

High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure the availability of expertise on gender issues to advise the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and will consider the question at its 1998 session.

Traditional practices affecting the health of women and children

The Sub-Commission appointed a special rapporteur in 1994 to study the issue of traditional practices affecting the health of women and children. At its 1997 session, the Commission on Human Rights endorsed the decision of the Sub-Commission to extend the Special Rapporteur's mandate for two years to allow the SR to follow up and monitor developments related to this question. The SR's reports to the 1997 Sub-Commission (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1997/10, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1997/10/Add.1) summarize replies received from and information provided by governments, UN agencies and organs and a number of non-governmental organizations. The Special Rapporteur's final report will be submitted to the 1998 session of the Sub-Commission.

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), General Recommendation No. 23 (1997), Political and Public Life (Articles 7 & 8)

At its 16th session, CEDAW adopted Recommendation 23 on Political and Public Life. The recommendation recalls that, under the Convention, State parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right (in article 7): (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government; and (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

In this context, CEDAW comments: public and private spheres of human activity have always been considered distinct; invariably, women have been assigned to the private or domestic sphere, associated with reproduction and the raising of children, and in all societies these activities have been treated as inferior; by contrast, public life, which is respected and honoured, has historically been dominated by men; despite women's central role in sustaining the family and society and their contribution to development, women have been excluded from political life and the decision-making process, particularly in times of crisis; this exclusion has silenced women's voices and rendered invisible their contribution and experience; in all nations, the most significant factors inhibiting women's ability to participate in public life have been the cultural framework of values and religious beliefs, the lack of services, and men's failure to share the tasks associated with the organization of the household and with the care and raising of children.

CEDAW also looks at article 8, which requires that State parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without discrimination, the opportunity to represent their governments at the international level and to participate in the world of international

organizations. CEDAW notes: it is evident that women are grossly under-represented in the diplomatic and foreign services of most governments, and particularly at the highest ranks; many permanent missions to the United Nations and to other international organizations have no women among their diplomats and very few at senior levels; and the situation is similar at expert meetings and conferences that establish international and global goals, agendas and priorities. Yet globalization of the contemporary world makes the inclusion of women and their participation in international organizations, on equal terms with men, increasingly important; the integration of a gender perspective and women's human rights into the agenda of all international bodies is a government imperative.

In the light of this, CEDAW makes, *inter alia*, the following recommendations:

With respect to Articles 7 and 8:

- ▶ States parties should ensure that their constitutions and legislation comply with the principles of the Convention, and in particular with articles 7 and 8.
- ▶ States parties are under an obligation to take all appropriate measures, including the enactment of appropriate legislation, to ensure that organizations such as political parties and trade unions do not discriminate against women and respect the principles contained in article 7 and 8.
- ▶ States parties should identify and implement temporary special measures to ensure the equal representation of women in all fields covered by article 7 and 8.
- ▶ States parties should explain the reason for, and effect of, any reservations to article 7 or 8; keep the necessity for such reservations under close review; and, in their reports, include a timetable for their removal.

With respect to Article 7:

- ▶ On the right to vote and stand for election, CEDAW recommends identifying, implementing and monitoring measures to: achieve a balance between men and women holding publicly elected positions; ensure that women understand their right to vote and how to exercise it; ensure that barriers to equality are overcome, including those resulting from illiteracy, poverty and impediments to women's freedom of movement; and assist women experiencing such disadvantages to exercise the right to vote and be elected.
- ▶ On participation in the formulation of government policy, CEDAW recommends measures to ensure: equality of representation of women in the formulation of government policy; women's enjoyment in practice of the equal right to hold public office; and recruiting processes directed at women are open and subject to appeal;
- ▶ On the right to participate in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and associations, CEDAW recommends measures designed to: ensure that effective legislation is enacted prohibiting discrimination against women; and encourage NGOs and public and political associations to adopt strategies that encourage women's representation and participation in their work.