



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

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF  
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN  
Sixteenth session  
13-31 January 1997

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION  
OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ON ITS SIXTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

Rapporteur: Ms. Aurora Javate DE DIOS (Philippines)

Addendum

IV. CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER  
ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

B. Consideration of reports

2. Combined initial, second and third periodic reports

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

1. The Committee considered the combined initial, second and third periodic reports of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (CEDAW/C/STV/1-3 and Add.1) at its 316th and 317th meetings, on 16 January 1997, and its 322nd meeting, on 21 January 1997.

2. In introducing the report, the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines apologized that the report submitted to the Committee in 1992 (CEDAW/C/STV/1-3) had been sent owing to an administrative error. The representative requested that the report submitted to the Committee in 1994 (CEDAW/C/STV/1-3/Add.1) be considered as the principal report. She further indicated her willingness to clarify statements in the document dated 4 November 1991 of the International Women's Rights Action Watch.

3. The representative indicated that a number of legislative reforms, including the Domestic Violence Act and the Equal Pay Act, had been implemented

since the submission of the report (CEDAW/C/STV/1-3/Add.1) in 1994. A family court and legal aid had been introduced within that period, as well. The representative indicated that treaties were not self-executing in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and, although there was no specific law against discrimination, a woman who was discriminated against might seek legal redress in the High Court under Section 16 of the Constitution. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had been seen as a major step in developing legally binding and internationally accepted principles aimed at achieving equal rights for women. Consequently the Government had introduced national legislation that conformed to the articles of the Convention.

4. The representative briefed the Committee on the administrative measures that had been taken to advance the status of women, including the establishment of a Women's Desk in 1984-1985, which had subsequently been upgraded to the Department of Women's Affairs. The Department, along with the National Council of Women, was focused on establishing equality between women and men, proposing socially responsive legislation and implementing policies that favourably affected women.

5. The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines expressed concern with regard to several important socio-economic issues, including youth unemployment, the high rate of female migration, decreased export earnings in the agricultural sector, the high rate of pregnancy among pre-teenagers and adolescents, traditional socio-cultural attitudes reflecting stereotyped gender roles and the prevalence of domestic violence.

6. The representative stated that, while all citizens had an equal right to education, employment, political participation and representation, obstacles remained for women in tertiary education and there was occupational segregation in the labour market. A gender gap also persisted in public sector employment, particularly at decision-making levels and in political life. Women experienced limited access to credit and land ownership, particularly in the rural areas, despite the fact that they represented a high percentage of the agricultural labour force.

7. In concluding her presentation, the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines indicated that she eagerly anticipated questions that might be raised by the experts on the development of the status of women, and pledged to take appropriate actions on behalf of the women of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and in keeping with their needs.

#### Concluding comments of the Committee

##### Introduction

8. The Committee expressed appreciation for the frank presentation of the combined initial, second and third reports. The oral presentation complemented the comprehensive written reports. The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was commended for being one of the first countries that had ratified the Convention, and had done so without reservation. The Committee regretted the lack of focus on how the status of women had progressed since the

ratification in 1981 to date. It also regretted the delay in the presentation of the initial report. The report failed to make any reference to a follow-up to Beijing or commitments made. There was also no information on implementation of the Committee's general recommendations.

#### Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

9. The current legal system did not allow for the direct enforcement of the Convention. As it was not part of domestic law, women could not fully exercise their rights under the Convention. Pervasive traditional, social, and cultural values, as well as behaviour, impeded the advancement of women.

#### Positive aspects

10. The Committee expressed its satisfaction with the well-structured reports that followed the reporting guidelines. The report format, with full text of the articles, followed by the relevant comments, was a good innovation and made the report a very useful educational document. The report provided excellent data. The Committee appreciated the Government's efforts to conform to the provisions of the Convention by introducing several legal reforms. It was also appreciated that the Government and non-governmental organizations were collaborating in the implementation of the Convention.

#### Principal subjects of concern

##### Article 2

11. Legal measures that had been taken did not address all aspects of the Convention. Some existing domestic laws contravened the Convention. The Committee regretted that the Constitution did not specifically refer to the equality of women. It was also regretted that the Convention had never been cited in any legal proceedings.

##### Article 4

12. The Committee noted with concern that the Government had not made use of affirmative action measures to accelerate the unequal status of women, particularly in the areas of employment and public service.

##### Article 5

13. The non-availability of shelter homes, which additionally provided victims with counselling services, was of concern to the Committee. Again the Committee was very concerned about the persistent traditional, stereotyped roles and attitudes towards women and girls. Moreover, domestic violence was rampant, a fact that was also of great concern to the Committee.

Article 6

14. The Committee noted with concern that no research had been undertaken on the real situation concerning prostitution and trafficking in women.

Article 7

15. The low participation of women in the political parties and as candidates for election was of great concern to the Committee.

Article 10

16. Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child and human rights in general were part of the school curriculum, the Committee was concerned that the women's Convention was not taught in schools. The Committee was very concerned about the very high rate of teenage and pre-teen pregnancy, which sometimes even forced children to be mothers with very serious, negative consequences for their future, in particular, the interruption of their education.

Article 11

17. The Committee was concerned about the very high rate of unemployment among women, which increased their vulnerability to domestic violence. It noted with concern that the Government had not made use of affirmative action to redress that problem. The Committee also expressed its concern about the feminization of migration.

Article 12

18. The Committee was concerned that women had to seek spousal consent for tubal ligation. That not only contravened article 12, but also article 15 of the Convention. The law on abortion limited women's rights to safe motherhood and to take control of their reproductive health.

Article 16

19. The Committee was concerned about the high rate of female migration outside Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and its effect on their children and aged relatives.

Suggestions and recommendations

20. There was a need to review all domestic laws with the aim of identifying which ones needed to be amended, and which new laws needed to be enacted in order that women could fully enjoy all the rights provided for under the Convention.

21. Subsequent reports must give information on the implementation of the Committee's general recommendations and also on follow-up programmes for the implementation of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

22. The Committee also wanted to be apprised of the commitments made at Beijing and the programmes developed to pursue agreements reached at Beijing.

23. The next report must indicate special measures that had been taken by the Government and the political parties to close the gap between de jure and de facto equality, particularly in the area of political decision-making and employment.

24. The next report should also provide more detailed information on prostitution and trafficking.

25. Government, non-governmental organizations, churches and indeed all individuals must increase family-life education to curb the very high rate of pre-teen and teenage pregnancy.

26. The laws on abortion should be reviewed with a view to removing the penal nature of the law and to guaranteeing safe motherhood.

27. Government and the private sector must work towards creating job opportunities to help keep employable females in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines so that they could better take care of their children and aged relatives and contribute meaningfully to the development of their country.

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