender Equality of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy,
- Snežana Pantić-Akesentijević from the Ministry of Health,
- Nenad Jovanović from the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration, and
- Gordana Mohorović and Svetlana Đorđević from the Office for Human and Minority Rights of the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

The Republic of Serbia presented the Initial Report before the Committee in May 2007. At that time, the Republic of Serbia was in the period of rehabilitation after the difficult and unfinished transition and establishment of a new approach to gender equality issues, which was followed by a trend of harmonisation of gender policies with the processes in the European Union and with the principles and recommendations of the United Nations, on the basis of assumed commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Republic of Serbia accepted new models and mechanisms for achieving gender equality based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It prepared for adoption of policy documents and laws in accordance with its Constitution from 2006, which guaranteed equality of women and men. It noticed emerging threat resulting in violence against women and domestic violence, it prepared for bringing closer to the public the issues of

gender equality and elimination of stereotypes related to the roles of men and women.

The Republic of Serbia adopted the Law on Gender Equality in 2009, which, together with the Anti-Discrimination Law from the same year, regulated prohibition of direct and indirect sex or gender-based discrimination in the field of employment, social services, health care, education, culture and sports, in politics and in public life. In 2010, the Republic of Serbia adopted the Law on Prevention of Harassment at Work, which also includes sexual harassment. For a longer period of time, it has been working on amendments to the Criminal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, and regulating the issue of dealing with violence against women and domestic violence. Amendments to the Labour Law from this year improved protection of pregnant women and new mothers from termination of employment agreements. In the Law on Amendments to the Criminal Code, adopted in January 2013, a criminal offense committed out of hatred for personal characteristics of the victim, such as gender, is envisaged as an aggravating circumstance for sentencing. Also, the Law on Special Measures for Prevention of Sex Crimes against Minors was adopted in April 2013.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted a set of policy and operational documents regulating the issue of gender equality and improvement of the status of women that are at the stage of full implementation. The National Action Plan of the implementation of the

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – Women, peace and security, has been applied since 30 December 2010. In addition to established institutional bodies, there are also gender equality mechanisms such as gender equality advisors, confidants, analytical groups for monitoring, annual planning and initiation of implementation of the National Action Plan. Continuous cooperation with civil society organizations has been established. For the first time, the security system in a systematic manner works on the improvement of the status of women with, above all, strong support of the Government, the competent committee of the National Assembly, and particularly with sensitization of all relevant stakeholders and media promotion of this process. The Republic of Serbia adopted the Strategy for the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination on 27 June 2013. The Office for Human and Minority Rights coordinated the development of the Strategy in accordance with the recommendation which the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality presented in its regular Annual Report for 2011, but also in accordance with the recommendation of civil society organisations. This document is aimed at improving the status of 9 vulnerable groups (women, children, persons with disabilities, the elderly, members of the LGBT population, national minorities, refugees and internally displaced persons and members of other vulnerable migrant groups, persons whose health may be the cause of discrimination, and members of religious groups).

Madam Chairperson,

The Law on Amendments to the Law on the Election of Deputies was adopted in May 2011, which, in terms of nomination, envisages that the electoral list must contain per three candidates on the list at least one person of the gender less represented on the list. The Law on Amendments to the Law on Local Elections was adopted in July 2011, which introduced the same formula for its own purposes. Solutions from both of the above stated laws were for the first time implemented in the elections conducted for the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia and provincial, city and municipal assemblies on 6 May 2012. After the elections, the National Assembly verified deputies' mandates, the third of whom were women, and the Republic of Serbia, in terms of this, is in the twenty-fourth position in the world, according to the data of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Also, new government was formed in the Republic of Serbia on 27 July 2012, with 19 members, 5 of whom are women. In early August 2012, the National Assembly elected a woman as head of the National Bank of Serbia.

Within the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia operates the Committee for Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality for the first time established in the current composition, with 17 members, 11 of whom are women. Within its scope, the Committee considers bills and other legal acts in the field of exercise and protection of human rights and freedoms and implementation of ratified international treaties governing protection of human rights. The Committee for Human and

Minority Rights and Gender Equality has so far held 17 sessions and 3 public hearings on the status of women, violence against women, the status of Roma women, sex and gender-based discrimination, and trafficking in women. The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia formed the six-member Commission Monitoring the Execution of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 - Women, Peace and Security, in February 2013, counting only one men member. Its task is to control and monitor operation of all authorities and mechanisms for the implementation of this Plan. Also, since February 2013, the Women's Parliamentary Network has been operating in the National Assembly as an informal group in which all women delegates participate voluntary, regardless of their party affiliation, for the purposes of monitoring implementation of existing legal solutions in the field of health and education of women, combating violence against women and their economic empowerment.

The 4th convocation of the Council for Gender Equality of the Government of the Republic of Serbia was established on 12 April 2013, and the first session was held on 29 May 2013. Council's tasks are to consider and propose measures for the improvement of the gender equality policy from the point of view of inter-sectoral cooperation in this field, and to initiate programs and measures for encouraging and training women to participate in public and political life. The Directorate for Gender Equality of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social

Policy, which operates in accordance with the three laws on ministries from 2008, 2011 and 2012, provides administrative and technical support to the Council. One of the competences of the Directorate for Gender Equality is also implementation of recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, that is, of your respected body.

According to the Law on Gender Equality, authorities of local government units must have established standing working bodies, or designate gender equality employees for conducting activities aimed at achieving equal opportunities. In the Republic of Serbia there are over a hundred local authorities dealing with gender equality (councils, commissions, etc.), as well as 20 employees for gender equality.

The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, established according to the Anti-Discrimination Law, and the Ombudsman, envisaged by the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, are authorised to act preventively in combating sex and gender-based discrimination and to take steps in assisting victims of discrimination. Local ombudsmen are also involved in dealing with this issue on the basis of the Law on Local Government. The issue of combating discrimination against women was assigned by the Ombudsman to one of its deputies, and this authority has its own Gender Equality Council which organised 6 sessions in 2012.

Madam Chairperson,

The Republic of Serbia signed the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence on 4 April 2012. The Convention ratification procedure is under way. The Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia held a meeting last week concerning the Proposal of the Law on the ratification of the stated treaty, and adopted it. The competent ministries fulfilled their obligations under the General Protocol on Procedures and Cooperation of Institutions, Authorities and Organisations in Situations of Domestic and Partner Relationship Violence against Women from November 2011, and adopted its own special protocols. The Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy adopted a Special Protocol for actions of social care centers – guardianship authorities in cases of domestic and partner relationship violence and women on March 2013, which, together with the completion of the procedure of ratification of the stated Council of Europe Convention, fulfilled both tasks committed to in the campaign of the UN Commission on the status of women which was, on behalf of the Republic of Serbia, signed by the Serbian Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Policy on 28 February 2013. The Ministry of the Interior also adopted its Special Protocol for actions of police officers in cases of domestic and partner relationship violence against women in February 2013. Together with the UNICEF, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological

Development established a special organisation unit for the protection from violence, and there are emergency telephone numbers held by civil society organizations and public institutions, which violations of rights, discrimination or violence can be reported to.

Involvement of the Republic of Serbia in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence is considered to be one of our central tasks. Only in 2012, 140 social care centers in the Republic of Serbia provided assistance to about 9 500 victims of physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence. In 96 percent of cases, violence took place in the family. We have put a lot of effort – training members of competent authorities in the Judicial Academy, adopting programs for working with perpetrators of violence, amending relevant laws and other acts, organising public media campaigns, working in schools and cooperating with the civil society. Nevertheless, we still come across cases of serious injuries, even murders motivated merely by the fact that the victim is a woman. For this reason, we are committed to proceed with the steps leading to eradication of violence against women and domestic violence and to resolving this serious problem.

The catalogue of the teacher training program, issued in the Republic of Serbia every two years, contains trainings on violence prevention and gender equality topics. About 70 professional training programs is dedicated to the issues of discrimination, working with the

students from marginalised groups, gender or sex-based issues, or working with the students with learning or developmental disabilities. Since 2009 within the activities of the Decade of Roma, the Ministry of Health has engaged 75 women as health mediators in 59 health care centers, who have visited and incorporated in the health care system 40 381 Roma women, who as a matter of fact account for about 1/3 of Roma women, according to the results of the last census from 2011. Activities of this type are maintained further on, and 87.66 percent of Roma women are covered by health insurance today. According to the same census, there are 571 780 persons with disabilities living in the Republic of Serbia, out of whom 58.20 percent are women. Women with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable and most sensitive social groups, and their status has not changed much. Therefore, the Law on the Foundations of the Education System introduced inclusive education in the education system in the Republic of Serbia. The right to wage subsidies for persons with disabilities from the Budget Fund for vocational rehabilitation and promotion of employment of persons with disabilities in 2012 was exercised by 41 companies for vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities.

We have taken steps in support of Roma women, women with disabilities and others from the multiply discriminated group of people. It can be said that significant progress has been made in the health care sector, whereas in terms of the education system, unfortunately, this is

not the case because we have a significant number of Roma women without primary or secondary school education.

We are fully aware that there is still a lot of work to be done in this field to ensure actual application of envisaged standards. We adopted adequate regulations and envisaged procedures, however, their full implementation remains our main task for the following period. We expect in the near future to establish better cooperation and a partnership with civil society organizations and to establish and maintain a unique alliance with them and with associations of multiply discriminated persons – for the purposes of improving their status.

We have been dealing with employment of women, marriage and the legal minimum for marriage, identity documents of women refugees and internally displaced persons. We have significantly improved the statistics and the system for keeping and processing the data classified by gender. We have been engaged in combating the trafficking in women. There is a systematic manner in which in the Republic of Serbia has been worked on the improvement of the equal status of women in relations and in the security system, which is strongly supported by the Government, the competent committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, and particularly with the sensitization of all relevant stakeholders and media promotion of this process.

Madam Chairperson,

I would like to emphasize in particular that even though, under UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), Kosovo and Metohija is an integral part of the Republic of Serbia, Serbia as a State Party to the Convention has not been able to implement it or oversee its implementation in this part of its territory. Pursuant to SCR 1244, administration of the province of Kosovo and Metohija has been entirely entrusted to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). In such circumstances, my country has partially described the serious situation prevailing in this part of the territory of the Republic of Serbia, as contained in an Annex to the second and third Periodic Report which is before you today.

In this connection, we recall that in considering the Initial Report submitted by the Republic of Serbia in 2007, CEDAW in its Concluding Comments (CEDAW/C/SCG/Co/1 of 11 June 2007), accepted those parts of the request by the Serbian delegation relating to calling upon UNMIK to provide additional information on the application of the Convention in Kosovo and Metohija. Since the requested information has not been provided to date, we suggest that the Committee urges once again UNMIK to prepare and supply the relevant information on

compliance with the Convention in Kosovo and Metohija. The information prepared by and received from UNMIK, together with the information submitted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, is the only way of gaining a credible and full insight into the human rights situation, including compliance with the Convention, in Kosovo and Metohija.

In this context, the Government of the Republic of Serbia, as a State Party which is, under the Convention, solely responsible for the submission of reports on its implementation, will continue to submit in the future all information available to it regarding the implementation of the Convention in Kosovo and Metohija.

Madam Chairperson,

In the end, allow me to inform you that, in terms of amendment to Article 20, paragraph 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Government of the Republic of Serbia submitted to the National Assembly a Draft Law ratifying the above mentioned amendment on 16 April 2013, thus, they are in the regular procedure. The Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia considered the Draft law and adopted it at its meeting on 11 July 2013.

In the previous period, we tried to establish gender equality as a continuous process, however, we are aware that many parts of the process need to be improved and further developed. The Republic of Serbia will continue to make efforts to further improve the status of women and protection of women's rights in order to achieve the highest prescribed standards in the field of human rights, and to fulfill assumed international obligations. In this sense, our participation in this session of the Committee is viewed as an important experience for us and as one of the stages of the stated processes.

Madam Chairperson and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for your attention.