

women's rights and equality issues; and the adoption of a national action plan to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, and efforts made to implement the plan.

Factors identified by the Committee as hindering the implementation of the Convention included: the difficult economic and political process of the transition to democracy and a market-oriented society; structural and indirect discrimination, which further compounds the situation of the *de facto* inequality of women; and the persistent emphasis placed on women's role as mothers, together with the extensive protection provided to women as mothers, and the tendency to perpetuate sex role stereotypes and reduce the father's role and responsibility in the upbringing of the children.

Subjects of concern identified by the Committee included, *inter alia*: the apparent lack of understanding by the government of the meaning and intent of temporary special measures favouring women, noting that an earlier retirement age for women than for men is not regarded as a measure of affirmative action; with regard to the establishment of the commission to monitor implementation of the national plan of action, the failure to house the commission within an appropriate framework in the governmental structure, possibly impairing the implementation of the Convention; the lack of a constitutional definition of discrimination consistent with article 1 of the Convention; the failure to take any steps to translate the provisions of the Convention into national legislation; the lack of special laws aimed at bringing about women's *de facto* as well as *de jure* equality (affirmative action); the lack of a strategy regarding a national machinery to address women's issues and to implement the Convention; the overwhelming number of people living below the poverty line and the fact that women, and particularly elderly women, are most likely to be adversely affected by poverty; exclusion of large numbers of highly educated women from decision-making processes and the associated failure to use fully their skills for the development of the country.

Violence against women, in both the public and private spheres, was identified as one of the Committee's dominant concerns, as well as the stipulation that legal proceedings for domestic violence may only be initiated upon the complaint of the victim. Other areas of concern included: that measures to combat trafficking in women are inadequate; the very high rate of non-participation of Roma children in schools; there is a need to provide incentives for children to stay in school and to educate their parents as to the importance of continued schooling; there is an extremely high rate of induced abortion among women, in particular young women, and that abortion appears to be used as a method of family planning; that measures taken to ensure that women have proper access to contraceptives are inadequate; the government does not have data disaggregated by sex on drug dependency and venereal disease, including HIV/AIDS; the information provided on the situation of rural women was inadequate, as was information on the extent to which they have benefited from agrarian and

other types of reform in the rural sector. The Committee also expressed concern over the lack of information on the social, economic and political status of women of different ethnic and religious minorities.

The Committee recommended that the government, *inter alia*:

- ♦ provide in its next report detailed descriptions of measures to change the prevailing attitudes and policies with regard to women's role in the home, to remove stereotypes from school books and from other facets of the education system so as to overcome the legal, economic and social problems of female heads of households with children, to combat all forms of discrimination against women in employment, and to improve women's access to free legal aid and the standard of living of rural women;
- ♦ introduce a definition of discrimination modelled on article 1 of the Convention into its constitution and other relevant laws;
- ♦ give priority to the establishment of a strong and effective national machinery with adequate financial and human resources for advancing the position of women; pay special attention to where this machinery should be placed within the government structure to make it as effective as possible;
- ♦ appoint an ombudsperson, in accordance with the current proposal before Parliament, and ensure that sufficient resources be allocated to enable the office to function effectively and provide the office with a clear mandate to address gender issues;
- ♦ adopt temporary special measures, in all necessary areas, particularly in the areas of employment and political decision-making, to accelerate the *de facto* situation of equality for women;
- ♦ strengthen legislative measures protecting women against all forms of violence, both public and private; make provision for the prosecution of offenders even in the absence of a complaint by the victim; develop a range of medical, psychological and other measures to assist women victims of violence and to change prevailing attitudes to domestic violence and to encourage women to seek redress; include in the next report information on the steps taken to address domestic violence;
- ♦ implement its intention to cooperate at the regional and international levels with regard to the problem of trafficking in women and their exploitation through prostitution; address women's economic vulnerability, which is the root cause of the problem; review and amend national legislation as needed; create effective administrative and police structures to address the problem; conduct media sensitization and training campaigns; promote the work of women's NGOs in this area; include in its next report yearly data on the number of women trafficked into Bulgaria and the number of those women who have