



Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women considers the reports of Eritrea

26 February 2015

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women today considered the fourth and fifth periodic reports of Eritrea on its implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Presenting the report, Tekea Tesfamichael, President of the National Union of Eritrean Women, said Eritrea was one of the few countries which had achieved great progress in attaining the Millennium Development Goals way ahead of the targeted deadline of 2015. It had revised all of its laws to thwart discrimination against women and had prohibited female genital mutilation. Eritrea had made tremendous progress in tackling maternal mortality, child mortality, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and achieving primary education for all. In the political and decision-making domain Eritrea took a ‘bottoms up’ approach to ensure the mass participation of women at the community level that would ultimately result and influence decision-making at higher levels. The problems of violence against women, stereotypes and harmful practices would vanish once economic development and prosperity were realized, and sanctions and the 12-year continued border occupation by Ethiopia came to an end.

In the discussion Committee Experts expressed grave concern about unlimited national service for all resulting in mass migration of young people seeking asylum. Eritrea was a country on the brink of disaster with a Government operating in survival mode, one Expert said. Sexual abuse of women in the military and in places of detention, including secret detention facilities, and of trafficked women was discussed. Eritrea was commended for reducing the maternal mortality rate and introducing local health services by Experts who queried data discrepancies regarding rates of malnutrition, female genital mutilation and early marriage. Women’s access to land and political participation and the low numbers of girls in school were also raised.

Yoko Hayashi, Committee Chairperson, in concluding remarks, commended Eritrea for its efforts and encouraged it to take all necessary measures to address the various recommendations of the Committee, for the benefit of all women and girls in the country.

In closing remarks, Ms. Tesfamichael thanked the Committee and said important issues were raised which Eritrea highly valued. She also thanked non-governmental organizations and civil society for their positive input to ensure the enhancement of gender rights in Eritrea.

The delegation of Eritrea included representatives of the National Union of Eritrean Women and the Permanent Mission of Eritrea to the United Nations Office at Geneva.

The Committee next meets in public at 10 a.m. on Friday, 26 February to consider the combined fourth and fifth periodic report of Maldives ([CEDAW/C/MDV/4-5](#)).

Reports

The fourth and fifth periodic reports of Eritrea can be seen here: [CEDAW/C/ERI/4](#) and [CEDAW/C/ERI/5](#)

Presentation of the Reports

TEKEA TESFAMICHAEL, President of the National Union of Eritrean Women of the State of Eritrea, recalled that Eritrea acceded to the Convention without reservation soon after its independence in 1995 and the reports were prepared with the extensive participation of all key ministries and local departments, as well as the private sector, academic institutions and civil society. The National Union of Eritrean Women, founded in 1979, had over 300,000 women members with a vast network cutting across the nation and the Diaspora. At its seventh National Congress, in September 2014, the President Isaias Afwerki acknowledged Eritrean women's role in "protecting their sovereignty, national reconstruction and development endeavours" and pledged to consider "enhancing the participation of women in the Eritrean Defence Force". Eritrea had revised all its laws and regulations to thwart discrimination against women and during the reporting period legislative progress included a proclamation prohibiting female genital mutilation and establishment of a National Gender Action Plan.

Eritrea was one of the few countries which had achieved great progress in attaining the Millennium Development Goals way ahead of the targeted deadline of 2015. Tremendous progress had been made in tackling maternal mortality, child mortality, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and achieving primary education for all. In the political and decision-making domain Eritrea took a 'bottoms up' approach to ensure the mass participation of women at community levels that would ultimately result and influence decision-making at higher levels. Notable progress had been made and today women made up 34 per cent of village leaders and 22.5 per cent of judges in community courts. A leadership training programme was in place to build confidence among women leaders and raise women's awareness to vote for female candidates during election periods.

The problems of violence against women, stereotypes and harmful practices would vanish once economic development, prosperity and the establishment of social values were realized, said Ms. Tesfamichael. Rape and sexual harassment were traditionally considered immoral acts and were sanctioned by the Eritrean community. The prevalence rate of female genital mutilation had declined to 12 per cent for children aged five and under and 33 per cent for children aged 15 years and under. Widespread campaigns and public awareness initiatives were ongoing to abolish female genital mutilation, underage marriage and the insignificant number of rape cases that still existed.

The Government believed in affirmative action and had reserved 30 per cent of Assembly seats, a third of community court judge seats and one place in all sport federations for women. Cash and 'in-kind' rewards were paid to parents in remote areas to incentivize them to send their

daughters to primary schools. Women benefited from slightly lower college entrance grades to boys, and female teachers were encouraged. Education at the elementary level in 2012 reached 73 per cent female enrolment. Funds were only granted to development projects that incorporated women's interests and participation. It was mandatory that land tenure, water management and other rural committees included women.

Like any other country Eritrea encountered challenges in promoting the advancement of women's equality, mainly due to two factors, said Ms. Tesfamichael. First, the level of socio-economic development, traditions, social norms and stereotypes and second, the 12-year continued border occupation (by Ethiopia) and sanctions on Eritrea. Eritrea believed that women's equality could be fully attained through socio-economic development and modernization of the country, increased institutional capacity and most of all, the creation of an emancipated girl child and woman who could fight for her own rights.

Questions from the Experts

The national service obligation of citizens of Eritrea was the first issue addressed by the Committee. An Expert noted the report stated "In the interest of national security the national service obligations of all citizens might go beyond the stated time period" but said the Committee understood that national service obligations were already established for an indeterminate length of time. The Committee had received numerous reports of women in national service suffering sexual abuse, often perpetrated by officers in their chain of command. There were reports of army commanders forcing women to submit to their sexual encounters and harshly punishing them if they refused. How many cases of rape and sexual abuse in the military had been investigated and perpetrators brought to justice?

In a significant series of developments, an Expert said Eritrea had entered a rapid period of economic and humanitarian decline. Eritrea was one of the top refugee-producing countries in the world. It was frequently described as a country on the brink of disaster run by a Government operating in survival mode. In recent years there had been more Eritrean than Syrian refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea. What was the Government's explanation for the exodus?

The Eritrean Parliament had been suspended since 2002. The Committee was extremely keen on the role of parliament in helping achieve gender equality, and had the impression a very important organ of State was missing. A matter of grave concern was that the Government operated on pre-constitutional powers. In the absence of a constitution and given the continued suspension of parliament, how were justice and the rule of law ensured? Had Eritrea sought technical assistance to draft a new constitution?

Eritrea was known throughout the world for images of women in trousers and flak jackets, said an Expert, asking what role women played in peace-making today. Did Eritrea have a national action plan on Security Council Resolution 1325, did it plan to ratify the Rome Statute, and what was its stance on the Arms Trade Treaty given the proliferation of small arms in Eritrea.

The issue of women in detention was raised by an Expert who asked what concrete measures had been taken to improve the poor conditions of women and child detainees who were reportedly

held by male staff and exposed to sexual violence and rape. There were furthermore disturbing reports of unofficial places of detention. Would the Government permit unhindered access by international monitors to all places of detention?

The difference between the situation portrayed in the reports and information from other sources was marked, said an Expert. The statistics presented by Eritrea were in stark contradiction to the United Nations Development Programme Global Humanitarian Index, the Global Hunger Index and the Mo Ibrahim Index.

Was the National Union of Eritrean Women a non-governmental organization or a Government body, asked a delegate? The report stated that participation and work by civil society organizations was applauded. What other civil society bodies were operating in Eritrea?

Response by the Delegation

National service was the obligation of every citizen of Eritrea – boy or girl, man or woman, said the Head of Delegation. When national service began the period was 18 months but when the conflict with Ethiopia began unlimited national service was implemented. Unlimited national service was necessary for the sake of national security, for the protection of Eritrea; it was a matter of life or death, a matter of sovereignty. The Government had no choice when faced with such a heavy army.

Eritrea had gained independence at a very expensive price – the lives of 100,000 young people – a high price to be paid to join the United Nations, she said. There were exceptions for inscription in the national service such as pregnancy or sickness. If the conflict with Ethiopia stopped today and peace endured then Eritrea could reinstate the 18 month national service period. The reality of the situation dictated the length of national service, said another delegate.

Regarding women as peacemakers, the Head of Delegation said women were fighting for peace and today women joined the national military willingly, as they knew their emancipation and their independence could only come through military security. Eritrea was proud of its women ex-combatants. During the liberation period women made up 30 per cent of the army, and now those ex-combatants were focused on rebuilding Eritrea.

Regarding discrepancies in data, the Head of Delegation said it was known that Eritrea had achieved the Millennium Development Goals, including on health and education. However, Eritrea was aware it still had some shortcomings.

Detention centres or prisons in Eritrea were in actuality correction or rehabilitation centres. It was not true that women were held incommunicado or were harassed by male prison guards in Eritrea, emphasized the Head of Delegation.

There were a lot of lies reported about Eritrea, said the Head of Delegation, describing a BBC programme published this week which she said was full of lies and propaganda about Eritrean migrants, reporting that Eritreans formed the second biggest group of asylum seekers after Syrians. Eritrea was a country of the law and had a working constitution. It was unfair to

describe Eritrea as lawless and without a constitution. Eritrea was unable to implement the constitution when it was first drafted, but had started drafting a new constitution now.

The issue was not one of refugees but rather of ‘push and pull’ factors, said another delegate. The ‘pull’ factor played a very negative role in enticing young and educated Eritreans out of the country in order to undermine the Government. Many Eritreans were victims of trafficking. Therefore Eritrea had acceded to the Convention on Transnational Organized Crimes and its protocol on Preventing Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. The Government of Eritrea could not be held responsible for the Eritreans leaving the country.

Eritrea was one of the countries which first negotiated the Rome Statute but when it saw how the Rome Statute was applied in African countries the Eritrean Government decided that it was not for them because it was discriminatory, so it would not consider ratifying it. Eritrea may consider actions to implement Security Council Resolution 1325 in future.

The National Union of Eritrean Women may not be a Ministry but it was not a non-governmental organization. It was empowered and authorized to represent the Government in all national and international *fora* in safeguarding the interests of Eritrean women and monitoring implementation of all women’s programmes.

Follow-Up Questions

People voted with their feet, remarked an Expert and the young people were leaving Eritrea. She noted that the delegation contested the BBC report but cited similar evidence from many other international organizations including United Nations bodies. Surely the most urgent step would be to end indefinite military service because that was the main reason Eritrean youth were leaving.

The delegation’s reference to ‘propaganda’ was noted by an Expert who cited many disturbing reports of ‘one-man-rule’, indefinite national service and lack of democracy which kept recurring, including in the United Nations Human Rights Council which had established a Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea. Why would Eritrea not allow the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea, or the Commission of Inquiry, to visit the country? What was its rationale?

Response by the Delegation

Regarding young refugees leaving Eritrea a delegate said the Government believed the wave would somehow stop in the coming years. It was because of organized smuggling, a campaign that was targeted at the young and educated, a ‘brain-drain’. The Government strove to stop it from happening but it was a big challenge. Reducing national service to 18 months could be an effective tool to stop youth leaving, and the Government would try that in future.

The communications of the Human Rights Council were politically motivated, said a delegate. Some States used the Human Rights Council as a forum to advance their political motives. That was not the real situation in Eritrea. Eritrea fought to uphold human rights not only for its own people but even for its enemies. Eritrea did not believe in the mandate of the Special Rapporteur

which was adopted by Governments that were hostile to Eritrea. However, Eritrea was now considering inviting thematic mandate holders to visit the country, a delegate noted. It had also engaged with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which had sent a team to visit Eritrea and assess technical assistance needs.

Regarding reported discrepancies in statistical data, the Head of Delegation said the Government policy was that the Ministry of Development was responsible for all data leaving the country, so it was impossible for any other organization to present data that did not accurately reflect the situation in Eritrea. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other United Nations and international organizations operating in Eritrea could only get their data from the Ministry. UNDP could not produce data from their own sources; it had to comply with the Ministry.

Questions from the Experts

Regarding women's participation in political and public life, an Expert asked if it was correct that women had to be a member of the political party of Eritrea in order to be elected into any political or public position. The Expert said she understood the challenges faced by Eritrea as a post-conflict country, but said it was missing opportunities, as the youth had different expectations to the older generation which went through the war. Temporary special measures would make a huge difference, especially for rural women.

No national elections had been held in Eritrea since its independence. That was particularly impeding on the advancement of women as they had less chance to advance in national policy making. The absence of a functioning democracy had also to be examined from a women's rights perspective. The delegation was asked about the effectiveness of its 'bottoms up' empowerment strategy for women given that more women were members of the Transitional National Assembly (22 per cent) than of regional assemblies (16 per cent).

Women made up 42 per cent of civil servants but only held six per cent of positions of high office. Only one out of six regional Governors was a woman. Although the report stated that more than 20 per cent of Directors at the Foreign Office were women there were no women Ambassadors. Why were those women directors not entrusted with the task of representing their country abroad? It seemed the ceiling was not made of glass but rather concrete, said an Expert, asking the delegation to comment.

In previous recommendations the Committee had urged Eritrea to prioritize the adoption of measures to combat violence against women and girls. What had been done in terms of legislation, data collection and other measures to tackle sexual and domestic violence, eliminate corporal punishment of girls and women, and combat rape and sexual harassment? What forms of redress were available to victims?

On trafficking in persons, an Expert congratulated Eritrea on ratifying the Convention on Transnational Organized Crimes and its protocol on Preventing Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. Eritrea was a source country. What studies had it made into the reasons for the exposure of a large number of its citizens to trafficking?

Eritrea had undertaken efforts to punish prostitution and had offered programmes for women to leave prostitution. However, the Committee was very concerned about the so-called ‘behavioural groups’ that the 2,000 plus prostitutes were organized into. Could the delegation please elaborate?

What was the sanction for practitioners of female genital mutilation, and those who facilitated the process, even though the process was dying out, admirably?

Birth registration was a condition to access not only nationality but also school, health services, social services and employment. The only data on the issue was a 2002 United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) report which stated it could find no published information on birth registration in Eritrea and stated “There is virtually no registration system in existence in Eritrea”. What was the situation today?

Response from the Delegation

Answering questions on women’s political participation, a delegate informed the Committee that temporary special measures were in place to reserve 30 per cent of seats in the national assembly for women, although that did not prevent women from taking more seats if they got enough votes in the election. There was no requirement to be a member of the political party to be elected to a political position, clarified a delegate. However, most Eritreans were members of the political party because they had all participated in the armed struggle.

The main obstruction to women’s political participation was the women, said the Head of Delegation. If a woman did not vote for other women in elections in open competition with men then women would not get in. A very strong campaign to encourage women to vote for female candidates had made a big difference. No national election had taken place, true, but there were elections to regional assemblies, and at the last village-level election 34 per cent of the persons elected were women.

The bottom-up approach was very important. It was far stronger for women to rise up from the bottom rather than to be appointed to the top jobs. You could appoint women at Ministerial, Director and Ambassadorial level but then what would be the fate of women at the bottom, the Head of Delegation asked Committee Members.

Eritrea had been exposed to trafficking since around 2001. Many European countries gave political asylum very easily to Eritreans, even to those who had not participated in military service. That was one of the strongest factors which pulled Eritrean youth from the country. Eritrea had taken part in a European Union/Horn of Africa fact-finding initiative on border issues and had met with the International Organization for Migration to find a lasting solution. Trafficking was a national security issue and Eritreans were the victims.

Prostitution was not a major problem, and there were no pimps or such exploitation, said a delegate. However, the Government sought to show prostitutes alternative ways of life and employment, and offered them training and credit to start their own business. There were around

1,600 women prostitutes in Eritrea and they were encouraged to join a forum for peer-to-peer discussion to come up with their own solutions. Prostitution was not a crime, the delegate added.

Formerly deeply-rooted stereotypes had existed in the patriarchal society of Eritrea that caused grave harm to the girl child. Those stereotypes were 90 per cent dissolved during the national liberation movement when girls and women took up arms alongside their male counterparts to fight for independence. At that point traditional stereotypes were mostly dismantled. Early marriage and female genital mutilation still existed but at insignificant levels. When Eritrea won independence it amended many laws on the enhancement of women, and one of those included abolishing a law which said a man was always the head of the family; 47 per cent of households were headed by a woman.

The media in Eritrea played an important role in eradicating stereotypes, said a delegate, citing a TV show which played every Saturday about family issues showing positive male and female role models. There were discussion programmes on the radio considering best practices for women. The national daily newspaper had a page covering women and their daily achievements.

On birth registration a delegate said much had changed since 2002. More women gave birth in hospitals and clinics and a birth certificate was given at that point. Regional Governors were responsible for registering births and deaths, although there may be discrepancies in rural areas, a delegate noted.

There was a proclamation to regulate the operations of non-governmental organizations in Eritrea, said a delegate. Any body that could fulfil the criteria in the proclamation could operate in Eritrea. Eritrea was trying to build up meaningful civil society participation in the country.

Questions by the Experts

Commenting on an earlier response, an Expert warned that it should not be only women voting for women candidates in elections. Men had to be encouraged to vote for women as well. The top-down and the bottom-up approaches had to be conducted simultaneously.

Eritrea's indicators on education were well below the acceptable standards set not only by the Convention but also the Millennium Development Goals. The main problems were insufficient qualified teachers and infrastructure. Eritrea said it had achieved the Millennium Development Goals, but the Expert said she begged to differ. As girls moved through the educational system there was a 50 per cent drop-out between primary and secondary levels: 70 per cent of girls attended primary school but just 20 per cent of girls went to secondary school – that was just one fifth of girls in the country. The Committee was concerned that Eritrea seemed to justify the low numbers of girls in school by the high participation of women in adult literacy programmes. That was unacceptable. Education was essential for young adults to take control of their lives and participate in the development of their nation.

All high-school students had to enrol in military service at the SAWA Military Academy. Did that final year of schooling include academic instruction as well as military? What was done to ensure girls were not subject to sexual exploitation at SAWA, and had there been any complaints

made?

A solution to the large number of Eritreans migrating from the country was to create jobs for them at home. Had the Government considered working with the relevant agencies to create jobs, social funds and micro loans aimed specifically at young Eritreans?

Regarding gender equality in employment, an Expert said 45.7 per cent of the labour force was said to be women, but the majority of female workers were in low-skilled and low-paid jobs. As Eritrea had commendably signed seven International Labour Organization Conventions could the delegation describe how the principle of 'equal pay for equal work of equal value' was ensured?

Health expenditure was just 4.2 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product, far below the average spending in African countries of 9.6 per cent. How did the Government manage to achieve so much in the field of health with such low levels of spending, if that figure was accurate?

An Expert commended Eritrea for reducing the maternal mortality rate and introducing local health services, but expressed concern about the extremely low rate of contraceptive use. The use of condoms had hugely diminished in the last two years to five per cent. There was a great need for contraception, especially for protection from sexually-transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Very young child pregnancy was a serious issue and the report stated 'childbearing age' had declined over the years by 39 per cent.

Eritrea had very few health personnel. There was only one doctor to every 10,000 people and only six midwives for every 10,000 people. Women constituted only 16 per cent of medical doctors. Those figures were very disturbing and well below the average ratio in Africa. As Eritrea was suffering a 'brain drain' of young educated people how did it intend to rectify that alarming shortage of health personnel?

Abortion was allowed in cases of rape or incest or threat to the life of the mother, but there was no concrete guidance on when medical personnel should proceed with an abortion, which led to high numbers of unsafe abortions outside of the health system.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) recently launched the most comprehensive study ever on female genital mutilation, in which Eritrea was listed as having the fourth-highest rate of female genital mutilation/cutting in the world, with a rate of 89 per cent. There was a major discrepancy between data provided by UNICEF and the State party. Furthermore, 60 per cent of women and girls in Eritrea believed that female genital mutilation/cutting was a religious requirement, noted the Expert.

A high number of children died from malnutrition: one in every five. The Committee had substantial evidence that the Government refused to admit that was the case. It was also concerned about the effect of hunger on the health of pregnant and breastfeeding women. The Expert said she was astonished by the delegation's sweeping remark that Eritrea had reached the Millennium Development Goals in the field of health.

Response by the delegation

There were high levels of illiteracy among women and the majority of those studying in adult education were women. Adult education was not a compensation for girls missing out on their early education, emphasized a delegate; most adult learners were mothers who had missed out on their primary education due to child marriage and early pregnancy.

The Government encouraged female teachers by offering monetary benefits, added the delegate, also noting that there were nine ethnic groups in Eritrea, each with their own language, and the curriculum was available in all: from Grades 1 to 6 children learned in their mother tongue. From Grade 7 onwards, Middle School, teaching was in English.

When students had completed their academic requirements they had to attend training at the SAWA Military Academy. SAWA was an academic and military college, a 'pre-college' that students attended for nine months. Once completed students undertook three months preliminary training for their national service. Violence against girls in Eritrean schools did not really happen, said a delegate, adding that the National Union of Eritrean Women had an office at SAWA and had received no complaints or evidence of girls being sexually violated or harassed there or elsewhere.

There was no form of sexual violence in the Eritrean military that could be a concern for the Committee, said a delegate. The army was very disciplined and sexual abuse or violence in it did not take place. The issue arose from Eritreans seeking refugee status in Western countries; girls in particular would say they had been raped only in an attempt to gain political asylum. In reality that was not the case.

National health expenditure was indeed 4.2 per cent confirmed the delegation which was less than the regional average. People could receive free medical treatment if they could prove that they did not have the ability to pay. The reality was that healthcare in Eritrea was far better than in many neighbouring countries.

Eritrea was a new nation and producing doctors was a tough job. Not every trained young person left the country; there were a lot of young doctors, nurses and midwives serving their nation. The motto of Eritrea was 'Never kneel down' – there would always be a shortage of health personnel but it continued teaching and even when trained young people left the country to live in Switzerland, the United States or elsewhere, they remained Eritrean and a national resource.

Eritrean Embassies had instructions to help Eritreans living abroad to work in their professional capacity and to provide them with a re-entry visa to Eritrea. Most were economic migrants who still wanted to support their country and many, even those who had left illegally, were returning. There was an amnesty to let Eritreans return, and even to let them go abroad again afterwards if they wanted to.

Regarding the assertions about malnutrition a delegate said Eritrea had a policy of self-reliance and a principled position not to depend upon foreign aid. It had mechanisms in place to enable people to feed themselves which had yielded very positive results.

The prevalence rate of female genital mutilation had declined from 100 per cent to 68 per cent overall in 2010; and 12 per cent for children aged five and under and 33 per cent for children aged 15 years and under. When female genital mutilation was made illegal in 2007, many religious leaders, from Muslim and Christian communities, were part of the campaign and declared it was not proclaimed in the Koran or Bible. Traditional birth attendants no longer practised female genital mutilation, thanks to training, prosecutions and the sanction of five years imprisonment.

The Eritrean Demographic Health Survey (EDHS) was conducted every four years, and the latest data from 2010 would be shared with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO) which were incorrect to list Eritrea as having such high rates of female genital mutilation.

Eritrea was suffering economically from sanctions, and had the same job-creation problems as many European countries. However thanks to economic and development progress, especially in the mining sector, the problem was mostly due to external pressures as the jobs would come soon.

Questions by the Experts

The traditional patriarchal situation, norms and values impeded the full participation of women in business, said an Expert, noting that Sharia law governed inheritance rights in some places in Eritrea, leaving Muslim women in particular vulnerable to economic discrimination.

The issue of women farmers and land was critical, because the Global Hunger Index in 2012 placed Eritrea 78 out of 79, and in 2014 75 out of 76 countries. How could that issue of food security, land allocation, and maternal and infant mortality, be reconciled with all the agricultural programmes listed in the report? Mining was said to be the way forward for the economy. How could local women participate in mining, and take decisions on the environmental aspect of mining?

An Expert said early marriage was widespread in Eritrea, with reports that 20 per cent of girls were married by the age of 14 years and 47 per cent of girls married by the age of 18. Some families reportedly saw early marriage as an escape for girls from military service.

Response by the Delegation

Girls were not getting married early to avoid national service, emphasized the Head of Delegation. Girls did not spend 11 years in high school only to get married early to avoid going to SAWA and risk wasting their life, education and opportunities. The Head of Delegation referred to United States President John F. Kennedy's famous quotation "ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country". Eritreans chose to join the military; national service was the only way to achieve their human rights.

Land could not be inherited or owned by the people. All land in Eritrea was owned by the Government. Land could only be used by the people, confirmed a delegate. So there was no issue

with land inheritance rights. Women in Eritrea had the right to access land on equal footing to men. Local Land Distribution Committees were responsible for allocating land and each body had one seat reserved for a woman, so that woman could protect both her own and other women's interests. Upon divorce marital aspects were divided 50-50 assured a delegate and even those in religious marriages were subject to the civil code of Eritrea.

Eritrea was fortunate to have a lot of fertile land. The Government had launched a new programme to resettle villagers from drought-stricken areas to fertile areas where they could plough the land and improve their livestock capacity, and women were part of that. There were many European Union and United Nations funded programmes for rural women in Eritrea. Any mining company in Eritrea had to carry out an environmental impact report.

The Head of the Delegation questioned the source of The Global Hunger Index which placed Eritrea 75 out of 76 and the validity of the statistics. If the figures had not come from the Government, they could not be proven, she said. Even the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Human Development Index, which had rated Eritrea almost at the bottom of the list, was simply not true.

Concluding Remarks

TEKEA TEFAMICHAEL, President of the National Union of Eritrean Women of the State of Eritrea, thanked the Committee for the fruitful and constructive dialogue and engagement which were productive for the advancement of women's rights in Eritrea. Important issues were raised which Eritrea highly valued and would be considered. Ms. Tesfamichael thanked members of non-governmental organizations and civil society for their positive input to ensure the enhancement of gender rights in Eritrea.

YOKO HAYASHI, Committee Chairperson, commended Eritrea for its efforts and encouraged it to take all necessary measures to address the various recommendations of the Committee, for the benefit of all women and girls in the country.

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