

Stereotypes, Social Customs (Concluding Observations, para 29 & 30)

Action to Eliminate Gender Discriminatory Remarks by Public Officials (Former “Women against Sexist-Ageist Remarks by Governor Ishihara”)

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women (hereafter, “the Committee”) mentioned several times about gender discriminatory statements and sexist remarks made by public officials. They are found in the list of issues made by the Committee’s working group, in the constructive dialogue with the Government of Japan at the 44th session in July 2009, and in paragraph 29 and 30 of the concluding observation. It is notable that in the deliberation of 2009, one of the Committee members asked a question: “It is an insult to not only Japanese women but also women in the world. How does the Cabinet Office take measures against these remarks? Why do politicians not to pay strong attention to it?” Furthermore, the chairperson asked about a role of media concerning discriminatory remarks. However, the responses from the Japanese government did not satisfy members.

As a result of the dialogue, the Committee showed its concern in paragraph 29 of the concluding observations of the 44th session: “The Committee expresses its concern at the high incidence of gender discriminatory statements and sexist remarks made by public officers and the lack of steps taken to prevent and punish verbal violence against women.” The Committee also urged the Japanese Government, “to take measures, including the criminalization of verbal violence, to ensure that Government officials do not make disparaging remarks that demean women and contribute to the patriarchal system which discriminates against women.”

It is an obligation of the government of a State party to this Convention to clearly declare that discriminatory statements are verbal violence, when its society is where discriminatory statements against women are not only tolerated but also not recognised as such, even though such statements are in fact insults to women as a whole and should be criminalised. It is an obligation of the member State to work towards the legislature and the government and those individuals who are either in the media or in leadership positions, all of whom fail to change these social norms, and at the same time, to provide concrete measures that do not allow such discriminatory statements.

In spite of its responsibility, the Government of Japan has failed to identify concrete measures or articulate its views on verbal violence in the 3rd Basic Plan for Gender Equality. The judiciary, though it is supposed to set models for society to follow, also continues to deliver judgements based on a stereotypic, gendered notion of women.

The Japanese Government does not interfere with the whole society’s insensitivity to verbal violence, but rather fosters it. The Government does not fulfil a State party obligation based on the Convention.