



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

Distr.: General  
2 August 2005  
English  
Original: French

---

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties  
under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

**Initial report of States parties**

**Mauritania\***

---

\* The present report is being issued without formal editing.

## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Acronyms and abbreviations . . . . .	3
Introduction . . . . .	5
Part One: Overview . . . . .	6
I. General information on the Islamic Republic of Mauritania . . . . .	6
A. Territory and population . . . . .	6
B. Economic data . . . . .	7
C. Political and institutional development . . . . .	9
D. Administrative organization . . . . .	10
II. Institutional framework for the promotion and protection of women's rights . . . . .	11
A. Administrative authorities responsible for the promotion and protection of women's rights . . . . .	11
1. State Secretariat for the Status of Women . . . . .	11
2. Ombudsman of the Republic . . . . .	14
3. Commission on Human Rights, Poverty Reduction and Integration . . . . .	14
B. Judicial authorities responsible for the promotion and protection of women's rights . . . . .	15
1. Constitutional Council . . . . .	15
2. Courts and tribunals . . . . .	16
Part Two: Implementation of the substantive provisions of the Convention (arts. 1-16) . . . . .	18
1. Legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures taken to implement articles 1, 2 and 3 . . . . .	18
2. Temporary special measures to combat discrimination against women (art. 4) . . . . .	19
3. Modification of social and cultural patterns of conduct (art. 5) . . . . .	23
4. Suppression of the exploitation of women (art. 6) . . . . .	25
5. Equality in political and public life at the national level (art. 7) . . . . .	26
6. Equality in political and public life at the international level (art. 8) . . . . .	27
7. Equality under the law with respect to nationality (art. 9) . . . . .	27
8. Equal rights in the field of education (art. 10) . . . . .	28
9. Equal rights to employment and work (art. 11) . . . . .	34
10. Equal access to health services (art. 12) . . . . .	38
11. Finance and social security (art. 13) . . . . .	47
12. Rural women (art. 14) . . . . .	49
13. Equality in legal and civil affairs (art. 15) . . . . .	55
14. Equal rights within the family (art. 16) . . . . .	56
Conclusion . . . . .	58

## Acronyms and abbreviations

ACOPAM	Organizational and cooperative support to grass-roots initiatives
ADB	African Development Bank
AFESD	Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development
AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
BPW	Building and public works
CAC	Community Food Centre
CAPEC	People's Savings and Loan Banks
CDHLCPI	Commission on Human Rights, Poverty Reduction and Integration
CEDIFFE	Documentation and Information Centre on Women, the Family and Children
CFPE	Preschool Training Centre
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CNC	Community Nutrition Centre
CREN	Centre for Recovery and Nutritional Education
CSA	Food Security Commission
DCPE	Economic Policy Framework Paper
DHSM	Demographic and Health Survey in Mauritania
DPS	Department for Health Protection
DPT	Diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus
GDP	Gross domestic product
GFEC	Women's Savings and Loan Groups
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IGA	Income-generating activity
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMFP	Partner Microfinance Institutions
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
MAED	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MEN	Ministry of National Education
MSAS	Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
NAP	National AIDS Programme
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NTIC	New information and communications technologies
ODSR	Organization for the Development of the Senegal River
OPF	Rural women's organization
OSP	Socio-professional organization
PACAD	Programme to Assist Agricultural Cooperatives in Difficulty

PCR	Consolidation and Recovery Plan
PDIAM	Integrated Programme for the Development of Irrigated Agriculture in Mauritania
PDU	Urban Development Programme
PNBG	National Good Governance Plan
PPG	Gorgol Perimeter Pilot Project
PREF	Plan for Economic and Financial Recovery
PRP	Poverty Reduction Project
PSA	Agricultural Services Project
RFD	Women and Development Network
SECF	State Secretariat for the Status of Women
SFPR	Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction
SNPF	National Strategy for the Advancement of Women
SONADER	National Rural Development Company
STD	Sexually transmitted disease
UMAFEC	Mauritanian Union of Female Entrepreneurs and Businesswomen

## Introduction

1. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania, which has been a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women since 2000, hereby submits its first national report on the legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures taken to implement the Convention in accordance with article 18 thereof.

2. The present report comprises the initial report that was due in 2001 as well as the first periodic report due in 2005.

3. A number of workshops and consultations were held in order to ensure that national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) could participate in the preparation of the report. Thus:

- A brainstorming workshop on the Convention was held (with the participation of the governmental bodies concerned and civil society organizations working in the area of the promotion of women's rights);
- A workshop was held in order to endorse the report (as amended by the participants);
- An Inter-ministerial Technical Commission was established, comprising the Department of Justice, the Department of Economic Affairs and Development, the Department of Communication, the State Secretariat for the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights, Poverty Reduction and Integration.

Lastly, observations were obtained from the various departments concerned, as well as from civil society organizations.

4. Accordingly, the present report on the implementation of the Convention is the result of the interaction between the various stakeholders.

5. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania takes this opportunity to express to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women its willingness to engage in a constructive and fruitful dialogue with its members on the situation of women in Mauritania, as described in this report, which has two (2) parts:

- Part One. Overview
- Part Two. Implementation of the substantive provisions of the Convention (arts. 1-16)

# Part One

## Overview

### I. General information on the Islamic Republic of Mauritania

#### A. Territory and population

6. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania lies between lat. 15° and 27°N and long. 6° and 19°W, with a surface area of 1,030,700 km<sup>2</sup>.

7. The country is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, Senegal to the south, Mali to the south and east, Algeria to the north-east, and Western Sahara to the north-west. This geographic location makes Mauritania a link between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, Mauritania is land of intermingling civilizations with a rich sociocultural heritage.

8. In the central and northern parts of the country, the terrain consists of the Adrar and Tagant mountain ranges, which rise as high as 800 m. The Senegal river valley, known as Chemama, extends to the south. The rest of the country consists chiefly of chains of sand dunes.

9. Mauritania is divided into four climate zones:

- The vast Saharan zone to the north, where the usually erratic rainfall totals less than 100 mm annually and where water sources are rare, although it does have scattered oases;
- The Sahelian zone, with a dry climate characterized by annual rainfalls ranging between 100 and 300 mm;
- The pre-Sahelian or Senegal river zone, which is characterized by annual rainfalls of up to 300-400 mm, and where flood recession agriculture is practised. Sometimes this water level is exceeded, as during the rainy season of 2003, when exceptionally high levels were recorded in this zone as well as in the rest of the country;
- A coastal zone influenced by the Atlantic Ocean.

10. The population of Mauritania was estimated at 2,698,375 in 2003. The annual population growth rate is 2.92 per cent, and life expectancy at birth is 51.53 years (53.71 for women and 49.42 for men). The fertility rate is 6.15 births per woman. Other features of the population as a whole include:

- Age pyramid (July 2002):
  - Aged 0-14: 46.1 per cent (boys 653,005; girls 650,530);
  - Aged 15-64: 51.7 per cent (men 720,473; women 741,094);
  - Aged 65 and older: 2.2 per cent (men 26,251; women 37,505).
- Gender-aggregated (July 2002):
  - At birth: 1.03 boys for each girl;
  - Under age 15: 1 boy for each girl;

- Aged 15-64: 0.97 men for each woman;
  - Aged 65 and older: 0.7 men for each woman;
  - Total population: 0.98 men for each woman.
- Infant mortality: 75.5 per thousand normal births.
  - Literacy (definition: ability to read and write among those aged 15 and older): total population: 41.2 per cent (men: 51.5 per cent; women: 31.3 per cent).
11. In demographic structure, the Mauritanian people consists of an Arabic-speaking majority, as well as Pulaar, Soninke and Wolof minorities.
12. These different components of the population have lived in harmony, unity and solidarity for centuries and have forged a brotherly nation united in and by Islam, which is the religion of all the people of Mauritania.
13. The Islam practised in Mauritania has always been the Maliki rite of Sunni Islam, which is devoid of dogmatism or sectarianism. Owing to its tolerance, it encourages solidarity, fosters unity, repudiates violence and hatred and combats arbitrariness and oppression. It has always been the true unifying factor in national identity.

## **B. Economic data**

14. Since initiating an economic and financial renewal policy in the 1980s with the support of its development partners, based on an economic and financial recovery plan, a consolidation and recovery plan and an economic policy framework paper, Mauritania has renewed its economic growth through reforms designed to improve public finances and the banking and insurance sectors, liberalize trade and disengage the State from the productive sectors in favour of the private sector, which is the engine of sustainable economic growth.
15. The implementation of these reforms has allowed the country to improve its economic performance. The average annual rate of growth in GDP increased from 3.6 per cent during the 1991-1994 period to 4.5 per cent between 1999 and 2002, and reached 4.9 per cent in 2003 and 2004, while inflation, which had been at an annual average of 7.3 per cent between 1991 and 1994, shrank to 4.3 per cent for the 1999-2003 period. Mauritania's performance with respect to both growth and inflation has surpassed the official average for sub-Saharan Africa.
16. This performance has led to a net improvement in the principal indicators of sustainable human development. Economic growth has also been accompanied by measures designed to expand the economy's production base, support expansion and diversification in traditional dynamic sectors such as agriculture, livestock and fisheries and exploit the potential of the mining sector, including hydrocarbons, and tourism.
17. Good prospects are emerging for the country because of the following:
- New projects have been launched to exploit gold, leather and, in the near future, phosphates in the Boffal area;
  - The country has become a prized tourist destination because of its security and stability and its innate tourism potential;

- The Government is putting in place vast road, port and airport infrastructures to keep pace with economic development;
- Fisheries management and protection have been improved, and processing industries are being promoted that preserve the marine environment while at the same time creating real value added.

18. Ongoing studies have confirmed the existence of significant commercially viable off-shore oil reserves, the exploitation of which is scheduled to begin in December 2005 with an initial output of 75,000 barrels per day.

19. In order to achieve equitable distribution of the benefits of growth, new development programmes and projects have been elaborated through a participatory process and implemented in the following priority areas:

- Poverty reduction and grass-roots development;
- Education, training and literacy;
- Health and social affairs;
- Women's advancement;
- Water supply;
- Rural development.

20. Mauritania's economic performance has been praised by its development partners, who have agreed to relieve its debt substantially by providing it with significant financial resources that have mainly been earmarked for poverty reduction. Poverty figures stood at 56.6 per cent of the population in 1990, 50.5 per cent in 1996, 46.3 per cent in 2000, and 41.5 per cent in 2004. It is in this context that a Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction (SFPR) for the 2000-2015 period was the subject of a policy act adopted in 2001. The goal of the SFPR is to roll back the poverty rate to less than 17 per cent by 2015 and, by the same date, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2000.

21. The SFPR targets for the year 2005 were: (i) to reduce the rate of poverty to 40.3 per cent by 2005; (ii) to increase the rate of school enrolment to 97 per cent; (iii) to raise the rate of childbirths assisted by medical personnel from 62 to 72 per cent between 2003 and 2005 and the rate of DPT3 vaccinations from 75 to 82 per cent in the same period; (iv) to reduce the rate of malnutrition for children under five from 32 to 20 per cent in the same period; and (v) to improve the rate of access to a potable water network, which was over 45 per cent in 2004.

22. The Strategic Framework will continue to stress acceleration of equitable, private sector-led economic growth supported by rapid infrastructure development, reduction of disparities in access to basic social services, modernization of administration and improved public resource management. The transition to a knowledge-based economy will be facilitated through a national literacy campaign, implementation of educational development programmes, new information and communication technologies and encouragement of innovation.



## C. Political and institutional evolution

23. Colonization in Mauritania was brief, eventful, late and superficial. Mauritania was created within its current borders by the Franco-Spanish Convention of 27 June 1900 (Treaty of Paris), but the annexation of territory, which met with fierce national resistance, continued until 1935. After several modifications within the colonial system, Mauritania adopted its first Constitution on 22 March 1959.

24. The 1959 Constitution inaugurated a fleeting parliamentary regime. The attainment by Mauritania of international sovereignty occasioned the adoption of a new constitution.

25. The Constitution of 20 May 1961 inaugurated a presidential regime that drifted inexorably towards a one-party system. This regime, succumbing in the fullness of time to national economic problems, was sorely tested by the multiple consequences of drought in the Sahel, and especially of the war in Western Sahara, in which Mauritania was involved at the time and which ended on 10 July 1978.

26. From 1978 to 1984, the country was governed by the military under the shadow of unstable political conditions and internal and external conflicts. Despite the declaration of a state of emergency, signs of stability and openness resulted in the advent in 1992 of a normal constitutional regime, which had been preceded by general municipal elections in 1986.

27. Thanks to the establishment of a democratic pluralist system beginning with the adoption of the Constitution of 20 July 1991, the country has had 19 elections, of which the most recent have been:

- The 2002 municipal and parliamentary elections;
- The 2003 presidential election;
- The 2004 partial renewal of the Senate (series B) and the election of a senator to represent Mauritians living abroad (series B).

28. These elections were notable for the participation of all the country's political alignments and for their transparency (with a reliable civil register, tamper-proof identity cards, Internet-accessible electoral lists and representatives of all candidates at polling stations), which was acknowledged by the political actors themselves or their representatives.

29. The introduction of a "proportional rule" for the electoral districts of Nouakchott, Nouadhibou and Sélibaby during consultations in 2002 allowed for an increase in the number of parliamentary seats going to opposition parties, as well as their presence at the head of certain municipal councils.

30. The 2003 presidential election, for its part, was distinguished by the participation, alongside that of the outgoing President of the Republic, of the main opposition leaders, and for the first time the candidacy of a woman. The participation by a woman in this election reflects the will of Mauritanian women to be fully involved in the political sphere since the advent of democracy.

## **D. Administrative organization**

31. The organization of territorial administration in the country is based on three levels: wilaya (region), moughataa (department) and district. The country has 13 wilayas, each of which is under the authority of a wali (governor) who represents central power. Each wilaya is divided into moughataas, of which there are 53 in the country, with each moughataa under the authority of a hakem (prefect). Districts are administered by district heads under the authority of the hakem.

32. Since 1986, the Government has implemented an administrative and institutional reform designed to reorganize territorial administration to adapt to the needs of the people. Decentralization was selected as a strategic choice because it brings the people closer to the management of their affairs. It should be noted here that decentralization was introduced in 1986 as a precursor to the democratization of the Mauritanian political system. It was able to serve as a suitable framework for training in democracy for a people who had suffered under a state of emergency.

33. According to the terms of Order No. 87-289 of 20 October 1987, which replaces Order No. 86-134 of 13 August 1986, a commune is a territorial collective under public law vested with a legal personality and financial autonomy, and charged with the management of communal interests. In this context, the commune's authorities include, most notably:

- Local roads, construction, maintenance of school buildings, clinics and maternal and child welfare centres;
- Urban transport;
- Hygiene;
- Collection of refuse;
- Markets;
- Slaughterhouses;
- Communal sports and cultural facilities;
- Parks and gardens;
- Cemeteries;
- Poverty relief;
- Planning and management of areas granted to the commune by the State.

34. In addition, according to the terms of article 6 of the above-cited order, the municipal body of each commune is made up of a municipal council, a mayor and one or more deputy mayors. Today the country has 216 urban and rural communes, of which 9 are under the umbrella of the Nouakchott urban community.

35. Prospects for enhancing the competence of the communes are encouraging in the context of the implementation of various ambitious development programmes, notably the Urban Development Programme (PDU) and the "Vaincre" ("Promotion of Economic Growth Initiatives") programme, in accordance with the goals of the Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction (SFPR) and the national good governance plan.

36. The Urban Development Programme is aimed at achieving basic infrastructure goals in various communes located in the regional centres, while the “Vaincre” programme is aimed at strengthening the capacities of mayors’ offices to implement development projects.

## **II. Institutional framework for the promotion and protection of women’s rights**

### **A. Administrative authorities responsible for the promotion and protection of women’s rights**

#### **1. State Secretariat for the Status of Women (SECF)**

37. Pursuant to Decree No. 005/2005 of 23 January 2005, the State Secretariat for the Status of Women has a mandate to ensure the advancement of women and their full participation in decision-making and economic and social development, and also to help safeguard the family and children’s rights and well-being, in accordance with Mauritania’s Islamic values and in keeping with the realities of its culture and civilization and the requirements of modern life. The State Secretariat for the Status of Women is, accordingly, responsible for:

- Elaborating, executing and monitoring the execution of policies relating to gender, the advancement of women, the family, the child and early childhood;
- Coordinating and monitoring the integration of a gender perspective into all development activities;
- Helping to devise and monitor the implementation of national policies, strategies and programmes, as well as development projects likely to have an impact on women, the family and the child;
- Promoting the rights of women, the family and the child;
- Raising public awareness of the rights of women and of the child by publicizing the various international legal instruments ratified by Mauritania and the laws and regulations in force;
- Leading and coordinating the women’s movement by encouraging women to organize their own groups and to develop women’s, national, Arab, African and international associations;
- Proposing and leading coordination and consensus-building bodies concerned with women, the family and the child;
- Proposing bills and draft regulations relating to women, the family and the child, and ensuring that they are publicized and put into effect;
- Monitoring the application of all treaties ratified by Mauritania relating to the rights of women, the family and the child.

38. In Mauritania, the follow-up to the Beijing World Conference on Women has been devoted to consolidating achievements and reinforcing national and regional institutional arrangements for the implementation of the national strategy for the advancement of women.

39. In this context, the State Secretariat has undertaken to reorganize professional training centres so that they can effectively meet the need for greater technical expertise on the part of professionals and managers, and better cooperative associations, NGOs and women's micro-enterprises in fields such as agriculture, livestock-raising, trade or health. The restructuring has been done with the assistance of mobile training teams dispatched throughout the country.

40. As part of the reorganization, regional branch offices (decentralized departmental offices) have been expanded to enable them to assume their proper role in the coordination, oversight, and management of local affairs. The State Secretariat has, for instance, been able to give its national and regional offices the material, equipment and premises needed to carry out their mandates.

41. In 1996, the Prime Minister sent a circular to all departments instructing them to do more to mainstream gender-related issues into their own programmes, in collaboration with the SECF.

42. The State Secretariat has also organized broad national consultations on formulating a family policy. The policy will reinforce measures taken by the Government for the advancement of women and the protection of the family. It has the following components:

- Codification of the various aspects of family life;
- Improvement of the educational potential of families;
- Helping to create sustainable economic resources for families and consolidating their productive and management capacities;
- Betterment of the health and social status of families;
- Improvement of the conditions of families in special circumstances.

43. In support of these activities, the Government, in accordance with its overall plan, has prepared and issued educational and media information and conducted awareness-raising campaigns about the protection of the family, the enrolment of girls in school, the work done by women, the battle against discriminatory practices harmful to women and girls, and the participation of women in political life.

44. Furthermore, it has reached out to decision makers, members of civil society and its development partners to advocate greater support for programmes for the advancement of women. The aim is to improve women's living conditions, encourage poverty reduction and illiteracy campaigns, promote participation in decision-making and reduce the gender gap.

45. SECF has strengthened the Documentation and Information Centre on Women, the Family and Children (CEDIFFE) as to documentation, databases and human resources, to enable it to provide insights to political decision makers and members of civil society, and expand its research on the status of women in Mauritania.

46. Even though the legal and institutional context is favourable to the promotion of the family in Mauritania, a big effort must be made to coordinate, apply and publicize the legislation, mainstream a gender approach, mobilize resources and update the objectives of the national strategy for the advancement of women.

47. The community organization movement in Mauritania goes back more than two decades. This movement initially focused on mutual assistance in communities

and social solidarity in rural areas. Later, various types of organizations with many social and economic objectives sprang up. The movement thus became a major mobilizing force for women nationally, working towards their emancipation and advancement and the improvement of their living conditions.

48. These associations are active in fields as varied as agriculture, livestock-raising, trade, crafts, community work, the environment, poverty reduction, the rights of women, and so on. They include national and regional cooperatives, tontines, specific groups, community organizations and NGOs, and they have proven to be both useful and cost-effective, even though they lack strong technical management or training in follow-up and oversight.

49. The areas in which these grass-roots groups are involved are very varied, as reflected by the kinds of organizations and the different ways in which they are structured.

50. Actually, most of these organizations have been set up either to meet a political or economic need or to take advantage of the support of a project or a specialized body involved in a specific field.

51. These groups have participated in many training workshops on the organization of cooperatives, the empowerment of women, management, the preparation of funding proposals or technical studies, the creation of a database, the educating of women's rights trainers, the preparation of a guide on the rudiments of women's rights, the establishment of systematic eligibility criteria for women's cooperatives, and so on.

52. These workshops, offered with the technical, material and financial support of several development partners, have led to an appreciable improvement in the working tools available to the women's groups and expanded their technical capabilities in the areas of production, operation and management.

53. Several government bodies are involved either in granting legal status to the organizations or in exercising a technical mentoring role.

54. A selective survey done in 1996 estimated that there were 1,294 cooperatives comprising about 73,590 women. These figures show that women's cooperative associations engage a large part of the female population of the country.

55. However, the survey results also showed that the total income of these cooperatives, including three fishing cooperatives, was UM 148,777,345, which barely amounts to the annual earnings of one fishing company.

56. At any rate, women's groups are coping with major difficulties that handicap them. The difficulties for the most part have to do with the organizations' deficient management and supervisory skills and their lack of material and financial resources.

57. In order to give the women's associations more credibility and staying power, the Government has taken the legal and institutional steps needed to organize, mentor and assist their activities, which has given them real political status in the communities and nationwide.

58. In 1996 there were only 31 NGOs. There are now many more of them: to cite only two of the occupational associations and trade unions, there are the

Mauritanian Union of Female Entrepreneurs and Businesswomen (UMAFEC) and the Women and Development Network (RFD).

59. In order to increase the participation of women in grass-roots development organizations, SECF is helping emerging groups and strengthening the capacities of national women's NGOs.

60. In addition, the United Nations system and other development partners are financing the attendance of NGOs at international conferences like the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing or the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, in 1995, as well as the follow-up meetings to these conferences.

## **2. Ombudsman of the Republic**

61. The Ombudsman of the Republic, whose post was established by Act No. 93,027 of 7 July 1993, is an independent authority appointed by presidential decree. The Ombudsman receives complaints from citizens regarding unresolved disputes in their dealings with government departments, territorial public authorities, public establishments and other public service bodies. Cases are submitted to the Ombudsman through members of Parliament or mayors. The Ombudsman also receives complaints forwarded by the President of the Republic for an advisory opinion, in cases regarding disputes between a citizen and the Administration.

62. The Ombudsman studies each complaint submitted to him and, if it seems justified, he writes a report with recommendations for settling the dispute and, where appropriate, suggests ways of improving the functioning of the body concerned. If he finds that the dispute has arisen because of the manifest unfairness of laws or regulations in force, he can propose to the competent authority steps that could correct the unfairness, and suggest the necessary changes. If a competent authority does not take disciplinary action against an official who has committed a serious offence against a private citizen, the Ombudsman prepares a detailed report on the matter for submission to the President.

63. The Ombudsman cannot intervene in a dispute which is before a court, nor can he question the appropriateness of a court decision, but he can make recommendations to the body being challenged.

64. If a final court decision beyond appeal has not been enforced, the Ombudsman may enjoin the responsible body to comply with it by a certain deadline. If that injunction is not respected, a special report is sent to the President informing him of the failure to enforce the court decision. The fact that the Office of the Ombudsman is independent and very much in the public eye makes it better able to act as a regulator and mediator in society.

## **3. Commission on Human Rights, Poverty Reduction and Integration**

65. Established by Decree No. 89/98 of 2 July 1998, as amended by Decree No. 094/2000 of 28 September 2000, the Commission on Human Rights, Poverty Reduction and Integration has a mandate to draw up and apply the national policy in those areas, taking a participatory approach and working in concert with other bodies.

66. The Commission, whose field of competence extends to several sectors, owes its establishment, in the first place, to the awareness that human rights — civil and

political, together with economic, social and cultural — are interdependent. Its establishment also heralds a unified concept of development, according to which economic progress must go hand in hand with political progress.

67. One of the chosen strategies is to favour approaches based on solidarity among citizens, their effective involvement and the full mobilization of their human and financial capacities.

68. In the matter of human rights, the Commission is responsible for drawing up and implementing the national human rights policy by:

- Using all appropriate means to insure the promotion and dissemination of human rights principles and values;
- Emphasizing dialogue and concerted action among national human rights associations;
- Developing cooperation and exchanges with regional and international human rights organizations and institutions;
- Monitoring Mauritania’s compliance with its human rights treaty obligations.

## **B. Judicial authorities responsible for the promotion and protection of women’s rights**

### **1. Constitutional Council**

69. The Constitutional Council is an autonomous judicial body created by the Constitution of 20 July 1991 to replace the former constitutional division of the Supreme Court. The introduction of the Constitutional Council as one of Mauritania’s courts represents a step forward in safeguarding human rights.

70. The Constitutional Council has six members. They are appointed by the President of the Republic (three members, including the Council President), the President of the National Assembly (two members) and the President of the Senate (one member). The members of the Constitutional Council are appointed for a non-renewable nine-year term. They have tenured status and enjoy the same immunities as members of Parliament. The Constitutional Council is responsible for ascertaining that laws, international treaties and the rules of procedure of the National Assembly and Senate are in conformity with the Constitution. It also has the power to declare laws unconstitutional if they are not in accordance with the Constitution.

71. In the words of article 87 of the Constitution, “the decisions of the Constitutional Council [take precedence in all] matters brought before it ... [They] are not subject to appeal. They must be complied with by the public authorities and by all administrative and [jurisdictional] authorities”. Here one should note the special role played by the Constitutional Council in protecting rights and freedoms: it has already declared a number of legal texts unconstitutional, such as the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, the Rules of Procedure of the Senate, the Organization of the Judiciary (Regulations) Act, and the Organizational Act on the election of senators representing Mauritians residing abroad.

## **2. Courts and tribunals**

72. The organization of Mauritania's judiciary is regulated by Act No. 99/039 of 24 July 1999, as follows:

### **2.1 Courts of the first instance**

#### *(a) Moughataa courts*

73. According to article 11 of Act No. 99/039, "a court known as the moughataa court shall be established in the local capital of each moughataa". It has the authority to hear civil and commercial cases that do not fall within the purview of the wilaya (regional) court.

#### *(b) Wilaya courts*

74. The wilaya courts are composed of:

- An administrative division;
- A civil division;
- A commercial division;
- One or more criminal divisions, which must include a specific bench for cases involving minors.

#### *(c) Labour courts*

75. Labour courts are established in all the local capitals of the wilayas and have a presiding judge assisted by judges appointed in accordance with the Labour Code.

#### *(d) Criminal courts*

76. There are criminal courts in all wilaya headquarters towns. These courts rule in the first and second instance on matters accorded to them by the law, and are presided over by the president of the wilaya court or, if necessary due to the volume of cases, by a judge appointed for the purpose. The Office of the Public Prosecutor is represented in the criminal courts by the regional prosecutor, and the registry is kept by a head clerk and his assistants.

### **2.2 Courts of second instance**

#### *(a) Courts of appeal*

77. There are courts of appeal in all wilaya headquarters towns, composed of the following divisions:

- An administrative division;
- A civil and social division;
- A commercial division;
- A criminal division.



By virtue of article 30 of the new law, these different divisions rule in appeals in accordance with their specialization and, as courts of second instance, in decisions and orders handed down by the courts of first instance.

(b) *Supreme Court*

78. The law regards the Supreme Court as the country's highest judicial supervisory institution. The Supreme Court may be requested by the Government to give its opinion concerning "draft laws or regulations and all questions on which it is required to intervene in accordance with an express legislative or regulatory provision". It may also be consulted by ministers "on difficulties of a legal nature which may arise owing to the actions of government agencies". Composed of a president, four divisional presidents with the title of vice-president, and several councillors, the Supreme Court comprises the following chambers:

- Joint chambers;
- Judges' council chambers of the Supreme Court;
- Specialized chambers.

79. Women whose rights have been violated enjoy access to all the domestic appeals procedures of the traditional judicial system, in accordance with the Act on the organization of the judiciary. Thus, they may go to court, appeal to the various courts of first instance, or apply for judicial review to the courts of second instance (courts of appeal and Supreme Court).

80. Moreover, in the event that they exhaust the available domestic appeals procedures, plaintiffs may apply to the various regional and international human rights mechanisms. The provisions of the Convention (arts. 1 to 16) are broadly protected by the Constitution of 20 July 1991 currently in force. According to the preamble to the Constitution, the Mauritanian people solemnly proclaims its attachment to the principles of democracy as they have been defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948 and by the African Charter of Human and People's Rights of 28 June 1981 as well as in the other international conventions which Mauritania has signed.

81. Furthermore, article 10 of the Constitution provides that "the State shall guarantee to all its citizens public and individual freedoms". Subsequent developments in the implementation of the Convention's basic provisions will further enlighten the Committee on this question. The provisions of the Convention may be invoked before national courts, and applied by them.

82. This possibility derives from article 80 of the Constitution, which provides that treaties and accords regularly ratified or approved, as soon as they are published, have an authority superior to that of laws contingent upon the application by the other party of each accord or treaty, thus giving the Constitution a monist character while also giving plaintiffs the power to invoke such treaties and accords before the courts on the same basis as they may invoke domestic laws.

## **Part Two**

# **Implementation of the substantive provisions of the convention (arts. 1-16)**

### **1. Legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures taken to implement articles 1, 2 and 3**

83. Discrimination against women as defined in the Convention is taken into account in Mauritanian law. The Constitution of 20 July 1991 proclaims equality for all before the law, without restriction based on gender.

84. Article 1, paragraph 2, of the Constitution provides that the Republic guarantees equality before the law to all of its citizens without distinction as to origin, race, sex or social condition.

85. Article 12 provides that all citizens may accede to public office or employment without any condition other than those determined by the law.

86. Similarly, article 15 of the Constitution guarantees the right of property (para. 1) and the right of inheritance (para. 2) to all citizens, without distinction.

87. There are also other laws and regulations which establish the principle of non-discrimination against women.

88. Mauritanian women have the right to vote and are eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies, including the Office of the President of the Republic (Order No. 091-027 of 7 October 1991), the National Assembly (Order No. 091-028 of 7 October 1991 on the election of deputies), the Senate (Order No. 091-029 of 7 October 1991 concerning the organic law on the election of senators) and town councils (Order No. 087-289 of 20 October 1987).

89. Furthermore, Act No. 093-009 of 18 January 1993, on the general status of civil servants and government contract staff, states that “no distinction may be made between civil servants based on their opinion, sex or race”. These provisions also apply to government contract staff pursuant to article 105 of the same Act.

90. The Labour Code recognizes the right of married women exercising a profession or a trade to belong to a professional union of their choice and to participate in its administration and management.

91. Act No. 2001-054 of 19 July 2001 makes primary education mandatory and establishes the relevant rules, as well as the penalties applicable in the case of failure to respect them. Article 1 of the Act makes primary education mandatory for all Mauritanian children “of both sexes, between 6 and 14 years of age, for a period of at least six years”.

92. Under the terms of this Act, the individual responsible for the child (father, mother or legal guardian, or any individual or corporate entity legally responsible for the child’s custody) must enrol the child in school during the 15-day period prior to the start of the school year (art. 2).

93. If the child’s guardian fails to respect these provisions, after receiving formal notice to do so within five days, he or she shall be subject to penalties.

94. In accordance with article 10 of the Act, the penalty shall be a fine of between UM 10,000 and UM 30,000 where the individual responsible for the child fails to enrol the child without valid grounds, keeps the child away from school for a period exceeding 15 days during a school term or causes “by his or her influence and actions, a temporary or definitive interruption in the child’s schooling”. If the offence is repeated, the fine may be increased to UM 50,000 or UM 100,000.

95. Act No. 099-039 of 24 July 1999, on the organization of the judiciary, establishes the principle of equal treatment without distinction, through a strict application of the laws and regulations in force: “the courts shall have jurisdiction in all administrative, civil, commercial and criminal matters and in labour disputes. They shall rule in accordance with the laws and regulations in force” (art. 1, para. 2).

96. Act No. 2001-052 of 17 July 2001, on the Personal Status Code, which recognizes the right of inheritance of widows and their children, girls’ right to marry and to attain majority at the age of 18 and women’s right of adoption and right to justice, further consolidated the country’s legislation on the promotion and protection of women’s rights.

97. At the international level, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania has acceded to a number of legal instruments on the protection of women, which supplement the positive law in force. These include the following international conventions: the Maternity Protection Convention (1919), the Convention concerning Night Work of Women Employed in Industry (revised 1948), the Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation (1958), the Convention concerning Equality of Treatment of Nationals and Non-Nationals in Social Security (1962) and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1953).

## **2. Temporary special measures to combat discrimination against women (art. 4)**

98. The Constitution of 20 July 1991 guarantees women’s civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, but the equality under law accorded to women by the Constitution does not automatically guarantee women equal treatment in practice. It was for this reason that the State Secretariat for the Status of Women was established in 1992, with a view to ensuring the advancement of Mauritanian women and their full economic and social participation, in accordance with the social and cultural realities of the country and with the relevant international developments. In order to accomplish this task, the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (SNPF) was formulated, as one of the priorities of the newly established Secretariat’s programme of action for the period 1992-1994.

99. The Government drafted and adopted this Strategy in 1995. Initially intended to cover the period 1995-2000, it is still being implemented and will be superseded by a new Strategy for the period 2005-2008. The 1995-2000 National Strategy comprises the following main elements:

- Women and health/reproduction;
- Women and education/training;
- Women and community life;

- Women and the environment.

The objectives of the Strategy are the following:

- To develop a comprehensive understanding of the situation of women in Mauritania;
- To define clear government guidelines for the advancement of women.

100. The most significant measures taken by the State Secretariat for the Status of Women as part of the implementation of the 1995-2000 National Strategy focused on the following areas:

- Job training and literacy;
- Microfinance and income-generating activities;
- Strengthening of the women's community movement;
- The family;
- Early childhood;
- Information, education and communication (IEC);
- Institutional strengthening.

101. However, despite the favourable national and international environment, which provided the framework for implementation of the 1995-2000 National Strategy, the results achieved have been below expectations.

102. In order to remedy the situation, the 2005-2008 Strategy takes into consideration all the shortcomings identified in the previous Strategy. This augurs well for the future advancement of women. The most notable shortcomings were the following:

- Low ratio of women benefiting from programmes carried out in the country's interior regions;
- Unequal distribution of resources allocated and shared out among the wilayas;
- Limited number of training and support programmes;
- Lack of attention paid by the State Secretariat for the Status of Women to the protection of the environment;
- Persistence of social constraints among a large majority of women (continued sociological constraints, certain practices and customs, ignorance of laws, economic dependence and lack of resources, etc.).

103. In light of the various issues which emerged out of the 1995-2000 Strategy, together with its shortcomings, the developments outlined above (paras. 1, 2 and 3) and those outlined below (paras. 5-16) build upon the Government's efforts to ensure the advancement of women in the various areas of political, economic, social and cultural life.

104. The special and non-discriminatory measures to protect motherhood relate to health-care coverage, maternal and child protection, prevention and control of epidemic diseases, and IEC campaigns.

## 1. Health coverage

105. As regards measures to reduce the mortality rate, particularly among children, government efforts in recent years have enabled health coverage to be extended to most of the population, in particular to the most vulnerable groups.

106. Accordingly, under the Expanded Programme on Immunization, children under the age of 5 have been immunized against six target diseases: pertussis, diphtheria, tetanus, measles, poliomyelitis and tuberculosis. Since March 2005, infants under the age of 12 months have also been immunized against hepatitis B. These immunization campaigns are also directed at women of reproductive age.

107. Since 1992, the country's public health strategy has been based on the cost recovery system and the provision of generic and essential medicines (Bamako Initiative), decentralization of health services and community participation. In this context, progress has been made in developing the health system and improving basic health indicators.

108. Public health programmes have made a significant contribution to improving the health of people in general and women in particular.

109. In addition to the adoption of a primary health-care policy, significant financial resources have been mobilized with a view to supporting the objectives of the various health and social affairs policy frameworks. Accordingly, the budget of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (MSAS) has been increased in recent years.

Table 1  
Increase in the budget for public spending on health (in millions of UM)

<i>Budgetary year</i>	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Operating costs of health care	1 340	1 651	1 775	1 602	1 732	2 082	2 287	2 387	2 641	5 445	5 485
Investment in health care	769	1 525	1 929	600	1 014	1 430	2 884	2 800	4 360	4 794	5 115
<b>Total health budget</b>	<b>2 109</b>	<b>3 176</b>	<b>3 704</b>	<b>2 202</b>	<b>2 746</b>	<b>3 512</b>	<b>5 171</b>	<b>5 187</b>	<b>7 001</b>	<b>10 239</b>	<b>10 600</b>
Operating costs at the national level	19 482	19 573	20 240	21 252	22 164	23 985	25 184	26 443	27 766	29 154	30 612
<b>Total national budget</b>	<b>37 486</b>	<b>34 624</b>	<b>36 658</b>	<b>38 491</b>	<b>40 415</b>	<b>43 262</b>	<b>45 425</b>	<b>47 696</b>	<b>48 650</b>	<b>49 623</b>	<b>50 616</b>
Operating costs of health care as a percentage of operating costs at national level	7%	8%	9%	8%	8%	9%	9%	9%	10%	19%	18%
Health budget as a percentage of total national budget	6%	9%	10%	6%	7%	8%	11%	11%	14%	21%	21%

Source: Ministry of Finance.

## 2. Maternal and child protection

110. To ensure healthy child development, a maternal and child health policy has been put into place. This policy focuses on primary health care and aims to make high-quality essential health care available and accessible for this sector of the population. Maternal and child protection focuses on four key areas:

- Prenatal monitoring;
- Assisted childbirth, associated care and neonatal resuscitation;
- Post-natal monitoring;
- Birth spacing.

Prenatal and natal consultations are held in the country's various health centres.

111. The increase in geographical accessibility (creation of a number of health posts in the most remote and inaccessible areas) and the deployment of physicians to various health-care districts has made it easier to tackle childhood diseases and high-risk pregnancies and reduce the mortality/morbidity rate among women of reproductive age.

112. As part of its efforts to tackle acute respiratory infections, the Government has put in place a programme to fight tuberculosis by establishing a health infrastructure that specializes in treating this disease, together with a strategy to treat children suffering from it. Although 75 per cent of the population now has access to essential drugs for the treatment of tuberculosis, fatal infections of this kind remain a serious public health problem among children.

113. Moreover, malnutrition remains a worrying cause of child mortality/morbidity.

114. The Government conducts a number of activities through the centres for recovery and nutritional education (CREN), the school canteens project and the food-for-work programme. However, given the extent of need in this area, such activities are still not enough to achieve the desired results.

115. Notwithstanding this situation, 67 per cent of health centres and 17 per cent of health posts are involved in detecting cases of malnutrition on the basis of anthropometric parameters.

116. It should be pointed out that the State Secretariat for the Status of Women (SECF) is implementing an ambitious programme as part of the Taghdia-Nutricom project, which aims to improve the nutritional status of children below the age of 3. This project is initially being implemented in five pilot wilayas and will later be extended to the rest of the country.

## 3. Prevention and control of epidemic diseases

117. A number of programmes have been set up in the area of the prevention and control of epidemic and endemic diseases, in particular the national programme to combat AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (NAP/STD), the strategy of which is essentially to prevent and treat STDs.

118. As a result of the awareness campaigns conducted by the State, illustrious *oulémas* (specialists in Muslim law) and members of civil society, knowledge about the modes of HIV transmission has improved significantly across the population,

particularly among young people, who are a priority target of the NAP/STD programme.

119. Such campaigns to raise awareness of fatal diseases, in particular AIDS, cover urban and rural areas. Efforts to combat AIDS have been boosted in recent years by a whole series of initiatives aimed at containing, as far as possible, its negative and destructive effects. Such initiatives have resulted in multisectoral AIDS programmes, the decentralization of efforts to combat AIDS throughout all of the country's wilayas and the inauguration in 2005 of the first ambulatory treatment centre for people with AIDS in the capital.

120. This commitment by the Government to combat AIDS is supported by the efforts of a number of NGOs that are well known on the ground owing to their campaigns to raise awareness, particularly among women.

121. As regards malaria, an extensive awareness campaign is conducted every year just before the rainy season to encourage people to use impregnated mosquito nets. At the moment, this is the best way to protect particularly vulnerable groups such as women and children against this disease, which continues to be one of the main causes of their mortality in Africa.

#### **4. IEC campaigns**

122. The Education for Health service, which is responsible for these activities, trains health professionals in information, education and communication (IEC) techniques and organizes regular information campaigns through all channels of interpersonal communication and the mass media (radio, television and the press).

### **3. Modification of social and cultural patterns of conduct (art. 5)**

123. The persistence of social prejudices according to which women are considered unaccomplished (in particular those living in difficult conditions) is a major obstacle to the structural changes necessary for the swift implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Mechanisms are, however, being put in place to follow up legal obligations under the Convention, in particular regarding institutional and juridical aspects.

124. Indeed, the various policies that have been designed cannot succeed without the involvement of women. Women must take responsibility for their role and translate their duty to participate into action. Above all, they must avoid perpetuating, at times unconsciously, sexist patterns of thought. Lastly, they must take concrete action to complement the legislative and institutional measures taken by the Government in their favour.

125. In this regard, since the advent of democracy, which has enabled citizens to benefit from the full enjoyment of all rights and freedoms, the information and communication sector has been a powerful vehicle for the advancement of women.

126. With a view to taking forward the policy aimed at modifying social and cultural patterns of conduct, women can now count on the different segments of the media (radio, television, the press) to help bring about the required changes in attitude.

127. Accordingly, both the national radio station and rural radio stations devote a significant portion of airtime to programmes aimed at accelerating social change and the advancement of women's rights.

128. Such programmes focus primarily on raising awareness of key legal texts (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Personnel Status Code) and laws relating to school attendance by girls, family planning, etc. To demonstrate its determination to achieve satisfactory results, the national radio station organizes an annual ceremony at which it awards a prize to journalists (male and female) who have distinguished themselves in the presentation of these programmes in the course of the year.

129. Moreover, a number of local radio stations addressing different subjects (women and development, women in communities and development of local programmes for women and children) have emerged and concentrate specifically on the advancement of women.

130. Government action in this area is supported by Mauritania's development partners. For example, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) donated 800 solar-powered radios to the Ministry of Communication and Relations with Parliament so that intensive campaigns could be conducted to raise awareness about population and development issues among 800 families living in remote parts of the country.

131. These campaigns aim to raise awareness of the Personnel Status Code, female genital mutilation and civil status. To achieve this, the UNFPA effort has involved the country's five local radio stations and the national radio station. In parallel to and in coordination with the radio broadcasts, campaigns on the same issues (Personnel Status Code, genital mutilation and civil status) are being conducted by 50 or so grass-roots organizations with UNFPA support in a number of wilayas. The objectives of these campaigns are:

- To improve women's access to the media, applying a differentiated approach according to level of education, place of residence and economic level;
- To promote the broad involvement of women in the various media (radio, the press and television);
- To draw up a comprehensive and integrated communication strategy for the advancement of women that mobilizes the various channels of communication (audio, written and audio-visual).

132. The provisions relating to civic instruction at all levels of national education, as laid down in Act No. 099-012 of 26 April 1999 reforming the national education system, and the seminars organized by the National School of Public Administration (ENA) for public-sector managers on the issue of human rights — particularly those relating to gender equality — are part of the effort to bring about an effective change in attitudes.

133. Women do not want to be outdone in this effort. Accordingly, since the advent of democracy in 1991, a number of women have set up and now run newspapers dedicating more column space to women. Moreover, the President of the Association of Journalists for the Defence of Women's Rights is a woman.



134. At the same time, in order to make the most of the existing legal framework in the area of freedom of association, many women have set up NGOs that address issues relating to the emancipation of women at the political, economic, social and cultural levels.

135. In recent years, women have had access to all areas of public and private employment (both formal and informal) alongside men. This has had an impact on harmonious relations at home, particularly in the area of basic education for children of preschool age.

136. With a view to eliminating the disparities inherent in this situation, the Government attaches particular importance to universal basic education and gives its continuing attention to early childhood.

137. In this context, many actions have been targeted at children of preschool age. Examples include the creation of a National Council for Children, the promotion of day-care facilities and kindergartens, the launching of a programme to train teachers and the organization of training modules for preschool teachers.

#### **4. Suppression of the exploitation of women (art. 6)**

138. In line not only with the constitutional provisions which guarantee “the rights attached to the family, the basic unit of Islamic society” (preamble), and the provision according to which “the State and society shall protect the family” (art. 16 of the Constitution), but also as part of the fulfilment of international legal obligations, the Mauritanian authorities recently adopted important legislative measures aimed at combating the exploitation of women.

139. It is in this context that Act No. 025-2003 of 17 July 2003, on the suppression of trafficking in persons was adopted. This Act forbids practices or actions considered to be related to trafficking in persons — meaning the recruitment, transport, transfer of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of deception, of abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payment or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation.

140. The elements constituting exploitation include the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation (art. 1). The legislation against such acts is complemented by the provisions of article 3, which stipulate that “the recruitment, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation are considered to be ‘trafficking in persons’, even if they do not involve the means set out in article 1”.

141. There is no exemption from the respective penalties for committing one of the acts set out in articles 1 and 3.

142. Thus, article 2 of the above-mentioned act stipulates that: “the consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to his or her exploitation is held to be null and void when one of the means set out in the preceding article has been employed”.

143. Additionally, as part of the State authorities’ desire to strengthen the legal framework in countering the exploitation of women, Mauritania has ratified:

- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, in 2004;
- The additional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, signed on 15 November 2000 in New York. This protocol concerns the prevention and suppression of trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

144. The ratification of these multilateral treaties stems from the Government's concern and its political will to protect the weaker fringes of society, composed of women and children, against all kinds of aggression and violence that might affect them.

## **5. Equality in political and public life at the national level (art. 7)**

145. Article 3, paragraph 2, of the Constitution of 20 July 1991 provides that "Those eligible to vote include all adult citizens of the Republic, of both sexes, having civil and political rights". This provision is complemented by article 12, which provides that "All citizens may accede to public office or employment without any condition other than those determined by the law".

146. Several legislative texts are based upon the above-mentioned provisions of the Constitution, as follows:

- Order No. 091-027 of 7 October 1991 on the election of the President of the Republic;
- Order No. 091-028 of 7 October 1991 on the election of parliamentary deputies;
- Order No. 091-029 of 7 October 1991 on the election of senators;
- Order No. 087-289 of 20 October 1987 on the election of municipal councils;
- Act No. 093-009 of 18 January 1993 concerning the status of civil servants and contracted agents of the State (arts. 15 and 105).

147. This legal framework gives Mauritanian women full access to elected office as well as to public appointments, and it should be noted that there was a woman candidate for the 2003 presidential elections. Also noteworthy in the political sphere in 2005 is that:

- Four women are serving as government ministers;
- 3.3 per cent of elected municipal offices are held by women (a proportion which rises to 19.1 per cent in Nouakchott, with one woman mayor out of every nine);
- 3.7 per cent of parliamentary deputies are women;
- 5 per cent of senators are women;
- A woman heads one of the political parties.

148. Women also hold responsible positions in administration (as secretaries-general of ministries, senior managers and heads of public institutions) and in education (as university professors, secondary school teachers and primary school

teachers). They are to be found alongside men in all public and parastatal bodies, such as the police, the gendarmerie, the customs services, the fire service, the navy and other services). Women also run newspapers, and several NGOs and associations are headed by women.

149. In addition to these activities, they work in partnership with several government departments, including the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development (MAED), the State Secretariat for the Status of Women (SECF), and the Commission on Human Rights, Poverty Reduction and Integration (CDHLCPI) in carrying out their missions. At the same time they often benefit from financial support from development partners like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Lutheran World Federation.

## **6. Equality in political and public life at the international level (art. 8)**

150. Mauritanian women, like Mauritanian men, represent their country at international level and take part in the work of regional and international organizations. This representation can be through the diplomatic service, or in the context of bilateral or multilateral cooperation. It must be noted, however, that in reality few women hold posts of responsibility, particularly in planning and decision-making, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They are also poorly represented as experts in subregional, regional and international organizations.

151. Women do, however, take an active part in the activities of non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with public policy problems and political issues. They represent the Mauritanian Government in many international forums. They have taken part in various international conferences, seminars and workshops devoted to the status of women and to questions of national, regional or international interest.

## **7. Equality under the law with respect to nationality (art. 9)**

152. Act No. 061-112 of 12 June 1961, on the Mauritanian Nationality Code; and its modifying texts (Act No. 073-010 of 23 January 1973; Act No. 073-186 of 30 July 1973; Act No. 076-207 of 30 July 1976; Act No. 076-207 of 9 July 1976 and Decree No. 082-028 of 26 March 1982) guarantee the same conditions of acquisition, retention and termination of Mauritanian nationality to all citizens, without distinction, including distinctions based on gender.

153. Through the general conditions governing the acquisition of Mauritanian nationality, based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*, different provisions of the above-mentioned Act create a legal system which does not discriminate against women.

154. Thus, “a foreign woman who marries a Mauritanian, may, at her express request and after a period of five years as from the date of the marriage, acquire Mauritanian nationality” (art. 16). Similarly, article 31 provides “that a Mauritanian, even an adult having foreign nationality, may be authorized, upon request, to relinquish Mauritanian nationality”. This provision, which is valid for both men and

women without distinction, is further defined in article 32, which imposes the following two conditions on any Mauritanian woman who desires to renounce her nationality because of her marriage to a foreigner:

- That the express declaration be made before the marriage;
- That it is certain she can acquire her husband’s nationality.

155. In addition, under article 71 of the Nationality Act, “a foreign woman who marries a Mauritanian man may, if the personal status law allows her to keep her nationality of origin, decline the acquisition of Mauritanian nationality for a period of one year as from the entry into force of this Act”.

156. Likewise, “a Mauritanian woman who marries a foreigner whose national laws allow a woman to take her husband’s nationality may renounce her Mauritanian nationality in the manner and time prescribed in the preceding article” (art. 72).

157. The Mauritanian Nationality Code (Act No. 061-112 of 12 June 1961) contains several articles by which women share equal rights with men concerning the nationality of their children. Thus article 8, paragraph 2, of the Nationality Code provides that “any child born in Mauritania to a Mauritanian mother and a father without nationality, or of unknown nationality shall be considered Mauritanian ... A child born in Mauritania to a Mauritanian mother and a father with foreign nationality who cannot renounce his nationality in the year preceding adulthood shall also be considered Mauritanian” (art. 8, para. 3). Other articles of the Act address the issue of a child’s nationality held by virtue of its parents’ nationality. Article 9 of the Act provides that:

“Any child shall be considered Mauritanian:

1. If the child is born in Mauritania of a foreign father who was born there himself;
2. If the child is born in Mauritania of a foreign mother who was born there herself, without the possibility of renouncing her nationality in the year preceding adulthood.”

158. Mauritanian nationality can be given to “a child born abroad, to a Mauritanian mother and a father of foreign nationality”, on condition that he chooses that nationality in the year preceding adulthood (art. 13, para. 1). Likewise, article 15 states that “any minor whose parents acquire Mauritanian nationality shall become fully Mauritanian on the same basis as the parents”. This provision does not apply, however, to two categories of children:

- A married minor;
- A child who is serving or has served in the armed forces of his country of origin.

## **8. Equal rights in the field of education (art. 10)**

159. Under the Mauritanian legal system, the right to education constitutes a fundamental right guaranteed in the preamble to the Constitution in the same way as all other economic and social rights; freedom of intellectual creative effort is also enshrined in article 10 of the Constitution of 20 July 1991. The Islamic Republic of

Mauritania is conscious of the interest surrounding this right in particular, and since 1987 it has been preparing to set up a programme to restructure the education and training system. The programme emphasizes expanding primary education, improving technical and occupational training and reorganizing higher education.

160. The principle of gender equality in the various forms of pre-school, primary, secondary, technical or professional as well as higher education is thus guaranteed by national legislation. Likewise, Order No. 081-212 of 24 September 1981 on private education guarantees pupils and students the same conditions as those in the public education system.

161. Article 1 of the Education Reform Act (No. 099-012 of 26 April 1999) provides that: "The curricula at the various levels of primary, secondary and higher education shall be unified. They shall be delivered under the same conditions to all pupils and students enrolled in both public and private schools and universities."

162. In addition, the provisions of article 5 of the Act stipulate that "professional training centres shall be opened in each wilaya, bearing in mind the economic orientation of each region, in order to accommodate the greatest possible number of those pupils who were unable to gain access to secondary education".

163. Gender equality in all forms of education is also reaffirmed in the Compulsory Primary Education Act (No. 2001-054 of 19 July 2001), which provides in article 1 that "primary education shall be compulsory for children of both sexes, from the age of 6 to the age of 14, and that schooling shall last at least 6 years. Education shall be provided in public and private establishments, the Mahadras and any other duly accredited educational establishment."

164. A National Policy for the Development of Pre-school Children (PNDPE) has been developed under the aegis of the State Secretariat for the Status of Women (SECF) to highlight different aspects of advancing this sector of society. Some of these aspects relate to the mentoring of children under 8 years of age, an age range which is particularly deserving of attention.

165. The national policy emphasizes:

- Indivisibility of the rights of the child;
- Non-discrimination between the children covered by any established programmes;
- Precedence given to the interests of the child in all activities;
- Reduction of social inequalities among children up to the age of eight.

166. Gender equality is also officially incorporated into the curricula and examinations, and promoted by teachers and by educational institutions at all levels. Order No. 081-212 of 24 September 1981 establishing the regulations for private schools deals in several of its articles with these different categories. Article 11, paragraph 1, of the Order stipulates that the curricula and hours of private educational institutions must conform to those of the corresponding public educational institutions.

167. In addition, article 13, paragraph 1, of the Order sets out the conditions for admitting students or auditors to private schools, which must conform to those of the corresponding public schools. Article 13, paragraph 2, adds that "private schools

must, when admitting students or auditors, ascertain that they will be able to take proper advantage of the teaching or training offered and earn the diplomas or certificates which they have the right to expect at the end of their schooling”.

168. Under article 14, paragraph 1, of the Order, private schools are to be supervised by the “officials of the body that monitors and inspects primary schools, secondary schools, technical schools, school hygiene and the performance of school administrators”.

169. Such supervision, according to article 14, paragraph 2, extends to pedagogy, health and safety, so that students are guaranteed good material and moral conditions of learning. In order to avoid any partiality that might taint the cherished principle of equality, article 15 of the Order states that “private schools may not issue diplomas, for the State has the monopoly on conferring degrees”. Private institutions are therefore, under article 16, “required to have their students sit for public examinations”.

170. The insistence on gender equality in the curricula and in other areas is reiterated in Act No. 099-012 of 26 April 1999 on the reform of the educational system.

171. Article 6 of the law provides that “the first cycle of secondary education shall be extended to four years in order to better prepare the students enrolled in that cycle either to go on to the second cycle or to gain admission to middle-level vocational training schools and centres”.

172. These provisions are rounded out by article 9, which provides that “once they have completed the fourth year of the first cycle of secondary school, students admitted to the next grade shall be steered, on the basis of their documented educational history, to one of the following specialized sections:

- Islamic studies taught in Arabic;
- Modern literature;
- Natural sciences;
- Mathematics;
- Technical studies”.

173. Act No. 2001-054 makes primary education compulsory. Pursuant to the basic provisions of article 1, it focuses on actual attendance at school by providing that “children living in localities where there are no educational facilities shall be enrolled in the school closest to them under an arrangement made by the competent administrative, municipal or school authorities”. The educational opportunities for preschoolers in their early childhood depends on the existence or the establishment of kindergartens, an expansion of the early childhood networks and the training and supervision of staff responsible for early childhood development.

174. For instance, the Pre-school Training Centre (CFPE) (the national institution that trains staff specializing in early childhood) has been in operation since 2003 with support from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and has already put into action a whole series of specific activities that help to instil a sense of equality in children in their early childhood years:

- 65 women have been trained as community leaders in Kiffa and 32 in Kankossa;
- 53 women have been trained as kindergarten teachers;
- 120 women have been trained as community leaders under work-study schemes, as of August 2005.

175. In order to ensure that pupils and students have proper access to education, the State gives scholarships to certain categories, namely, pupils and students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, those displaced from their wilayas (regions) and enrolled elsewhere and those intending to study in universities abroad.

176. A National Scholarship Commission has been set up within the Ministry of National Education and offers scholarships according to objective criteria, bearing in mind the need for transparency and equality and making no distinctions based on gender.

**Table 2**  
**School attendance by gender**

(Percentage of actual population between the ages of 6 and 24 living in households and enrolled in formal schooling, according to area of residence and selected socio-demographic characteristics)

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>6-11</b>			
Male	60.4	37.1	45.9
Female	57.5	33.6	42.4
Ratio	104.9	110.4	108.4
<b>12-17</b>			
Male	68.7	39.8	52.3
Female	66.0	29.1	44.8
Ratio	104.0	137.0	116.8
<b>6-17</b>			
Male	64.2	38.2	48.6
Female	61.7	31.7	43.4
Ratio	104.0	120.6	111.9
<b>18-21</b>			
Male	39.2	16.7	29.1
Female	35.6	9.3	21.9
Ratio	110.2	181.0	132.9
<b>22-24</b>			
Male	23.9	8.4	17.9
Female	16.4	4.1	9.8
Ratio	145.5	205.8	182.7

Source: DHSM, 2000-2001.

177. The teaching of Islamic studies in Arabic has contributed enormously to the movement towards literacy in Mauritania. The classes are given in informal schools known as mahadras, which are, in addition, a form of pre-school because they are attended by very young children.

178. The State has made appropriate arrangements that take into account the fact that classes taught in Arabic contribute to its literacy campaign. There is, for instance, a ministerial department responsible for combating illiteracy, for ensuring an Islamic orientation and for the teaching of Islamic studies, which coordinates and carries out the measures recommended.

179. Women in Mauritania today are benefiting from the broad campaign against illiteracy (2004-2006) inaugurated by that department, which aims to eradicate illiteracy in all social strata throughout the country in the long run.

180. Since 1988, thanks to a huge programme to set aside classrooms where reading and writing are taught, together with functional literacy campaigns targeting specific segments of the public (women, rural populations, and so on), there are already signs that significant progress has been made in making women literate. However, there is still a big literacy gap between men and women, depending on the geographic area.

181. Although the literacy rate for females aged 10 and over has clearly risen, going from 30 per cent in 1988 to 45.3 per cent in 2000, women still lag behind males (who have a literacy rate of about 60 per cent). The gap is also evident between regions. In 2000 the female literacy rate stood at:

- 68.4 per cent in Nouakchott (administrative capital);
- 69.5 per cent in Nouadhibou (business capital);
- 38.1 per cent in the wilaya of Hodh El Charghi;
- 28 per cent in the wilaya of Guidimagma;
- 20 per cent in the wilaya of Gorgol.

182. These low literacy rates are due in part to the female population's limited access to education until relatively recently, and also to the still fairly high rate of dropouts from primary school, more common among girls than boys. This trend is, moreover, very marked in rural areas. A survey has shown, for instance, that in rainfed rural areas the majority of domestic workers are women (58.5 per cent), 41.1 per cent of whom have never been to school, compared to 19.7 per cent of male domestic workers who have never been to school (household and farm survey, 2000-2001).



**Table 3**  
**Illiteracy by gender**

(Percentage of illiterate women aged 15-49 and illiterate men aged 15-59, by selected sociodemographic characteristics)

Level of education	Sociodemographic characteristics			
	Women		Men	
	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number
None	93.6	2 357	94.6	464
Koranic	57.8	2 072	46.6	417
Primary	32.9	2 146	23.4	566
Secondary or higher	0.0	1 153	0.0	745

Source: DHSM, 2000-2001.

183. Consequently, public and private action has been taken to bring down the school dropout rate. The Nutricom project, for instance, as part of its activities, recruits female assistants with secondary school diplomas at the *brevet* or baccalaureate level or the equivalent, to try to reduce the dropout rate. Its policy is to give the women some work experience in its centres to enable them later to take examinations to become primary school teachers.

184. As for sports, the authorities are giving special attention to physical education. The recent adoption of a national strategy for the development of sports in Mauritania underscores that trend. Among its objectives are:

- Enhancing the value of a complete and harmonious development of the person in Mauritania;
- Preparing boys, girls and adolescents for full and active citizenship, so that they can eventually take part in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals;
- Encouraging young people to become active by practising team sports, and supporting the development of outstanding athletic achievement, the protection of athletes, and the like.

185. This strategy will, inter alia, help to:

- Promote high-quality physical education programmes for all young people of school age;
- Keep the physical well-being and overall health of the population from declining;
- Encourage a healthy use of leisure time.

186. Lastly, the issues of health and family well-being are today being given sustained attention in civics courses and also in media broadcasts devoted to the topic.

## 9. Equal rights to employment and work (art. 11)

187. All citizens are guaranteed access to public office or employment under article 12 of the Constitution. Article 15 of Act No. 093-009 of 18 January 1993, on the general regulations for civil servants and contracted State officials, provides that no distinction shall be made between civil servants because of their views, their gender or their race. Article 105 of the same law provides the same protection for contracted State officials. Similar provisions are also included in the collective labour agreement and in the new Labour Code adopted in 2004.

188. In practice, the Government applies the provisions of Decree No. 96-021, of 19 March 1996, which establishes the composition, organizational structure and working methods of the National Commission on Competitive Examinations. The Commission, which is assigned to the office of the Prime Minister, is an autonomous administrative authority whose mission is to ensure the transparency of competitive examinations for posts in the civil service and public establishments charged with administrative responsibilities (art. 2).

189. In keeping with the spirit of the Constitution and its explicit stipulation that the only limitations on access to public office and employment are “those determined by the law” (art. 12), and to guarantee that everyone, without distinction, has opportunities for promotion at work, all technical or vocational institutions are open to women for vocational training, refresher courses, upgrading of skills or ongoing training.

190. The Centre Supérieur d’Études Techniques (CSET), the Centres de Formation et de Perfectionnement Professionnels (CFPP), the technical high school, the business high school and several other establishments are open, without discrimination, to women. Women accounted for 26 per cent of all graduates in 2000-2001 and 29 per cent of students enrolled in all vocational training institutions in 2001-2002.

191. Women workers are also guaranteed the same rights as men in all matters pertaining to remuneration and job performance evaluations.

192. To this end, Mauritanian law guarantees the right to satisfactory working conditions. Civil service regulations ensure the right to remuneration, and Decree No. 99-01 of 11 January 1999 establishes the salary scale for civil servants and public officials. Under this decree, remuneration consists of the following:

- Base salary;
- Supplementary salary;
- Benefits and allowances;
- Dependency allowances.

193. Article 3 of Decree No. 99-01 of 11 January 1999 establishes the method for calculating base pay, the index point value, the composition of supplementary salary, the classification grid and relevant salary scales. Public officials receive the following benefits and allowances:

- Dependency allowance;
- Hardship allowance;

- Incentive bonus;
- Housing allowance;
- Domestic service allowance;
- Additional skills bonus.

194. Public officials are classified under categories A, B and C, and as contracted officials. The salary scale (base pay and supplementary salary), excluding allowances and benefits, is as follows:

Category A	19,483-51,806	(index 101-342)
Category B	16,822-34,063	(index 71-193)
Category C	13,390-24,833	(index 43-132)
Contractual	10,192-20,565	(index 23-98)

The aforementioned salary scale does not take into account recent salary increases for civil servants.

195. In the private and comparable sectors, individual workers' wages are determined by the job they are assigned in the company. It is at least equal to the minimum wage established for the worker's category.

196. A Classification Commission presided over by the competent labour inspector and made up of an equal number of employer and worker representatives monitors the application of the provisions (arts. 34 et seq. of the National Collective Labour Agreement of 13 February 1974).

197. Wages for workers in the private and comparable sectors are at least equal to the wages established for an equivalent position in the public sector.

198. Workers' remuneration is made up of the following:

- Wages for the category concerned;
- Various benefits;
- Seniority bonus.

199. Articles 37 to 42 of the National Collective Labour Agreement contain instructions regarding wages, allowances and benefits.

200. The level of remuneration is determined, taking into account the country's economic and financial situation, through negotiations between employer and employee representatives. In general, the level of remuneration of Mauritanian workers in the public and private sectors has been regularly revised upward over the past few years.

201. Thus, a flat increase of UM 8,000 was applied to salaries of civil servants and other State officials, both civilian and military (i.e., 20-80 per cent of average to low wages); in addition, retirement pensions for civilians and military personnel were raised by 20 per cent as of January 2005. These increases were made after the 28 per cent increase that had been granted for all categories in January 2004.

202. Parallel to the measures taken for the benefit of the public sector, and as part of its continuing effort to narrow the gap between public and private sector workers,

the Government established a mechanism for dialogue between employers and other stakeholders. This agreement encouraged a social dialogue between employers and those labour unions that are under government supervision. The dialogue culminated in 2005 with the Minimum Guaranteed Inter-professional Salary (SMIG) being raised from UM 4,312 to UM 21,000 (an increase of 397 per cent). It should also be noted that on 20 June 1961, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania ratified the 1928 International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention concerning the creation of minimum wage-fixing machinery.

203. In the area of social security, health and job safety, women's rights are guaranteed by three basic laws: the general statute on civil servants and State officials, the law establishing the social security system and the Collective Labour Agreement.

204. Under article 38 of Act No. 093-009 of 18 January 1993, civil servants are entitled to the following allowances:

- Family allowance;
- Maternity allowance.

205. Civil servants are entitled to old-age pensions and, if necessary, a lifetime disability annuity, as provided for under the retirement system of the civil service pension fund, when they have accumulated 35 years of service after the age of 18, or when they reach the age of 60 (art. 72 of Act No. 093-009 of 18 January 1993).

206. Workers in the private sector are entitled to social security benefits provided by the national social security fund system (Act No. 67-039 of 2 February 1967, establishing the social security system as amended by Act No. 87-296 of 24 November 1982). Workers covered by this system are entitled to the following allowances:

- Prenatal allowance;
- New child allowance;
- Family allowances;
- Daily maternity benefits;
- Assistance to mothers and infants.

207. Medical services offered by companies or groups of companies are responsible for examining workers who claim to be sick and providing or arranging for such care as may be necessary; they also monitor sanitary conditions in the workplace and provide medical expertise as required.

208. Articles 23 to 25 and 64 to 65 of the Collective Labour Agreement lay down the conditions under which compensation is to be provided to sick workers or workers who have suffered an accident, and stipulate what types of assistance are to be provided to hospitalized workers.

209. The relevant texts (civil service statute, Labour Code, Collective Labour Agreement) guarantee women workers the right to maternity leave. To enable women to have peace of mind at their jobs, well-staffed kindergartens and nurseries have been set up under the aegis of the State Secretariat for the Status of Women

(SECF). On 8 November 1963, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania ratified ILO Convention No. 3 concerning Maternity Protection, of 1919.

**Table 4**  
**Wage earners and year-round wage earners, by gender**

(Percentage of women and men who earn wages and percentage of those who earned wages throughout the year (during the last 12 months), by sociodemographic characteristics)

	<i>Sociodemographic characteristics</i>					
	<i>Women</i>			<i>Men</i>		
	<i>Wage earners</i>	<i>Year-round wage earners</i>	<i>Number of women</i>	<i>Wage earners</i>	<i>Year-round wage earners</i>	<i>Number of men</i>
<b>Age group</b>						
15-19	14.6	6.0	1 697	35.6	19.2	494
20-29	24.0	9.1	2 773	70.0	44.9	618
30-39	30.4	15.7	2 024	91.2	55.5	485
40-49	28.0	12.9	1 234	89.2	61.8	390
<b>Current marital status</b>						
Single	19.6	8.7	2 211	53.3	31.6	1 067
Currently married	24.1	10.4	4 541	90.4	59.3	876
Divorced, widowed	35.4	17.2	976	86.8	57.5	44
<b>Number of live children</b>						
0	19.2	8.9	3 035	57.7	34.8	1 219
1	20.2	10.1	880	91.0	61.0	129
2	26.8	10.3	854	88.5	64.4	142
3	31.3	14.7	734	99.4	65.3	135
4	26.8	12.2	604	87.7	47.8	108
5+	30.3	12.7	1 621	88.2	58.2	255
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	33.8	17.3	3 554	70.8	51.3	1 135
Rural	16.1	5.3	4 174	89.8	35.2	852
<b>Educational level</b>						
None	22.1	8.3	2 357	78.9	39.7	386
Koranic only	23.7	9.3	2 072	85.1	46.6	355
Primary	25.8	11.6	2 146	70.9	46.2	540
Secondary or higher	26.8	17.0	1 153	58.0	44.5	706
<b>Well-being index</b>						
1 (poorest)	18.3	5.8	1 373	79.1	31.8	294
2	22.5	7.9	1 431	72.0	37.5	352
3	24.3	9.4	1 570	62.8	36.5	307
4	24.1	11.4	1 634	70.1	51.0	409
5 (wealthiest)	30.6	17.9	1 720	69.4	53.8	625
<b>Total</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>7 728</b>	<b>70.4</b>	<b>44.4</b>	<b>1 987</b>

Source: DHSM, 2000-2001.

## **10. Equal access to health services (art. 12)**

210. Equal access to all health services is a key concern for the Government of Mauritania. This right is established in the preamble and reiterated in the body of the Constitution of 20 July 1991 by reference to economic and social rights.

211. The State ensures protection for all social strata, and especially for women, taking into account their vulnerability as a result of their reproductive function, and their responsibility for the healthy development of their children.

212. Under the national health policy, the health-care services provide balanced treatment for women in Mauritania in a number of different areas. The areas covered are: (a) prenatal monitoring, (b) women's access to health care, (c) prenatal care and tetanus vaccination, (d) combating harmful practices, (e) expanded programme of immunization (EPI), (f) reproductive health programme, (g) national programme to combat AIDS and STDs and (h) nutrition.

### **(a) Prenatal monitoring**

213. Coverage for prenatal and post-natal consultation is provided by the different health structures of the country. However, these services are requested mostly by women who live in urban areas. The percentage of assisted deliveries is low in the interior of the country. Also, 60 per cent of midwives are concentrated in Nouakchott.

214. With regard to prenatal consultations, 65 per cent of women giving birth had consulted a health professional at least once; 37 per cent said they had consulted a midwife at least once; and 20 per cent said they had consulted a physician. Nurses are not often consulted (8 per cent), and neither are assistant midwives/obstetricians (less than 1 per cent).

215. The proportion of women who have received prenatal care varies according to certain factors, in particular place of residence and level of education: 84 per cent of women in Nouakchott and 85 per cent of women in other cities have consulted health personnel at least once compared to 50 per cent of those living in rural areas. Women in the centre and south of the country (45 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively) are the least likely to receive prenatal care.

216. Those proportions increase significantly, however, with women's level of education. Of mothers who have completed secondary school, 94 per cent have received prenatal care compared to 78 per cent of those who have only a primary education and approximately 55 per cent of mothers who have received no education or have only attended Koranic school.

### **(b) Women's access to health care**

217. Over the past five years, less than half of all births occurred in a health-care establishment; 51 per cent occurred in the home. Childbirth in a health-care establishment is very frequent in urban areas (82 per cent), compared to only 23 per cent in rural areas.

218. The proportion of births taking place in a health-care centre likewise increases with the mother's level of education: from a low figure of 33 per cent when the mother has received no schooling to 88 per cent when the mother has a secondary-

level education or higher. Over the past five years, more than half of all births occurred with the assistance of trained personnel (57 per cent): with the assistance of a midwife (36 per cent), a doctor (10 per cent), a nurse (8 per cent), or a birth attendant (4 per cent).

219. A traditional birth attendant was present during 21 per cent of births and the family members were present during 15 per cent of births; nearly 7 per cent of births occurred without assistance. The rate of medical assistance during childbirth varies greatly according to place of residence and level of education.

220. In urban areas 88 per cent of women were assisted during childbirth by trained personnel compared to only 33 per cent of women in rural areas. Levels of assisted childbirth range from 92 per cent in Nouakchott and 74 per cent in the north to only 23 per cent in the south. Women who had at least secondary-level education said that they gave birth assisted by a trained individual in 93 per cent of cases compared to only 71 per cent of women who had primary-level education and less than 50 per cent of women who had only attended Koranic school or had not attended school at all.

**(c) Prenatal care and tetanus vaccination**

221. According to the Demographic and Health Survey in Mauritania (DHSM), 40 per cent of women who had had at least one live birth over the previous five years had received at least one dose of tetanus vaccine during pregnancy in order to protect the child from neo-natal tetanus; of that number, 14 per cent had received only a single dose and 25 per cent two doses or more. Vaccination rates varied: in Nouakchott, 59 per cent of women had received at least one dose of tetanus vaccine compared to 48 per cent of women in other cities and only 29 per cent in rural areas.

222. Tetanus vaccination rates vary from 59 per cent in Nouakchott to 20 per cent in the south. Mothers having at least secondary-level education were more likely to be vaccinated (58 per cent) than those who had only a primary-level education (51 per cent), with even lower rates for mothers who only had Koranic education (32 per cent) or had not attended school at all (34 per cent).

**(d) Combating harmful practices: excision and force-feeding**

223. Excision, which involves the removal of part of a woman's external genital organs, is a fairly common custom in Mauritania. In addition to the suffering caused by pain, excision can make the woman susceptible to numerous infections.

224. According to DHSM, 93 per cent of women who know what excision is have been victims of this practice. Nearly three quarters of Mauritanian women between 15 and 49 years old have been subjected to excision. Excision rates vary greatly according to ethnic group as follows: 92 per cent of Soninké women, 72 per cent of Pulaar women, 71 per cent of Arab women. On the other hand, only 28 per cent of Wolof women have been subjected to excision. Excision has, however, become less common over the last 15 years and is less frequently practised in urban areas (45 per cent) than in rural areas (77 per cent).

225. Force-feeding is a practice in which female children and adolescents are forced to eat excessively so that they will gain weight and become obese. This practice is detrimental to their health. An overwhelming majority of Mauritanian women are aware of the practice of force-feeding and a little more than one woman in five in

the 15 to 49 age group is being or has been force-fed. The practice is limited almost exclusively to the Maures. The highest rates of force-feeding of women occur in the central regions of the country (30 per cent) and the south (36 per cent), in rural areas (24 per cent) and among women who have not attended school (39 per cent).

226. Such practices are, however, becoming less common thanks to public information and awareness campaigns undertaken by the ministries concerned to underscore the negative effects of these practices on the health of girls and women.

227. The draft Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure for minors will strengthen efforts to eliminate the practice of female genital mutilation.

**(e) Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI)**

228. According to the demographic and health survey, there were slight differences in vaccination rates by gender, with rates for girls being slightly higher than for boys, or 34 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively. Vaccination rates varied little in urban areas: 36 per cent of children in Nouakchott received all EPI vaccinations compared to 41 per cent in other cities; vaccination coverage in rural areas was, however, much lower (27 per cent).

229. Children whose mothers had primary or secondary education had higher immunization rates for the illnesses targeted by EPI (40 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively) than those whose mothers had only attended Koranic school or whose mothers had not received any schooling (28 per cent and 27 per cent, respectively).

230. After reviewing the current situation for maternal and child care, the authorities, in the context of the health master plan, have identified the following objectives:

- Reduce child mortality: neonatal mortality will be further reduced by means of measures such as monitoring of pregnancy, assisted childbirth and treatment of neonatal hypoglycaemia, hypothermia, asphyxia and infections. Attention to the problems of premature birth and low birth weight should likewise have a positive effect. As part of these efforts, all health personnel will receive training; families will be provided with information and education; health centres will receive better equipment; and immediate and exclusive maternal breastfeeding will be promoted.
- Reduce maternal mortality: maternal deaths from obstetric causes will be reduced by half, in particular by reducing rates of puerperal infections caused by eclampsia, haemorrhaging and dystocia, and by improving medical care. Mortality as a result of non-obstetric causes will be reduced by 60 per cent. The rate of nutritional anaemia in pregnant women (iron and folic acid deficiencies) will be reduced by 33 per cent and should no longer affect more than 25 per cent of pregnant women.

231. Malaria rates will be significantly reduced. At the operational level, 80 per cent of pregnant women in rural areas and 100 per cent of pregnant women in urban areas will be guaranteed access to good quality pre- and post-natal care as close as possible to their place of residence, and 60 per cent of pregnant women will receive assistance from qualified personnel during high-risk pregnancy or childbirth or an obstetric emergency. Maternal mortality cannot of course be reduced without also increasing efforts to improve family well-being.



**(f) Reproductive health programme**

232. Couples who so desire may use contraception to prevent pregnancies which are too early, too close together, too late or too frequent. The current very low rate of contraceptive use will be increased to at least 6 per cent.

233. The demographic and health survey (Mauritania 2000-2001, preliminary report) reveals that awareness of methods of contraception is relatively high among women in general, including married women: 69 per cent of women surveyed said that they were aware of at least one method of contraception and 67 per cent were aware of at least one modern method; the figures for married women were 71 and 68 per cent respectively.

234. One married woman in five (20 per cent) reported having used at least one method of contraception of some kind, and 13 per cent said they had used a modern method of contraception. Approximately 16 per cent of men said they had used a method of contraception of some kind and 13 per cent a modern method. The respective percentages for married men are 23 per cent and 16 per cent.

235. With the exception of the 40 to 49 age group, the rate of use of modern contraception methods increases with age, from a low of 3 per cent for women aged 15 to 19 to a high of 8 per cent for women aged 35 to 39. The rate of use of modern contraceptive methods varies greatly according to place of residence: 13 per cent in Nouakchott, 10 per cent in other cities and 1 per cent in rural areas.

236. Contraception rates vary greatly according to region: after Nouakchott, the north is in second place (12 per cent), with much lower levels in the river regions, of the south and centre, with rates of 1 per cent and 2 per cent. Total number of children seems to be a determining factor in contraceptive use; the rate is virtually zero for women having no children, compared to more than 6 per cent for women having three children or more.

**(g) National programme to combat AIDS and STDs**

237. The first AIDS case was diagnosed in 1987. In 1996 there were 31 new cases and the total number of reported AIDS cases as at 31 December 1996 was 532. The total number of HIV-positive individuals is estimated to be more than 10,000, or approximately 0.5 per cent of the general population. The number of HIV-positive blood donors shows a worrying increase from 0.3 per cent in 1992 to 0.5 per cent in 1996 and 1 per cent in 1997; the 2005 rate was approximately 1 per cent.

238. The national programme to combat AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) focuses on prevention and proper and early care. Knowledge of how HIV is transmitted has increased significantly among the population following the first awareness campaigns, which underscored Islamic values, methods of transmission and the dangers of the disease. The authorities have adopted a number of measures to give new impetus to the fight against STDs and AIDS by creating a favourable environment for such efforts.

239. It should be noted that a relatively high proportion of women and men have heard of HIV/AIDS. Levels of awareness are, however, slightly higher among men than women, especially in rural areas. At the national level, 76 per cent of women surveyed said they had heard of HIV/AIDS compared to 86 per cent of men. In rural areas, however, 75 per cent of male respondents and only 63 per cent of female

respondents said they had heard of HIV/AIDS. Awareness of AIDS was also higher among men and women in Nouakchott than in other cities.

240. Although a relatively high number of Mauritians have heard of HIV/AIDS, only 34 per cent of women and 65 per cent of men were able to cite at least one way to avoid infection. Levels of awareness of the ways to prevent HIV/AIDS vary greatly according to place of residence, regardless of gender. In Nouakchott, 54 per cent of women were able to cite at least one way to avoid infection compared to 46 per cent in other cities and only 19 per cent in rural areas. For men, the figures were 85, 71 and 46 per cent, respectively. Furthermore, 43 per cent of women and 10 per cent of men believe that nothing can be done to prevent AIDS or do not know if it can be prevented.

241. Campaigns undertaken by the National AIDS Programme (NAP) focus on providing information to the entire population, and stress:

- Methods of transmission, including mother-to-child;
- Higher risk of infection for women;
- Higher risk of infection for prostitutes;
- Conjugal fidelity, abstinence and the need to use protection for all high-risk relations.

242. The authorities have established centres for AIDS-related health education. Awareness campaigns have succeeded in involving youth associations, women's NGOs and health and educational institutions; the involvement of a group of imams is particularly important in a country which is 100 per cent Muslim and where Islam is the dominant religion.

**(h) Nutrition**

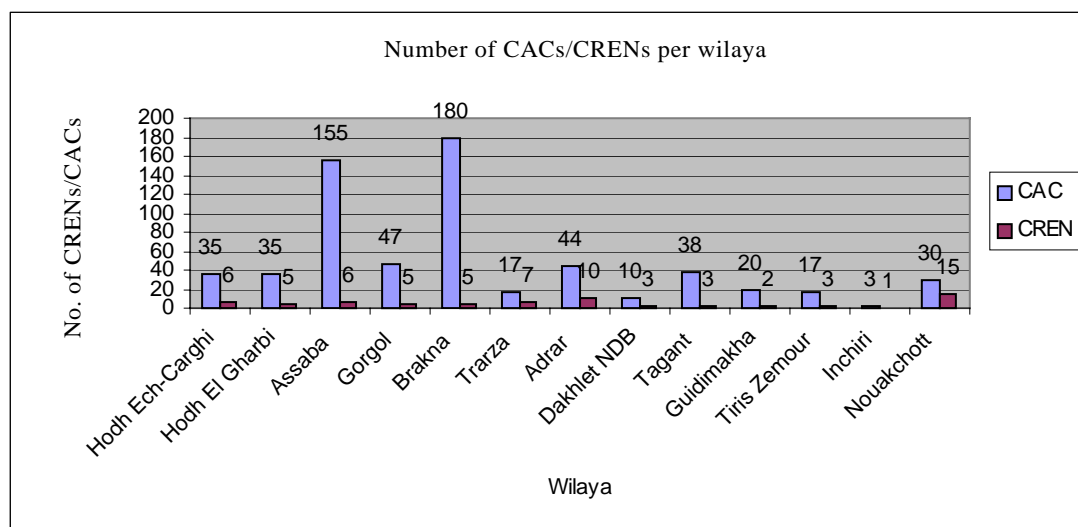
243. The nutritional situation in Mauritania is characterized by energy-protein malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and the resulting morbidity. Surveys to date have revealed a fairly worrying situation. The 2000-2001 Demographic and Health Survey (DHSM) found that more than 35 per cent of children under 5 suffered from chronic malnutrition and 17 per cent severe malnutrition. There is currently no satisfactory national response to the country's nutritional situation, and a national nutrition policy must be instituted in order to establish a benchmark framework within which the Government, its development partners and civil society will be able to work to increase the well-being of the population.

244. Notwithstanding that situation, identification of cases of malnutrition based on anthropometric criteria is undertaken by 67 per cent of health centres and 17 per cent of health posts.

245. Efforts to combat the various types of malnutrition have been implemented in several ministries.

246. The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (MSAS) does this by formulating and implementing nutrition programmes. Activities aimed at combating malnutrition are carried out by the Centres for Recovery and Nutritional Education (CRENs) and the Community Food Centres (CACs), which have been incorporated into the country's health-care facilities.

Figure 1  
Distribution of CRENs/CACs per wilaya in 2003

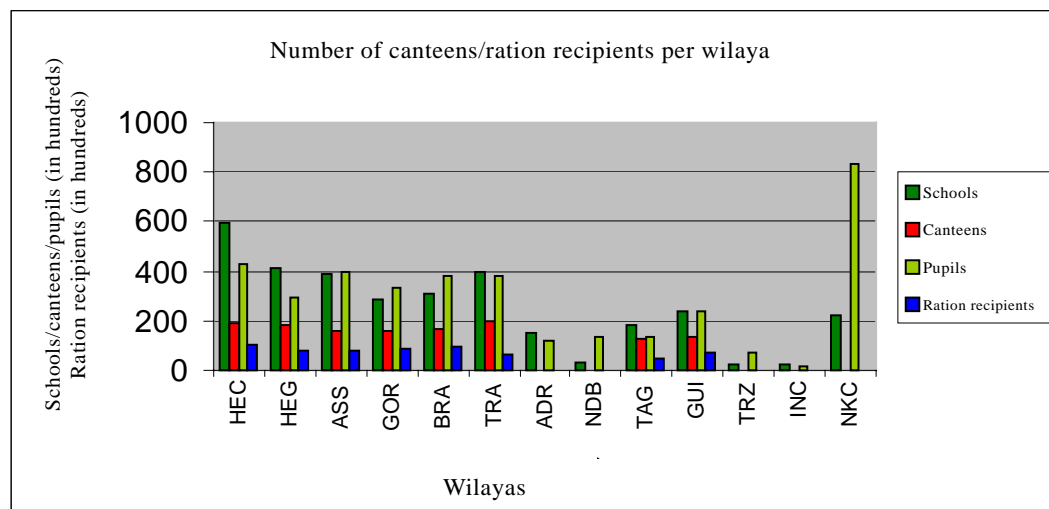


Source: DPS/MSAS.

247. The 702 CACs and CRENs located throughout the country provide nutritional health care for 19,325 children, or an average of 27 children per facility, representing a coverage rate of 2.8 per cent among children up to 6 years of age.

248. The Ministry of National Education (MEN) also contributes to this effort through its school canteen department, which is supported by the World Food Programme (WFP) as part of its efforts to combat malnutrition through its own school canteen programme. WFP provided total funding of UM440.6 million in 2002. During the same year, the school canteen programme covered 1,316 schools in eight wilayas (Hodh Ech Chargui, Hodh El Gharbi, Assaba, Gorgol, Brakna, Trarza, Tagant and Guidimagha). The school canteens provide food for 64,580 ration recipients, including 62,600 in primary schools and 1,980 in mahadras and Islamic institutes. They cover 40.3 per cent of basic schools, and thus 16.7 per cent of all pupils in basic education. Mahadras and Islamic institutes account for 4.6 per cent of all canteen services. It therefore seems clear that there is a significant shortfall in canteen coverage in primary education, particularly in the mahadras.

Figure 2  
Distribution of canteens/ration recipients per wilaya



249. SECF runs a community nutrition project entitled “Nutricom” for pregnant women and for children up to age 3. The aim of the project is to test the community nutrition approach through two different models — one for rural areas and the other for urban areas — with a view to reducing infant/juvenile malnutrition and bringing about a measurable improvement in mothers’ health. The project covers five wilayas: Hodh El Gharbi, Assaba, Gorgol, Nouakchott and Dakhlet Nouadhibou. The project also enjoys the institutional support of SECF in four areas: nutrition, microprojects, social mobilization projects and external assessment. Under the project, 117 CNCs have been opened in the five wilayas covered, with the monthly capacity to cater for 46,800 children (equivalent to 400 children per CNC per month).

250. The following results have also been achieved through the Nutricom project:

- The coverage rate for the 0-3 age group has risen to 11.2 per cent;
- 17,089 women have attended informational meetings;
- 234 community nutrition workers in the various wilayas have been given training in nutrition and in information, education and communication (IEC);
- 116 microprojects have been set up in the five wilayas covered by the project;
- Several training programmes have been carried out for income-generating activity (IGA) beneficiaries, in the management, selection, planning, monitoring and evaluation of projects;
- A functional literacy programme has been implemented;

- Course materials have been developed and equipment to aid social mobilization purchased, and a survey has been carried out on nutrition indicators in rural environments.

251. The Food Security Commission (CSA) carries out activities to ensure the food security of the people. Timely actions are also taken in the event of emergency or disasters.

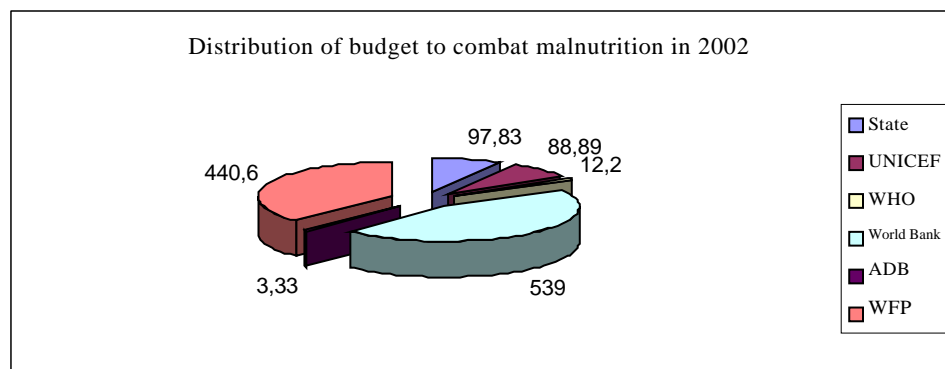
Table 5  
**Main nutrition indicators**

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Rate</i>	<i>Regional average (sub-Saharan Africa)</i>	<i>Source for data on Mauritania</i>
<b>Iron deficiency anaemia rate in pregnant women</b>	53%	–	PNSR/MSAS
<b>Low birth weight</b>	9.2%	15%	DHSM 2000-2001
<b>Malnutrition</b>			
Chronic	35%	–	
Severe	17%	–	
<b>Weight deficiency</b>	32%	20.5%	
<b>Growth retardation</b>	35%	37%	
<b>Emaciation</b>	13%	10%	
<b>Breastfeeding</b>			
Breastfed only (0-3 months)	21.6%	34%	
Breastfed plus weaning food	96.7%	60%	
Still breastfed at 20 to 23 months	49.6%	52%	
<b>Coverage of vitamin A supplements (6-59 months)</b>	57.8%	54%	
<b>Proportion of households consuming iodized salt</b>	1.1%	64%	

The low proportion of households using iodized salt partly explains the strong prevalence of problems due to iodine deficiency.

252. The total funding mobilized from the State and other sources to combat malnutrition in 2002 was UM1,185.85 million. This amount does not include funds mobilized by CSA, which were channeled through the departments of health and education and SECF to the various nutrition programmes. The most notable projects undertaken in this regard were the school canteens project, the Nutricom project, and the national malnutrition programme of MSAS. WFP contributes to the fight against malnutrition through MEN by supplying eating facilities for the school canteens project.

Figure 3  
**Distribution of the budget to combat malnutrition, by funding source**



253. Breastfeeding is widely practised in Mauritania, especially in rural areas. However, it is not common practice to rely exclusively on breastfeeding during the first six months, with other foods often being introduced at an early stage.

254. Within the context of the National Action Plan on Nutrition, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (MSAS) has also implemented a number of strategies whose goals include the following:

- Developing national capacities for evaluating and monitoring the nutritional situation;
- Incorporating dietary and nutritional considerations into development objectives;
- Improving the quality and security of food products;
- Providing socio-economic and nutritional care to vulnerable population groups;
- Training workers to implement the plan;
- Increasing the provision of information and communication to the public;
- Strengthening the institutional framework and intersectoral relations.

255. In addition to these general measures, some specific measures have been introduced to combat deficiencies in micronutrients. For example, the programme to combat blindness has been revitalized, with a focus on vitamin deficiency. Products that are rich in vitamin A have been selected, and their consumption encouraged.

256. Measures have been introduced to combat iodine deficiency. For example, a law has been adopted on the use of iodized salt in human and animal foods; economic agents and NGOs have been supported in their production of iodized salt; and efforts have been made to sensitize and inform people about the dangers of iodine deficiency and about the beneficial effects of iodized salt. Actions have also been taken to promote the exclusive breastfeeding of children from birth to six months.

257. As a result of these actions, certain hospitals, small- and medium-sized industries, health centres and health posts have been elevated to the status of “baby-friendly” hospitals, and good breastfeeding and weaning practices have been disseminated in order to reduce the malnutrition prevalence rate. Training activities undertaken in this context have already involved national and regional hospitals. However, the draft law on the sale of breast milk substitutes has not yet been adopted.

## **11. Finance and social security (art. 13)**

258. The Constitution of 20 July 1991, by its reference to economic and social rights (preamble) and freedoms of commerce and industry; opinion and thought; expression; and intellectual, artistic and scientific effort (art. 10), establishes full equality, without distinction, between men and women in these areas.

259. Accordingly, women enjoy almost all the rights provided for in the various laws (law on collective bargaining, Labour Code, Social Security Code), in the context of their jobs. Under current law, women are also entitled to family allowances.

260. With regard to the right to take out bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit, the State has initiated and developed several networks to promote the status of women and free them from dependence.

261. In this regard, the People’s Savings and Loan Banks (CAPEC) have been active in several parts of the country since 1996, and they have been very popular with members in general, and with women in particular. Since their introduction they have produced good results, attracting nearly 37,000 members (of whom 42 per cent are women), handing out UM3.5 billion in credits (of which 38 per cent went to women), and taking in around UM2 billion in savings deposits, with a recovery rate of almost 98 per cent.

262. Still in the area of finance, experience has shown that:

- Women are given formal microcredit slightly more often than men (around 52 per cent);
- Repayment rates for women are generally much higher than for men, with an average loss of under 10 per cent;
- The activities of the Women’s Savings and Loan Groups (GFEC) and the Nissa Banks (community microcredit banks for groups of disadvantaged women), which together have more than 28,652 women members (3,495 GFEC members and 25,157 Nissa Bank members) show that in 2001 the total loan amount granted through these institutions (UM1.115 billion) accounted for nearly 10.8 per cent of microfinancing granted nationally.

**Table 6**  
**GFEC results for the wilayas of Nouakchott, Gorgol and Hodh El Gharbi**  
**in 2001**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Total</i>
No. of members	1 129
Individual women	876
Groups	253
No. of women's projects	1 433
Total loans granted	121 330 960
Repayment rate	Over 80% on average
No. of women beneficiaries	30 613

*Source:* SECF, 2002.

263. The involvement of the Commission on Human Rights, Poverty Reduction and Integration (CDHLCPI) helps strengthen the Government's efforts to ensure that women can gain access to loans in order to launch income-generating activities. With the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the African Development Bank (ADB) and ILO, the Commission has begun to develop microfinance and microbusiness strategies as tools for combating poverty.

264. During 2002 the Commission developed working groups responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of these strategies.

265. Subsidies were awarded to eight microfinance institutions.

266. Balancing subsidies worth UM 12 million were awarded to 14 microfinance institutions to help them grant microcredits to poor population groups that cannot access the formal banking system.

267. The Commission also made 63 graduates available to these institutions to boost their technical capacity, and the National Bank of Mauritania helped the Commission to arrange loans for the start-up of 60 micro- and small businesses to be managed by graduates.

268. The Commission is also managing a poverty-reduction project (PRP). Financed by ADB and benefiting from the technical assistance of the World Bank and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the project aims mainly to support microbusiness and promote the development of a network of microfinance institutions.

269. The goals of the project are the following:

- To strengthen target groups' capacities to initiate and develop IGAs;
- To support the ability of IGAs to access loans, and strengthen the capacities of intermediaries and end-beneficiaries;
- To develop savings and loan associations that are able to provide community-based loans on suitable terms to poor population groups that cannot access the formal banking system.



270. During 2002 and 2003 the microbusiness-support component achieved the following results:

- IEC campaigns were carried out in Nouakchott and Rosso (2002). In 2003, these two towns were joined by Atar, Kaedi, Kiffa, Nema and Nouadhibou;
- Literacy training was provided to 4,000 customers and Partner Microfinance Institutions (IMFP) members in 2002 and 2003;
- 22 unemployed women graduates were assigned to the project in 2002;
- In 2002, loans of UM 180 million were granted to 31 IMFP (of which 17 were CAPEC), representing an increase of six loans compared with the year 2001. Nearly UM 180 million in loans were granted to IMFP in 2003.

271. In 2002 there were 20 operational CAPEC with more than 25,000 members (49 per cent of whom were women), UM 877 million in deposits and UM 1,808,121,940 in loans, granted to 25,084 borrowers (of which 8,813 were women). Under the Nutricom project, income-generating activities have been set up at all the 117 CNCs, and 113 microprojects have been funded, benefiting 12,914 women and providing training to 244 managers of microprojects.

272. Lastly, in 2004 the Mauritanian Union of Female Entrepreneurs and Businesswomen (UMAFEC) established three savings and loan associations to facilitate the efforts of the authorities to ensure women's advancement in this vital sector. However, women do face certain obstacles in gaining access to credit. These obstacles mostly relate to the unsuitable nature of the financial tools developed by formal institutions, especially in rural areas, which are increasingly prey to a kind of legalized usury by which traditional lenders grant loans at high interest rates.

273. With respect to the right to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life, women do not suffer any discrimination. They are able to take part in recreational activities on the same basis as men under Decree No. 2001-14 of 14 March 2001, which establishes a break of two days (Friday and Saturday) for all workers in the public and formal private sectors.

274. In the area of sports and culture, the State introduced new strategy-based policies (cultural, youth and sports development strategies) of relevance to all citizens in 2003.

275. In practice, there are no taboo areas for women in the cultural and sporting fields. Through their leadership of musical groups and their participation in the arts and in all sports played in Mauritania, women have acquired the necessary tools to combat any kind of discrimination designed to prevent their advancement.

## **12. Rural women (art. 14)**

276. While 45 per cent of Mauritania's total population lives in rural areas, those same areas are home to 76.5 per cent of the country's poor. The continuously high levels of poverty and extreme poverty in rural areas is linked to the weak performance of the agricultural sector, but also to significant gaps in economic infrastructures and access to basic social services. However, the rural sector plays a central role in the national economy and provides around 60 per cent of the country's workforce with an income.

277. Female workers engaged in agricultural and herding activities account for over 50 per cent of producers in rural areas. In that connection, it should be recalled that, during the 1990s, the rural sector experienced annual growth of around 4.2 per cent and accounted for approximately 20 per cent of the country's GDP.

278. The rural sector has considerable potential to create jobs, ensure food security and reduce poverty. However, it is facing many difficulties, including the seasonal nature of agricultural activities, low yields and a lack of skilled workers.

279. The authorities remain aware of the specific problems facing women. Accordingly, they are implementing measures in rural areas in a number of essential sectors, such as health, social security, literacy, housing, sanitation, water, electricity, communications and transport.

280. As part of this ambitious policy, health posts with trained personnel able to provide primary health-care services and ensure that women have healthy pregnancies and births (pregnancy monitoring and post-partum follow-up) can be found in almost every region.

281. In addition, the State is working to improve the standard of living in rural areas, in particular by bringing electricity to them. In that regard, it is basing its efforts both on the actions undertaken in the context of subregional cooperation under the energy component of the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (ODSR), which focuses on the introduction of electricity to all locations along the river from the Manantali and Diama dams, and on the programmes designed by the relevant departments of the Ministry of Energy and Oil (solar energy, etc.).

282. Access to drinking water has not been overlooked. In addition to the actions already undertaken, in 2005 the State established a well and sinking company with the mandate to dig as many wells and boreholes as necessary in order to be on schedule to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Similarly, the "Espoir Eau Potable" (Hope for Drinking Water) project, overseen by the Ministry of Rural Development, Water and the Environment, is continuing to develop infrastructures to facilitate access to drinking water in a number of rural wilayas. Rural populations, and particularly rural women, who are very involved in livestock-raising in those areas, are benefiting from those activities.

283. The construction of feeder and access roads in order to improve access to rural areas forms a large part of the global effort in which other institutions, such as the Food Security Commission and the Commission on Human Rights, Poverty Reduction and Integration, are involved.

284. The access of rural populations in general and of women in particular to communications services is one of the Government's primary concerns, as evidenced, inter alia, by the extension of telephone network coverage and the speeding up of access to television and radio for as many inhabitants of remote areas as possible.

285. In addition, the large-scale literacy campaign (2004-2006) is being duly implemented throughout national territory and covers all ages and both genders.

286. Lastly, Mauritanian Women's Day (established in 1986) was celebrated, as every year, on 5 March. The theme for 2005 was "Working together to eradicate female illiteracy". The Government's interest in combating that phenomenon is therefore apparent.

287. With the support of the Ministry of Rural Development and the Environment, rural women have become involved in market gardening (managing, marketing and processing), acquired new techniques and knowledge to improve their working conditions and achieved a degree of financial independence, which has enabled them to take all the necessary steps to expand their activities. All the actions and activities undertaken for and by rural women are part of the effort to reduce poverty and are therefore likely to improve their working and living conditions as well as increase their income.

288. Those actions and activities are:

### **1. The introduction of market gardening at water points**

289. In 1999-2000, 145 women's cooperatives in 145 villages in the wilayas of Tagant, Assaba, Hodh Ech Chargui and Hodh El Gharbi began market gardening.

290. A follow-up and evaluation survey conducted in May and June revealed that, in addition to production techniques, women (3,421) had learned how to prepare meals as well as traditional preserving techniques for produce (primarily drying). The survey also revealed that the Agricultural Services Project (PSA) had contributed to the production of 265,880 tons of produce from market gardens run by women in remote areas of Assaba, Hodh Ech Chargui and Hodh El Gharbi.

### **2. The introduction of oil presses**

291. While the inhabitants of certain rural areas produce considerable quantities of groundnut oil that they sell at very little profit, they also buy cooking oil at prohibitively high prices. PSA has launched a programme consisting of the introduction of oily varieties of groundnut and the use of an oil press for extracting cooking oil.

292. The programme comprises a number of actions, including:

- The introduction of oily varieties of groundnut in R'Kiz and Foum Gleita;
- The manufacture of 20 presses and a shelling machine at Boghé professional lycée;
- The provision of training to 375 women in 162 villages in the wilayas of Guidimagha, Gorgol, Brakna, Assaba, Hodh Ech Chargui and Hodh El Gharbi on methods of extracting groundnut oil using a traditional press;
- The introduction of 22 oil presses in those wilayas (20 manufactured presses and 2 prototypes purchased overseas).

### **3. Traditional crafts**

293. During the reporting period, centres for the advancement of women, which were established by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) with funds provided by the Government of the Netherlands, embarked upon traditional craft activities. Activities are already under way in four of the seven centres, namely those in N'Diago, Ebden, Ziré II and Moidina. Those activities revolve around mat making, tent making and sewing.

### **3.1 Mat making**

294. This activity began after Diawling National Park supplied women in the lower delta region with raw materials (skins and sporobolus stems) and equipment (overalls, knives, gloves and files). That free donation has benefited nine villages (Ebden, Kahara, Dar Rahma, Moidina, Dar Eslam, Khaya, Ziré II, Ziré I, Birette and Bouhajra) and has enabled most women to make six or seven mats (in Bouhajra, Ebden and Ziré II).

### **3.2 Tent making**

295. As with the production of mats, raw materials for the manufacture of five tents have been given to five women's cooperatives. The tents, which are still under construction, have been assigned to the following five cooperatives: Maimah, Sbeika Leksa, Ziré Sbeika, Hasi Marrou and Hel Mohamed Amar.

### **3.3 Sewing**

296. Sewing has been introduced into the area by Diawling National Park. Twelve sewing machines and the relevant accessories have been supplied to eight locations.

## **4. The microfinance sector**

297. Access to short-, medium- and long-term credit is a major source of concern for many women. Since most materials and equipment can no longer be used free of charge, women have been forced to obtain additional funding to ensure that they can have access to particular equipment.

298. The credit systems in place vary from lender to lender (World Bank, IFAD, AFESD, ADB etc.), but they are very often completely decentralized in each area. Thus, for example, the Oasis system, which is based on the long-term accumulation of savings from shares that generate income on the basis of the performance of the activity financed by the credit, is managed by the shareholders.

299. Since the women's groups were established and their activities began, the Oasis Project has provided them with funds amounting to UM 28,762,178 with a view to strengthening market garden production, small-scale livestock rearing, trade and traditional crafts. These activities are financed jointly by the Project and the women's groups, which, on average, provide one third of the funds needed to implement the agreed actions.

300. These funds have lent a new dynamic to women's activities in oases. The organization of women's groups has been strengthened, and women living in oases are playing an increasingly significant role in economic activities, thereby increasing their incomes. The opening of five community stores in the wilaya of Inchiri (the villages of Bénechaab, Lejwade, Libeidhatt, Berzeimat and Elghareh) should also be seen from that perspective.

## **5. Collaboration with NGOs**

301. The partnership with NGOs in the wilaya of Brakna is progressing as anticipated and the results achieved mean that there are plans to extend it to the wilaya of Gorgol. In the 40 villages working with NGOs, a number of actions have produced satisfactory results, in particular:

- The improvement of 143 homes, which has been of benefit to households in 25 villages;
- 122 demonstrations of the manufacture of traditional salt licks for small ruminants in the area;
- The establishment of 25 reforestation nurseries in 20 villages in order to supply 6,850 woodland plants.

## 6. Training outreach staff

302. The National Rural Development Company (SONADER) has developed a training plan to improve the competencies of its staff and ensure continuous learning so that it can provide high-quality services and adapt to its new mandates.

## 7. Training producers

303. The activities undertaken in 2000 essentially consisted in:

- Implementing the harmonized intervention approach for socio-professional organizations (OSPs);
- Strengthening the three OSP support units, two of which have each benefited from the addition of a volunteer;
- Organizing two study visits for rural women’s organizations (OPFs) within the subregion (Senegal and Mali);
- Conducting a study on the legal transfer of primary infrastructures;
- Providing direct support to 180 cooperatives, nine OPFs and 14 individual producers. Support activities, which varied from one OSP to another, were determined on the basis of an assessment of:
  - Standard economic and organizational functions;
  - Organizational and management training for cooperative board members currently under way in PPG1 and PPG2 and in small areas of Brakna;
  - Functional literacy training currently under way for 230 producers from 22 cooperatives, 8 of which are composed of women;
  - Training under way for 123 *agadiers* in Fom Gleita and 22 in Kaédi;
- Preparing funding applications addressed to institutions with a view to obtaining financial support;
- Supporting the legal recognition of 93 OSFs, including three cooperative unions;
- Maintaining production tools with a view to resuming activities;
- Supporting the establishment of a network of partners of the former ILO/ACOPAM programme.

304. Within the framework of the Integrated Programme for the Development of Irrigated Agriculture in Mauritania (PDIAM), other activities involving the provision of advice on agricultural matters are being carried out. They include:

- Conducting information and awareness-raising missions for SONADER personnel working on the ground and producers;
- Holding a national information workshop from 21 to 24 May 2000 on supporting the management and organization of agricultural plots;
- Disseminating legal and regulatory texts and providing regional administrations with additional assistance in the form of a summary of the various texts governing the different types of OSP;
- Conducting an implementation study on a legal and regulatory framework for large areas.

## **8. Female employment in rural areas**

305. More than half the workforce lives in rural areas and the rural sector remains one of the primary sources of productive employment. Over 22,000 jobs were created in the rural sector during the 1992-1998 period. During the last six years, 9,961 jobs have been created in the traditional fisheries sector, while 12,408 have been created in building and public works (BPW).

306. In terms of overall rural employment (the economically active population), agriculture followed by livestock farming account for 215,917 (or 78.5 per cent) of all rural jobs.

307. Water control is essential for the improvement of the drinking water supply and for increased agricultural production. Based on technical, soil and economic research, a 10-year programme for the construction of 10 to 15 dams per year was launched in 2002. This effort has been supplemented by extensive programmes for the construction of collective dykes and sills, with the participation of the communities themselves and advisory support from NGOs. These activities come within the framework of programmes set up by the Commission on Human Rights, Poverty Reduction and Integration (CDHLCPI) and the Food Security Commission (CSA).

308. CDHLCPI has also set up multifaceted programmes in rural areas which take into account the challenges facing women. These programmes include the following:

- The Toumza Programme, which provides a safety net for rural populations and aims to increase the incomes of the poor by distributing small ruminants to the neediest families; this programme has benefited over 835 families in 10 different villages in the Brakna region and has already been extended to the wilayas of Adrar and Inchiri.
- The Programme to Assist Agricultural Cooperatives in Difficulty (PACAD), which was launched in 1999, at a time when most agricultural cooperatives were facing financial difficulties which threatened their very existence; PACAD aims to contribute to the fight against rural poverty by increasing the productivity of small farms and by creating paid jobs for the village communities of the Senegal river valley. The objective of the programme is to enable the communities concerned to rehabilitate the outlying areas that have been abandoned or mortgaged. PACAD has already benefited several cooperatives in the wilayas of Brakna, Trarza, Guidimaka and Gorgol.

- The Lehdada Programme, which was launched in 2004 to respond to the people’s needs with respect to agriculture, livestock-raising, drinking water and basic infrastructures and to enhance organizational capacity in 14 communes comprising 140 villages in the two Hodhs along the border with the Republic of Mali.

309. Although the programme is relatively new, concrete action has already been taken. In the department of Bousteilla, a production workshop has been set up to manufacture farming tools such as carts and plows; a new plan to purchase milk cows (seven for each of the 10 villages in Bousteilla) has been implemented; each village has received 50 plows; and a new credit scheme has been introduced.

310. This credit scheme extends loans to farmers at low interest rates and repays the village committees who manage the scheme in grain following the harvest. The grain constitutes a commodity bank which enables the villages to achieve food self-sufficiency and export the surplus. The establishment of the credit scheme and the above-mentioned programmes demonstrates that the Government is committed to harmonious development and the equal treatment of all citizens.

### **13. Equality in legal and civil affairs (art. 15)**

311. The Constitution of 20 July 1991 guarantees equality between men and women and prohibits gender discrimination of any kind (art. 1, para. 2). Women therefore possess the legal capacity to engage in any action which may contribute to their advancement.

312. In accordance with article 15 of the Constitution, women are guaranteed the right to own property. Article 24, paragraph 2, of the Code of Obligations and Contracts recognizes that women have the legal capacity to undertake and assert contractual obligations unless they have been declared legally incompetent (art. 24, para. 2).

313. Article 58 of Act No. 2001-052 of 19 July 2001, which created the Personal Status Code, provides that a woman has the right to administer and freely dispose of her personal property. A husband has no right of say with regard to the management of his wife’s property unless she makes a gift of more than a third of her property (art. 58).

314. The right to inheritance is an inalienable and universal right under Mauritanian law. The Personal Status Code contains several articles which provide that no limitations may be placed on a woman’s right to inherit. Article 232 defines the rules for inheritance; article 251 contains provisions on male heirs; and article 252 contains provisions on potential female heirs.

315. The right of access to justice is guaranteed to all citizens without distinction as to gender. Article 13 of the Constitution provides that all persons, without distinction, shall be presumed innocent until proven guilty by a regularly constituted court. Act No. 99-039 of 24 July 1999 on the organization of the judiciary guarantees equal treatment for all persons in courts and tribunals.

316. Article 10 (on nationals) and article 22 (on aliens) of the Constitution guarantee the right to travel and to settle. This is reflected by:

- Prompt issuing of passports to citizens and residence permits to aliens;

- Representation of Mauritians living abroad by a senator;
- Simplification of procedures for refugees living in Mauritania, so that they may enjoy freedom of movement and harmonious integration in the host society.

#### **14. Equal rights within the family (art. 16)**

317. The legal mechanisms for a harmonious family life are contained primarily in Act No. 2001-052 of 19 July 2001 on the Personal Status Code. This is in accordance with the preamble of the Constitution, which guarantees “the rights attached to the family, the basic unit of Islamic society”, and article 16, which provides that “The State and society shall protect the family”.

318. Several measures have been taken to guarantee the stability of the family. Based on the principle of equal rights for men and women, the right to enter freely into marriage is guaranteed without distinction in Act No. 2001-052 of 19 July 2001 on the Personal Status Code, which provides that marriage is a legal contract which joins a man and a woman in lasting matrimony (art. 1).

319. The act of marriage is legally valid only if both spouses have given their free and full consent (art. 5 and art. 9, paras. 2, 3 and 26 of the Code). The act of marriage creates rights for both spouses during the marriage and with respect to the dissolution thereof. During the marriage, the woman may demand that her husband not be permitted to marry another woman; that he not be absent for longer than a specified time period; and that he not prohibit her from attending school or working (art. 28).

320. Article 55 of the Code provides that the act of marriage confers the following rights: maintenance and housing, the preservation of honour and the duty of fidelity, mutual support and assistance. This is supplemented by articles 56 and 57, which provide that the wife must assist her husband in running the family (art. 56) and that she may work outside the home in the profession of her choice (art. 57). The Personal Status Code contains several provisions on the effects of the dissolution of the marriage, guaranteeing women important rights with respect to repudiation (art. 84), compensation (art. 93) and mandate (art. 96).

321. Article 119 of the Code provides that women are to remain in the family home during the prescribed waiting period and may not be expelled by the spouse during that time. Article 123, paragraph 2, provides that if the marriage is dissolved, child custody shall preferably be awarded to the mother.

322. The Personal Status Code and the law on compulsory primary education contain various provisions on joint parental responsibility. For instance, article 120 of the Personal Status Code provides that “the mother shall breastfeed her child and the father shall support the child during the breastfeeding period”.

323. The Personal Status Code contains a general definition of childcare (art. 121) and describes the conditions in which it must be provided (art. 122). The Code provides that the care of the child is the responsibility of both the father and the mother as long as they remain joined in matrimony (art. 123, para. 1). It also contains a special clause which is applicable if the marriage is dissolved. In the case



of dissolution, custody of the child shall preferably be awarded to the mother (art. 23, para. 2).

324. In accordance with article 126 of the Code, boys must be supported until they attain the age of majority and girls until they are married. To safeguard the interests of the child, the Code also contains a number of special clauses on his or her care (art. 126, para. 2, to art. 134).

325. Article 2 of Act No. 2001-054 of 19 July 2001, on compulsory basic education, provides that the father or mother is responsible for the child.

326. Article 4 of that Act provides that the persons responsible for the care of the child must enrol him or her in school during the two-week period preceding the first day of the school year. If these persons fail to enrol the child, they shall be subject to penalties, as provided in articles 5, 6 and 10. In the same context, both the Government and NGOs have paid special attention to parental responsibility and family planning issues.

327. Studies have shown that the percentage of married women who do not wish to have more children is two to three times higher than the corresponding percentage of men, and that the gap increases with the number of living children. In general, the percentage of married men who do not wish to have more children is less than half that of women. Only 9 per cent of men, compared to 19 per cent of women, do not wish to have more children.

328. Contrary to the findings among women, the percentage of men who wish to limit their family is almost the same in urban and rural areas (9 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively). The percentages range from 6 per cent to 7 per cent in the central and northern regions and in the Senegal river valley and from 10 per cent to 12 per cent in the south-eastern region and in Nouakchott. The statistics are higher (13 per cent) among men who have a secondary education or higher.

329. The male tendency to reject birth spacing should be taken into account in family planning awareness campaigns. If such campaigns are to be successful, they should not target women alone.

330. The right of all persons to manage, acquire and own property is recognized. Article 15 of the Constitution of 20 July 1991 “guarantees property rights” without exclusion. According to this constitutional provision, article 58 of the Personal Status Code states that “a woman may freely dispose of her personal effects (...)”. The applicable Mauritanian laws governing engagements, marriages and the legal effects arising from them, stress the interest of the young woman involved.

331. In this regard, article 6 of the Personal Status Code states that “the legal capacity to enter into marriage is granted to all persons of competence who have reached the age of 18 years”. Article 75 of the Code affirms that “marriage shall be contracted before a marriage officer or notary who registers the marriage certificate”. This article is supplemented by article 76, which provides that the marriage certificate must be “registered in accordance with the provisions of article 65 of Act No. 96-019 of 19 June 1996 establishing the Civil Status Code”.

332. Article 77 of the Code provides that “marriage certificates of Mauritians abroad shall be transcribed in conformity with the provisions of the Civil Status Code”. According to article 3 of the Code, an announcement of marriage must be made to the competent authorities of the host country, and the marriage must be

registered with the diplomatic representations and consulates of Mauritania. In order to protect women against all forms of discrimination, the authorities are working with several NGOs to protect women from violence.

333. These NGOs are working actively in the field in partnership with the Government to eradicate violence against women and girls, and fully support the initiatives taken by the Government in this area. These initiatives are mainly centred on the strategy to combat practices that are harmful to women and girls.

334. These NGOs did particularly well in 2003 and 2004 in organizing awareness-raising workshops for various actors (judges, imams, doctors and police officers) who are in a position to influence public opinion and, by their conduct, contribute to reversing the negative trends.

335. However, efforts in this area must be pursued in order to curb all practices (force-feeding, early marriage and female genital mutilation) that are harmful to the health of women and that continue to thrive in rather large segments of the population.

## **Conclusion**

336. In presenting this first report on the implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania wishes to express its determined will to fulfil its commitments within the framework of the promotion and protection of human rights, and in particular women's rights.

337. This is now reflected in the institutional, legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures adopted by the Government to improve the living conditions of women and to foster a climate conducive to the exercise of freedoms and the enjoyment of all rights envisaged under the Convention. Admittedly, certain deficiencies related to globalization and national underdevelopment remain, but the Government of Mauritania is committed to taking all necessary steps to speed up the political, economic, social and cultural advancement of Mauritanian women.

338. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania reiterates its support for the ideals embodied in the Convention and, to that end, is ready to engage in fruitful and ongoing discussions with the members of the Committee.

---