

In the interests of presenting a report that would reflect the true situation of Gabonese women, the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women began by hiring a national consultant, Ms. Honorine Nzet Biteghe. She studied the situation of women in the various areas covered by the Convention, in collaboration with experts from various administrative areas (Education, Health, Justice, Economic and Social Council, Social Affairs, Presidency, Finance, Family, Employment, Human Rights, Planning, et al.) and approximately ten non-governmental organizations and women's associations (Gabonese Association of Women Educators, Gabonese Movement for Family Welfare, Association of Gabonese Women Lawyers, Association for the Defence of Women's and Children's Rights, and the Observatory for Women's Rights and Equality, et al.).

The national consultant, Ms. Honorine Nzet Biteghe, a judge by profession, is deeply involved in women's rights and the advancement of women and engages in various relevant activities, including:

- A radio show on Radio Africa No. 1 dealing with gender and women's issues.
- A social and legal study on the status of Gabonese women.
- The preparation of many publications in the area of women's rights (cohabitation, customary marriage, how to lodge a complaint, widows and orphans, etc.).

She is the President of the Observatory for Women's Rights and Equality and a member of a number of women's organizations (Association of Gabonese Women Lawyers, Christian Women for Peace, et al.).

At the end of the first stage, a workshop to assess the report was held by the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), from 11 to 15 March 2002 at the Rapontchombo Novotel Hotel in Libreville.

This workshop had two facilitators, Ms. Nzet Biteghe, the national consultant, and Ms. Odile Boulie Nunkwa Mubiala, the international consultant for UNICEF Congo, as well as governmental representatives and members of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and other associations.

During those sessions, the experts considered the second, third, fourth and fifth combined draft reports on the implementation of the Convention. Numerous amendments were formulated and considered.

Question No. 4:

The ties between the National Commission for the Family and the Advancement of Women and the Observatory for Women's Rights and Equality are complementary. When the Commission is considering a question of law related to the family, it works together with the Observatory to find a solution.

With respect to the links between the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women and the Observatory for Women's Rights and Equality, the latter is a non-governmental organization whose community

II. Stereotypes

Question No. 7:

Although the law prohibits dowry marriage, the practice continues. Nevertheless, at the time of separation or divorce, some men hold that the marriage is not dissolved until the dowry has been repaid. Judges, when such situations are brought to their attention, invoke the provisions of the law.

Impact of measures taken to combat stereotypes and traditional attitudes and cultural practices

- Awareness-raising about the gender approach at all levels (Government, non-governmental organizations, the public and private sectors);
- Mandatory school attendance for children up to the age of 16;
- Criminal sanctions against any parent who does not send to school a child between the ages of 0 and 16;
- Education free of charge in

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Complaints concern professional, public and academic spheres.

(3) In view of the continual growth of this phenomenon, the alarm has begun to be sou

- Female celibacy
 - Verbal abuse and slander
 - Switching between monogamy and polygamy during the marriage
 - Abandoning a wife
- (c) Violence by the State
- Texts which discriminate against women despite the constitutional prohibition
 - Poor representation of women in decision-making bodies
 - Laxness or tardiness in making decisions to protect the rights of women, such as obtaining alimony payments, protection against violent threats, and so forth

2. Scope of the problem

Instances of domestic rape and incest are known, but talking about them is taboo; the problem is real and has become widespread. The other forms of violence really occur, and the perpetrators and victims belong to all social categories.

3. Legal considerations

Acts of physical violence are subject under articles 230 et seq. of the Penal Code to criminal penalties and sanctions according to the type of offence (two months to five years imprisonment or long-term rigorous punishment).

Psychological violence such as verbal abuse and slander are punishable under articles 283 to 288 of the Penal Code (3 months to 12 months imprisonment or a maximum fine of 500,000 CFA francs).

Under the Civil Code, any form of discrimination may be invoked during a divorce trial as grounds for divorce.

Question No. 11:

Statistics on persons prosecuted for violence against women are not available because the courts do not differentiate among the victims.

The Government intends to fill this gap, both at the level of victims (awareness-raising and information) and at that of the public and private facilities which help them.

Question No. 12:

Women are brought up 20410.3273 0 0 au8oo. 1

- The listening unit of the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women, the social services programme of the Ministry of Justice, the legal clinic of the Observatory for Women's Rights and Equality, and the dissemination of legislative texts penalizing the various types of violence help women to be liberated from a sense of lethargy.

The Observatory:

- urges women to obtain a medical certificate following an act of violence;
- formulates complaints for women who cannot afford to hire a lawyer;
- informs the Government Prosecutor of cases that are brought to its attention;
- encourages women to communicate with their husbands rather than to resolve problems by coming to blows.

Services offering attention and assistance to women are provided by non-governmental organizations, social services and the Ministry for the Family, the Protection of Children and the Advancement of Women, but there are no shelters for women. Some churches are able to shelter women for short periods.

The services are of a legal, health-related, socialization and

involves a minor under the age of 18, and if there is duress, or if the perpetrator is the husband, father, mother or legal guardian of the victim, the punishment is a prison sentence of from two to five years. Fines range from 50,000 to 2 million CFA francs.

Measures taken

As such acts are punishable, it goes without saying that they are carried out clandestinely in such legal establishments as restaurants, hotels, theatres, dance halls or other premises of such establishments.

The temporary or permanent closing of the establishment or the removal of its licence may be declared by the competent jurisdiction.

Measures applied to provide support for the social reintegration of prostituMea

Question No. 17:

The Network of Gabonese Women Ministers and Parliamentarians is a young association, founded on 20 May 2000. Its objective is to mobilize all Gabonese social classes and to carry out a campaign with a view to accelerating the placement of women in decision-making bodies. It does its work through talks, workshops and awareness-raising and training seminars for women, various social groups and government personnel.

With a view to reversing the negative trend towards decreasing representation by women in the National Assembly, the Network:

- held, in collaboration with UNFPA, an awareness-raising workshop for political leaders (in elective and decision-making positions) on advocacy, lobbying and the gender approach, in Libreville from 24 to 26 May 2001;
- organized a seminar on women's involvement in politics from 24 to 25 June 2002;
- campaigned the Government with a view to obtaining parity on electoral lists and affirmative action in decision-making positions. The President of Gabon, who is always attentive to the needs of women, arranged for special measures to be taken by the political parties. During the most recent elections (legislative and local, 2002), he decreed that each list should contain at least 30 per cent women, and that a sufficient number should appear at the top of the list. With regard to decision-making positions, he requested each ministerial cabinet to take on at least four women advisers.

Question No. 18:

Unmarried women do not require the consent of a relative to participate in international activities.

Measures envisaged to remove the requirement of marital consent for participation in activities at the international level

With a view to protecting the family and marriage (article 1, paragraph 14, of the Constitution) article 254 of the Civil Code empowers the husband to choose the family residence, obliges the wife to live with him, and requires him to provide for her.

Only when the residence chosen by the husband poses a physical or psychological danger to the family may the court authorize the wife to live elsewhere with her children.

There is no other measure allowing res

VI. Nationality

Question No. 19:

The Nationality Code may be applied

Question No. 23:

To reverse the current trend and tackle problems faced by female students, government programmes aim to influence: the abdication of parental responsibility, domestic

Question No. 24:

her right of usufruct (article 692, paragraph 3). The husband is not subject to this obligation;

- The Family Council (Civil Code, articles 699 to 707): this institution is becoming an instrument by which the husband's relatives take vengeance on the surviving wives. If the parents-in-law refuse to uphold it, the inheritance may be prevented from passing to the widow, even though she is the legal heir. Normally, the widow takes precedence over the family heirs;
- This plundering of the widow's inheritance is not clearly codified in the Penal Code as an offence;
- The failure to respect a will that benefits the widow;
- The difficulty of dissolving co-ownership, in particular, for widows who married under the option of monogamy.

Measures¹¹ taken

- The President of Gabon has questioned the various departments concerned regarding the abuses to which widows are subject;
- Legislation of a general nat