



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

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

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### Responses to the list of issues and questions for consideration of the combined initial and second periodic reports

#### Turkmenistan

##### Introduction

Ever since its first days of independence, Turkmenistan has proved itself to be a reliable partner in the international arena, repeatedly demonstrating its firm commitment to a policy of peace and goodwill. The essence of Turkmenistan's policy was stated most succinctly by President Saparmurat Turkmenbashi in his conceptual article "Strategic Partnership in the Ideals of Peace and Humanism", published in the *United Nations Chronicle*, issue 2, 2004: "Turkmenistan's consistent position is to strengthen the United Nations in the international arena as the highest forum for establishing a new, fair and humane world order. It supports the strengthening of the United Nations role, its peacemaking potential and its renewal in accordance with the changing realities of global development."

As was noted in the national report we submitted, the report was prepared on the basis of materials from the ministries and departments of Turkmenistan whose areas of competence include guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of women and the adoption of measures to prevent any manifestation of discrimination against women, State statistical data, the results of special investigations and information received from civic organizations that engage with questions regarding the subject of the report.

In preparing the report, consideration was given to the recommendations of the expert group of the United Nations Human Rights Committee headed by the Regional Adviser, Professor Rein Mullerson, which travelled to Turkmenistan to provide advice on the preparation of national reports, and also of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) international expert, Mr. Afsan Chowdhury (Bangladesh).

## 1. Information regarding the questions about education

On gaining independence and positive neutrality, through the personal efforts of our President for Life — the Great Saparmurat Turkmenbashi — the country acquired enormous opportunities for cooperation in various areas of political, public and cultural life, including in the field of education.

The purpose of Turkmen law relating to education is to assure and protect the constitutional right of all citizens to education. In addition, men and women have equal civil rights. Any violation of equality on the basis of sex is punishable by law (article 18 of the Constitution of Turkmenistan).

Education, as the basis for society's spiritual, socio-economic and cultural progress, is a priority area of national development in Turkmenistan.

The Constitution of Turkmenistan states that every citizen has the right to education. General secondary education is compulsory, and everyone is entitled to receive it free of charge in State educational institutions.

The President of Turkmenistan, the Great Saparmurat Turkmenbashi, is making supreme efforts to improve all aspects of high-quality education and access to education by citizens of the country, including women, irrespective of their nationality.

Turkmenistan's human-centred law provides for equal rights for women in political and public life, their equal access to education and the elimination of discrimination against women in employment and remuneration, and guarantees women's employment in the event of marriage and motherhood.

Women of various nationalities are studying in the education system and labouring for the good of their homeland, turning the new education policy of the Great Serdar into a reality. Also, with regard to gender equality in secondary education, women have maximum access to education, vocational training and employment opportunities. For example, women represent 62 per cent of the total number of secondary school teachers in Turkmenistan.

The State ensures access for all, especially women, to vocational, secondary vocational and higher education, in accordance with their abilities.

All of this demonstrates the supreme importance that the Great Saparmurat Turkmenbashi attaches to mothers. In Turkmenistan, motherhood is regarded as the paramount social value identified with the homeland. "For a Turkmen, the mother is sacred" (*Ruhnama (Book of the Soul)* 1, p. 321) because "[the love] born of the warmth of a mother's embraces and the security of a mother's arms is the basis for the growth and development of the human being and the formation and maturing of the human body" (*Ruhnama* 1, p. 323).

A mother going out to work can have peace of mind when she takes her child to a preschool institution in Turkmenistan; such institutions accept children aged 1 to 7 years, catering for the full physical and mental development of children of preschool age. In addition, the country's preschool institutions provide employment for women and girls of various nationalities and ages as head teachers, educators, teachers, specialists in disability and teaching assistants, among others. In 2004, women accounted for 88.7 per cent of the total number of staff in preschool institutions.

Women are creating and building a new way of life on the basis of the ancient traditions of the Turkmen people, guided by the teachings of the Great Saparmurat Turkmenbashi.

Women of various nationalities are actively involved in the country's political and social life and in international exhibitions, festivals, meetings and so on.

In the Turkmen education system, there is no discrimination of any kind against women, and women's equal rights with men are fully respected. For example, at the beginning of the 2004/05 academic year, women made up 38.2 per cent of the students, 52 per cent of the total staff and 33.6 per cent of the teaching staff at higher education institutions in Turkmenistan. In secondary vocational training institutions, women represented 64 per cent of the students, 55 per cent of the total staff and 59.4 per cent of the teaching staff.

This lack of discrimination is supported by the provisions of legal instruments governing the activities of the education system in Turkmenistan.

### **1. The Law of Turkmenistan "On education in Turkmenistan" of 1 October 1993**

The basic principles of education in Turkmenistan are as follows:

- Universal access for every citizen to all forms and kinds of educational services provided by the State;
- Equal rights for every person for the full realization of his or her abilities and talents.

In educational institutions, the conditions necessary to preserve and strengthen the health of pupils, students and staff are established.

Vocational training allows the citizens of Turkmenistan to become competent in a profession or speciality consistent with their vocation, interests and abilities.

Higher education provides the citizens of Turkmenistan with fundamental scientific and practical training, enabling them to develop an area of specialization in accordance with their vocation, interests and abilities, to upgrade their skills and to improve their professional training. It also caters for the training and retraining of scientific and teaching staff.

Persons who have completed the appropriate vocational teacher training are entitled to be employed as teachers in educational institutions.

### **2. Statute on State institutions of higher learning in Turkmenistan (resolution No. 3825 of the President of Turkmenistan of 11 August 1998)**

Paragraph 8. Citizens of Turkmenistan who have completed their secondary education may be admitted to higher education institutions.

The Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan, in accordance with the teachings of the Great Serdar on the need to bring up a healthy generation, has set specific objectives that are being successfully achieved in cooperation with civic organizations and international agencies of the United Nations in Turkmenistan, namely:

- The spiritual and moral education of the younger generation;
- Advanced training for staff;
- The introduction of new, modern programmes and technologies in education.

In conjunction with the offices of international organizations in Turkmenistan, all the main international instruments on human rights have been published in the national language, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the United Nations, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international instruments have been widely disseminated. Compilations of international and national instruments enshrining the rights of, for example, children, women and refugees are published on a regular basis. The Turkmen National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other organizations, has published 18 similar compilations. These include "Compilation of Turkmen legislation on human and civil rights and freedoms", "Human rights and justice in Turkmenistan", "The rights of women in Turkmenistan", "The legal status of foreign nationals in Turkmenistan", "The rights of refugees", "Protection of the rights and freedoms of the individual in Turkmenistan", "Motherhood and childhood: Turkmen law and international instruments on the rights of women and children", "International human rights instruments", "The rights of refugees in Turkmenistan" and "The Great Saparmurat Turkmenbashi: on democracy and human rights".

## **2. Information regarding the questions about health**

Great attention is paid in Turkmenistan to the protection of maternal and child health. The gradual implementation of the State Health Programme and of the programme for the protection of reproductive health has seen a steady decrease in infant and maternal mortality.

An inter-institutional working commission has been set up with a view to developing a State programme for a transition in Turkmenistan to internationally accepted principles and criteria for determining maternal and infant mortality. In addition to representatives of the Ministry of Public Health and the Medical Industry and the National Institute of State Statistics and Information, the commission's membership includes experts from the relevant departments of the Ministry of Economic and Financial Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and other institutions. The work of the inter-institutional commission has included the development of a mechanism for the use in medical practice in Turkmenistan of international standards for determining maternal and infant mortality rates.

Today, maternal mortality is defined in Turkmenistan as the death of a woman caused by pregnancy (irrespective of the duration and location of the pregnancy), occurring during pregnancy or within 42 days of a pregnancy ending, for any reason associated with the pregnancy or the strain it places on the body, but not owing to an accident or coincidental circumstances.

The calculation of infant mortality is also based on internationally accepted criteria. Before international standards were adopted, a pregnancy that ended at less than 28 weeks (where the child weighed less than 1,000 grams and measured less than 35 centimetres in length) was considered to have ended before term and was classified as a late miscarriage in medical practice in Turkmenistan. Only if such a premature baby survived for seven days was the birth considered a live birth. Today, the births of all living babies are considered live births, irrespective of the duration

of the pregnancy, if there are any signs of life, such as breathing, a heartbeat or voluntary contraction of skeletal muscle. In this way, the criteria elaborated by the United Nations are used in national medical practice to determine the rate of live births.

Protection of the reproductive health of the population is a priority area of national health policy, and the main objective is to ensure that men and women enter into parenthood willingly, that is, to ensure that families have the right to decide for themselves when to get married and how many children to have, and to provide them with all the resources they need to achieve that aim.

For the protection of families' reproductive health to be effective, people need to be well informed about methods of birth control, which should be accessible, in accordance with the requirements of a wide range of potential users. Access to birth control, in turn, is dependent on the quality and quantity of family planning services available.

The main objectives of the protection of families' reproductive health in Turkmenistan are to reduce the level of risk during pregnancy, to ensure safe motherhood and to reduce the incidence of complications during pregnancy and of extragenital diseases among women of reproductive age.

Women in Turkmenistan have every opportunity under national law for the full realization of all their reproductive rights and for the achievement of a good state of reproductive health.

Article 18 of the Constitution of Turkmenistan underlines the principle of equality and equal rights for men and women, establishing a firm legal basis for the prevention of discrimination. Neutral Turkmenistan supports the strategic position set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, of 1979, which rejects all forms of infringement of women's rights and freedoms, and has acceded to the Convention.

The State Health Programme forms the political basis for health-care reform. Since 1996, family medicine has been introduced across the country, and a State system of voluntary medical insurance has come into effect. Since January 1996, the Ministry of Public Health and the Medical Industry has introduced State licensing of medical and pharmaceutical activities and State voluntary medical insurance. At the Sixteenth Council of Elders of Turkmenistan on 24 and 25 October 2005, a number of amendments were made to the Law of Turkmenistan "On the protection of the health of citizens": in particular, the premiums for voluntary medical insurance were reduced from 4 to 2 per cent and, at the same time, discounts on all types of medical services provided against payment were increased from 30 to 50 per cent. Health services provided against payment have thus become more accessible to all citizens of the country, including women, irrespective of whether they live in towns or in rural areas.

One of the most important indicators of the country's prosperity and quality of life is the health of the population, which is always uppermost in the minds of the President of Turkmenistan and of the Government.

In 1992, at a meeting with representatives of the medical community, the President established the objective of fundamental reform of the health-care system.

The outline of the main areas of the President's policy with regard to the protection of public health is reflected in the State Health Programme, which was adopted in 1995 and finds its continuation in a national programme known as the strategy for the economic, political and cultural development of Turkmenistan for the period up to 2020. This programme sets out measures to improve and develop the equipment and technology available to medical institutions and to create optimum conditions for the accommodation and treatment of patients.

The purpose of the action plan for the implementation of this programme is to achieve a high standard of health for all in the twenty-first century and to increase the life expectancy of all citizens of Turkmenistan.

The further development of preventive care is a major principle of the Government's policy on public medical services.

The ratio of women to men in Turkmenistan remains stable; women represent 50 per cent of the population. The high proportion of women who are married and the low divorce rate form the basis for the high birth rate.

The State establishes all the necessary conditions and safeguards for good reproductive health. In particular, the resources needed for social assistance to mothers and children are provided for in the national budget, and the law prohibits the employment of women for hard physical work and in jobs where the production conditions are harmful.

Pursuant to the Law of Turkmenistan "On the protection of the health of citizens" (14 December 2002, 25 November 2005), chapter IV (Rights of citizens with regard to health protection), article 16 (The right of pregnant women and mothers to health protection), motherhood in Turkmenistan is safeguarded and encouraged by the State. The rights in question are realized through the organization and implementation of preventive measures and the incorporation of scientific advances in medical practice.

Pursuant to the Law of Turkmenistan "On the protection of the health of citizens" (14 December 2002, 25 November 2005), chapter V (Rights of citizens with regard to health protection) [sic], article 32 (Artificial termination of pregnancy):

“1. A woman shall be entitled to decide for herself the issue of motherhood.

2. Artificial termination of pregnancy may be performed at the woman's request up to the twelfth week of pregnancy; on social grounds up to the twenty-eighth week of pregnancy; and on medical grounds and with the woman's consent at any stage of pregnancy.

3. Artificial termination of pregnancy shall be performed in medical institutions.

4. Unlawful performance of an artificial termination of pregnancy is a criminal offence under Turkmen law.”

Rural and village hospitals, rural outpatient clinics and midwifery units have been turned into rural health centres and “houses” and incorporated in the system of rural etrap (district) hospitals. Family doctors, nurses and paramedics have a

positive impact on the quantity and quality of medical services provided to rural women.

To improve standards of housing, utilities and sanitation in rural settlements, comprehensive work is under way on water supplies, disposal and drawdown, in accordance with the measures planned under the strategy for the economic, political and cultural development of Turkmenistan for the period up to 2020.

### **3. Information regarding the questions about social protection**

The acquisition by Turkmenistan of permanent neutrality status has enabled it to expand the legal and regulatory framework for the protection of human rights, particularly women's rights, and for the provision of guarantees regarding their realization.

Having acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Turkmenistan is taking all appropriate measures stipulated in the Convention.

Women in independent Turkmenistan enjoy every right and freedom and participate actively in all areas of public life on an equal footing with men. The country's legislative framework provides all the conditions for the realization by women of opportunities for their active participation in government and public affairs and for their integration in the ongoing reform process.

In accordance with article 18 of the Constitution of Turkmenistan, men and women in Turkmenistan have equal civil rights. Any violation of equality on the basis of sex is punishable by law.

Furthermore, under the Constitution of Turkmenistan, all citizens have the right to work, to choose their profession or employment and place of work according to their own judgement and to be remunerated according to the quantity and quality of the work performed.

Under the Labour Code, any sort of reduction in a worker's pay on the grounds of sex, age, race, nationality, religious conviction or membership of civic organizations is prohibited.

Collective pay bargaining, which involves combining the mechanism of State wage regulation with the economic independence of enterprises of all types of ownership, has become an effective means of managing wages while according a greater place to the human dimension at all levels of economic management.

The conditions of pay of heads of Government and administrative bodies and employees of budget-financed institutions are regulated by the State, while enterprises determine independently the type and systems of payment and wage and salary rates. However, the State acts as a guarantor of the agreements reached and ensures that there is a balance between the interests of all the parties in the labour relations and that the basic rights and guarantees accorded to workers are preserved.

To this end, a system of social partnership has been established in the area of social and labour relations. Since 1992, trilateral sectoral labour (pay) agreements have been concluded between Government agencies, trade unions and representatives of enterprise owners (employers). These agreements stipulate the parties' mutual obligations and regulate the following aspects of social and labour

relations: organization of work, pay, social guarantees, hiring and firing of workers, measures to increase the efficiency of production, strengthening of work discipline, prevention of labour disputes and consideration of workers' interests during privatization.

Such agreements are aimed at ensuring respect for the economically grounded correlation between increases in pay, taking account of retail price reforms, and increases in productivity. The agreements must not worsen conditions of employment or violate the social guarantees established by law, and they must be consistent with the law.

Trilateral agreements are elaborated by ministries and departments on the basis of minimum and social guarantees that are binding throughout Turkmenistan.

In 1998, Turkmenistan switched to a two-tier pay system for workers in the productive sectors. Wage rates were differentiated in enterprises by grading workers according to the complexity of the work they perform and their level of skill.

The basis for differentiation was the correlation between the skill levels of workers' occupations according to the Uniform Wage Rates and Skills Handbook and their grade under the two-tier system.

When the wage tiers were established, minimum and maximum wage rates were set in each of the two tiers, allowing workers' individual qualities to be taken into account (length of service, experience, education, etc.).

Also, enterprises apply a system of increments and supplements in addition to the fixed salary and wage rates for posts, as well as paying bonuses.

The social policies pursued in Turkmenistan are aimed at further increasing the living standards of the country's population; this is reflected in national programmes and is in keeping with the goals derived from the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

For example, the strategy for the economic, political and cultural development of Turkmenistan for the period up to 2020 provides, first and foremost, for the increase of real incomes, the strengthening of incentives to work and the transformation of wages into a reliable basic income source able to provide workers and their families with a decent existence.

Wages will be doubled every five years, which will help to enhance individual performance. In the context of efforts to improve the pay system, it is planned to strengthen further the economic link between workers' skill level and performance and their pay.

This will create the conditions for a major increase in real wages and for the attainment by workers of a level of pay that will allow them to lead a sufficiently comfortable life.

Women's entrepreneurialism is being further developed, as is participation by women in small businesses and other forms of employment in the non-State sector of the economy.

In 2004, the proportion of women among those employed in the country's small businesses increased by comparison with the previous year. This increase is to be seen in such types of economic activity as processing, in enterprises providing



health and social services, in hospitals and restaurants, in agriculture, and in enterprises engaged in real estate and other types of activity.

The number of women wishing to lease State property in order to engage in entrepreneurial activity is growing dramatically.

Radical changes in Turkmenistan's economy and on the labour market (the development of the private sector and of new forms of labour recruitment, the exponential increase in the number of economic actors) and difficulties in applying traditional data-gathering methods have called for the adoption of new concepts and definitions and new methods of data collection.

In order to gather the necessary data on problems related to employment and ensure that it is reliable, it has been found advisable in Turkmenistan to conduct systematic (quarterly) sample surveys of employment-related problems by administering questionnaires to households.

This method of statistical data collection is widespread in countries with market economies. It is the most flexible data-gathering method of all and ensures that interrelated information is obtained on various aspects of employment (composition of the labour force by sex, age, etc.).

The importance of women's social function allows them to determine their employment status for themselves. In addition, the State affords them social guarantees.

For example, in accordance with the Law of Turkmenistan "On pensions", adopted on 25 January 2006, women have the right to retire on a pension on reaching the age of 57, i.e. five years earlier than the age fixed for men. Moreover, the pension granted is paid irrespective of whether the woman continues to work.

The indicator used in calculating the pension entitlements accrued is life expectancy following retirement, which is defined as average longevity for men and women combined. Since women retire five years earlier than men, this means that their accrued pension entitlements are greater.

In accordance with the Law "On State benefits", adopted on 17 July 1998, women are granted the following types of benefit:

- Maternity benefit — paid to women working in enterprises, organizations and establishments of all types of ownership, women studying in higher and secondary specialized education institutions and women serving in the armed forces or in internal affairs agencies who take maternity leave (duration of payments — at least 112 calendar days, with the right to an extension of 16 or 40 calendar days, depending on the reasons);
- Childcare benefit — paid to women who take leave to care for a child (payments continue until the child reaches the age of 3).

In addition, in accordance with article 19 of the Law "On pensions", these periods are included in women's length of service when the amount of their State pension is calculated.

At the initiative of the President of Turkmenistan, a large-scale cultural policy has been developed and is being implemented. It includes a range of measures providing for the revival of ancient traditions and customs and national holidays,

more widespread use of the native tongue as the official language, the development of all types of professional and folk arts, the steady increase of the population's level of education, and the development of book publishing and the mass media.

One of the most important cultural traditions of the Turkmen people is the sacred tradition of honouring mothers as keepers of the domestic hearth and guarantors of family stability. In Turkmenistan, the State pays tribute to womanhood and to women's contribution to work, family life and leisure. In order to revive the national traditions and customs inherited from our ancestors and as a sign of the high esteem in which women are held, a presidential decree was adopted in 2002 proclaiming a national spring holiday on 20, 21 and 22 March, the first day of which is dedicated to the women of Turkmenistan. On 20 March, all women in the country, irrespective of age, are presented with a monetary gift on behalf of the President. In addition to working women, such gifts are also received by pensioners, recipients of State benefits, female students, schoolgirls and girls cared for in kindergartens and crèches, which clearly demonstrates the recognition of the important role played by women in Turkmen society.

#### **4. Information regarding the questions about gender equality, legal protection and participation by women in the country's political and public life**

*The term "gender" was introduced relatively recently (in 1968, by the American psychologist Smoller) and was intended to highlight socio-economic, as opposed to biological, reasons for the differences between men and women.*

At the global level, the issue of gender equality was first raised at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), which took place under the slogan "Action for Equality, Development and Peace". The States participating in the Conference (including Turkmenistan) adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, aimed at ensuring gender equality.

At the dawn of the new millennium, the Heads of State and Government gathered at the United Nations General Assembly set out their vision for the world and acknowledged their responsibility for the fate of humanity and for upholding the principles of human dignity, justice and equality. They adopted the Millennium Declaration, which enunciates goals in the field of development that serve as benchmarks for the progress made by all of humanity towards the realization of the vision of development, peace and human rights. These goals are informed by a number of fundamental values that are of vital importance for international relations in the twenty-first century.

In its resolutions 55/162 of 14 December 2000 and 56/95 of 14 December 2001, the General Assembly instructed the Secretary-General of the United Nations to prepare an annual report on progress achieved by the United Nations and Member States towards implementing the Millennium Declaration.

In order to promote a just world, Turkmenistan endorsed the United Nations initiative and was among the 189 States that signed the Millennium Declaration. As a United Nations Member State, Turkmenistan has consistently recognized human rights and freedoms and contributed to and supported initiatives in public and political life aimed at building peace, bringing nations and peoples closer together and defending humanism and democracy.

At the same time, it should be noted that, while the realization of these goals certainly depends on joint efforts by United Nations Member States, the key role in addressing problems belongs, first and foremost, to countries themselves, drawing on their own capacity to overcome their difficulties.

The Millennium Declaration includes eight goals in the areas of education, health and women's empowerment, and 18 targets. Of the 18 targets related to the goals of the Millennium Declaration, which are to be met by 2015, Turkmenistan has already fulfilled 13. It has therefore reformulated these targets, taking into account the parameters of the strategy for the economic, political and cultural development of Turkmenistan for the period up to 2020.

Goal 3 of the Millennium Declaration is to promote gender equality and empower women.

Turkmenistan is pursuing a national policy aimed at achieving gender equality. It should be noted that there can be no universal model for gender equality. Each country must elaborate its own strategy for achieving gender balance in society, taking into account its own peculiarities.

Family values have tended to predominate in Turkmenistan. Accordingly, women have traditionally played a large and honoured role. The continuity of the best traditions and the fundamental role played by women are reflected in the works of the President of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Turkmenbashi, including *Ruhnama* and others.

Turkmen women play an active part in the country's economic, public and political life.

Turkmen women — the focus of State attention and the objects of universal love — work on an equal footing with men in the most varied sectors of the economy. Many women occupy positions of responsibility in Turkmenistan's ministries and departments, in sectoral administrative bodies and in the sectors themselves. The proportion of women among the deputies in the Majlis (Parliament) of Turkmenistan — 16 per cent — is 1.6 times higher than the world average. In addition, 14 per cent of members of the gengeshi (local councils), 42 per cent of officials of administrative structures, 60 per cent of health-care authority employees and 60 per cent of workers in the fields of education, science and culture are women. Elections to Government and administrative bodies are conducted in accordance with the Law "On guarantees of the electoral rights of citizens of Turkmenistan", adopted on 22 April 1999, and based on the principles of universal suffrage and equality of rights of men and women. Candidates for election to representative bodies are elected directly by citizens, voting in elections is by secret ballot, and no monitoring of the expression of the will of the voters is permitted during the voting.

On 15 September 1999, the Majlis (Parliament) of Turkmenistan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of Women, which states that women are entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions on equal terms with men (information supplementary to paras. 66-75 of the national report).

Women make up almost half the labour force and more than 44 per cent of employed persons. The proportion of working-age women (from 16 to 57 years)

who are economically active is fairly high in Turkmenistan, almost 70 per cent (without counting those engaged in domestic work). The proportion of women among persons working in the State sector is 43 per cent, in the non-State sector 45 per cent. A large percentage of women working in the State sector are employed in large and medium-sized enterprises (more than 40 per cent). In addition, it should be noted that the level of education of economically active women in Turkmenistan is higher than that of men.

Women are successfully combining economic and public and political activity with childbearing. The birth rate in Turkmenistan is one of the highest in the world.

Each year, in the global *Human Development Report*, UNDP ranks countries according to their human development index (HDI). Turkmenistan belongs to the group of countries in the medium human-development category. Since 1993, UNDP has calculated a gender-adjusted HDI (GDI). In Turkmenistan, GDI is close to one (0.967 in 2004), which means that the differences between men and women in terms of human development are minimal.

The progress made by Turkmenistan towards achieving gender equality in society is borne out by the legal framework established and the practical efforts to implement it.

Turkmenistan has ratified or acceded to the main international human rights instruments, including the declarations and conventions on women's and children's rights. These instruments include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value (Convention No. 100), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, the Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (Convention No. 138), the Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation (Convention No. 111), the Convention concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour (Convention No. 29), the Convention concerning the Abolition of Forced Labour (Convention No. 105), the Slavery Convention, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and a number of others. The Government of Turkmenistan has taken measures to further the implementation of the provisions of these international instruments. The principles and norms contained in these instruments have been incorporated in virtually all of Turkmenistan's laws and regulations concerning human rights, including women's and children's rights.

Moreover, this process is continuing. On 28 March 2005, Turkmenistan acceded to a range of important United Nations conventions and protocols directly related to issues concerning women and children. They include the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational

Organized Crime, the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

Our country, while strictly adhering to the obligations it has undertaken and acting from a position of neutrality, actively supports all United Nations initiatives and decisions, and the fact that it has signed documents aimed at making people's lives more secure and stable is eloquent testimony to this.

Turkmenistan is consistently implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and of the documents adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 4 and 5 September 1995), thus guaranteeing women the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

Mindful of the 12 critical areas of concern set out in the Beijing Platform for Action, in 1999 Turkmenistan adopted a national plan of action establishing the following priorities:

- Creation of a mechanism for coordinating actions at the local, national and international levels;
- Participation of women in the work of Government and administrative bodies and in the process of formulating and adopting administrative decisions;
- Education and vocational training for women;
- Women and health;
- Women and the economy;
- Women's rights;
- Women and the mass media.

The priority areas established under the National Plan of Action in line with the Beijing Platform for Action reflect pressing issues that will be resolved through more active participation by women in all areas of public life and comprehensive mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the long-term planning and implementation of specific programmes.

As mentioned previously, the centuries-old Turkmen cultural tradition of respecting and honouring women, an effective and comprehensive legal framework enabling women to exercise their rights fully, the active participation of women in all areas of public life, including Government and administrative bodies, and the equal status of men and women in marriage and family relations, including child-rearing, prevent gender stereotypes from appearing and taking root in Turkmen society. This is manifest in Turkmen life. For example, six women were among the 12 winners from different etraps (districts) of the country who were awarded cash prizes in a television contest for young amateur singers held in 2005 as part of the "Golden Age of the Turkmen People" competition announced by the President of Turkmenistan, in which contestants celebrated in song the unity, cohesion and spiritual and national revival of the Turkmen people. By way of further example, the

Dokmachi women's football team of the Ministry of Textiles took part in a women's football tournament held in Bulgaria in 2005. In addition, in July 2004, the *Neitralny Turkmenistan (Neutral Turkmenistan)* and Turkmenistan newspapers and the weekly publication *Novosti Turkmenistana (Turkmenistan News)* published articles on a female student of the Turkmen Polytechnical Institute whose project, which made possible a considerable increase in gas extraction, won first prize in a competition for young scientists and who was awarded a diploma by the President of Turkmenistan. It should also be noted that, each year, a large number of female students and schoolgirls take part in the young scientists' competition inaugurated by the Ministry of Education and the Makhtumkuli Youth Organization. The majority of reporters and journalists in Turkmenistan are women. These examples are convincing testimony to the absence of gender stereotypes in Turkmen society.

One clear example of the absence of gender stereotypes in Turkmenistan is women's unlimited access to jobs long regarded as belonging to the male domain, such as driving, including in public transport (for example, many women work as trolleybus drivers in Ashgabat), or programming, as the following data show.

**Students of vocational secondary schools by subject area, as at the beginning of the 2003/04 school year**

<i>Subject area</i>	<i>Percentage of total</i>		<i>Distribution by sex, shown as percentage</i>	
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
Economy and planning	20.1	31.7	51.4	48.6
Education	41.3	16.9	80.3	19.7
Health care	24.0	16.3	71.0	29.0
Culture and art	11.2	30.7	37.9	62.1

Analysis of the above table shows that girls represent the majority both among students of vocational schools and in many subject areas.

The absence of gender stereotypes in Turkmen society is further demonstrated by the content of school textbooks, the mass media and advertisements broadcast on national television, the distribution of family responsibilities in the home and the fact that spouses assume equal responsibility for child-rearing.

Turkmenistan attaches great importance to raising the young generation — particularly boys — in the spirit of the national tradition of respecting and honouring women. The educational programmes and awareness campaigns conducted in Turkmenistan by national bodies and international organizations (such as UNDP) through the mass media and the State education system with a view to addressing gender relations will facilitate the elimination of any direct or indirect manifestations of gender stereotypes in daily life.

Understanding the importance of such work in society, the Women's Union of Turkmenistan, with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), publishes an electronic newspaper (Internet address: <http://www.nt-ene.gov.tm>). The main purpose of the newspaper is not only to report on the development of the women's movement in independent, neutral Turkmenistan but also to educate its readers about issues related to gender equality, women's reproductive rights and

reproductive health among men, women and adolescents. The electronic newspaper addresses issues in sections with such headings as “Gender: theory and practice”, “Women and the law”, “School of Health” and “Women and Society”, which not only highlight the status of women in Turkmen society but also serve as a major educational tool, raising readers’ awareness of current legislation in various areas of public life, reproductive rights, reproductive health and vocational training for women. For example, in 2004, an international business trainer wrote a column for the newspaper in which he set out a series of steps whereby women could set up their own businesses.

On 7 April 1994, at a conference of female representatives of each of the country’s regions, the Gurbansoltan-eje Women’s Union of Turkmenistan was founded as a voluntary, popular, authoritative and influential civic organization, forming part of the national *galkynysh* (revival) movement. The Women’s Union now has a membership of more than one million Turkmen women united by shared views and interests. It is registered with the Ministry of Justice of Turkmenistan and is a legal entity. The Women’s Union is a nationwide institution; its branches and primary organs are in operation throughout Turkmenistan: in the velayats (regions), cities and etraps (districts), and in enterprises, organizations, vocational secondary schools and schools of higher education.

The Women’s Union is not a commercial organization; it does not collect membership dues, nor does it pay its members for work that they may undertake for the Union; all activities are conducted on a strictly voluntary and public basis.

The organization’s supreme body is the Union Congress, which consists of plenipotentiary representatives from the nationwide branches. During periods between Congress and conference meetings, the Union is governed by the Central Council and the Chairperson. The first Women’s Congress took place on 16 March 2002. It analysed the work of the Union, elected new members to the Central Council and the Review Committee and drew up a five-year strategy. Delegates also discussed the Statute and Regulations of the Review Committee, to which amendments and additions were made.

The main aims of the Union’s activities are as follows:

- To unite and mobilize efforts by women to implement reform in Turkmenistan, to expand their participation in social, work and cultural life; and to lend them social and professional support;
- To enhance the role of women in the development of the country’s economy, to improve their position on the labour market and increase levels of employment among them, to provide them with access to education, and to assist them in building on their job qualifications and professional skills;
- To strengthen legal guarantees and protect the constitutional rights and freedoms of women;
- To protect maternal and child health, to strengthen the family and improve women’s health, to assist in the implementation of the President’s Health Programme, and to defend the legal interests of mother and child;
- To foster ties with international women’s organizations and exchange information on issues related to the women’s movement, the economy, politics, science and culture.

The practical implementation of decisions, plans and recommendations for the further advancement of women drawn up and adopted by the Women's Union at its congresses, conferences and meetings is achieved through mechanisms such as the Union's Chairperson, its Central Council, an inter-ministerial group, a working group, resource centres and centres for reproductive health.

The Central Council is the supreme executive body of the Women's Union and the supreme administrative body in relation to all the Union's subsidiary bodies and organs.

The Central Council of the Women's Union:

- Conducts its activities in accordance with the goals and objectives set out in the Charter of the Women's Union, periodically reporting to the Union's subsidiary bodies on its activities;
- Submits proposals to Government and administrative bodies regarding issues related to the status of women and implementation of the programmes of the President of Turkmenistan for the protection of maternal and child health and the promotion of healthy lifestyles;
- Promotes, in accordance with Turkmen Law, participation by women's organizations in the conduct of national referendums and elections of khalk vekilleri (people's representatives) deputies of the Majlis (Parliament) and members of the gengeshi (local councils);
- Lends advisory, methodological and other assistance to the Union's subsidiary bodies and organs and trains its active members.

The activities of the Central Council are directed by the Chairperson. The meetings of the Central Council are called by its Chairperson and are held when necessary, but no less than twice a year. Matters relating to the current activities of the Central Council are addressed through instructions issued by the Chairperson, which are approved at Council meetings if necessary.

The inclusion of leaders of the Women's Union in the membership of the Khalk Maslakhaty (People's Council), which is the supreme representative organ of popular power, helps to ensure that women's interests are taken fully into account in strategic decision-making and in formulating and approving national programmes for the development of Turkmenistan, and attests to the prestige of the women's movement in Turkmen society.

On 11 April 2006, Ashgabat hosted an international conference on the theme "Turkmen Women in the Golden Age". The event was organized by the country's leading civic organization, the Gurbansoltan-eje Women's Union of Turkmenistan.

The conference, which focused on the achievements of Turkmen women in the Golden Age in the politics, governance, economy, culture and public life of Turkmenistan, was attended by participants from almost 50 countries worldwide, which demonstrates the genuine interest of the international community in events taking place in Turkmenistan.

As a State Member of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other authoritative international organizations, independent, neutral Turkmenistan complies fully with its human rights obligations. Turkmenistan, which considers universally recognized international legal norms to



be of paramount importance, has recognized and acceded to international instruments, conventions and declarations concerning human rights. Its commitment to its international human rights obligations is reflected in its political, economic, cultural and public life. Turkmen women are highly active in public administration and public activities. Turkmenistan's Basic Law guarantees women's rights equal to those of men: women are free to vote, to be elected and to take an active part in building a bright future for Turkmenistan.

In accordance with the Constitution of Turkmenistan, all the necessary conditions have been created for women to live freely and to work, train and study; women have the opportunity to raise their children in the spirit of modern times. The *Gurbansoltan-eje* magazine and the *Ene Myakhri* newspaper, both published by the Women's Union, report on the life of contemporary Turkmen women who are active in public administration and in social and political life. By a decision of 18 June 1996, the Majlis of Turkmenistan established the Order of Gurbansoltan-eje to reward women for special services in employment and public and political life. The Order of Gurbansoltan-eje has since been awarded to many women engaged in various occupations, including writers, poets and carpet-makers. A spring festival celebrating Turkmen women, coinciding with the Novruz festival, and a national spring holiday have been inaugurated.

Since Turkmenistan gained independence, hundreds of production plants, factories and major industrial complexes equipped with state-of-the-art technologies have been built and put into operation. Women are as adept as men in using this state-of-the-art equipment. Turkmen women have long since mastered specialist skills as engineers, technologists and production managers.

At the international conference on "Turkmen Women in the Golden Age", participants exchanged views on the role of contemporary women in public life and in the family, their commitment to the principles of democracy and humanism, cooperation among women's associations from different countries and the tasks lying ahead. They learned about the experience gained by the Gurbansoltan-eje Women's Union of Turkmenistan in its work and examples of its cooperation with Government bodies and public and international organizations. During the conference, participants visited leisure resorts and national museums and spent time at modern factories, where they witnessed at first hand how women of the capital work; they also visited Turkmenistan's places of interest.

As the President of Turkmenistan noted in his address to the conference participants: "Our hearts, homes and tables are open to our dear guests. Strike up friendships with our women — the pride of our country. Once you have entered their rich spiritual world, you will gain an insight into our people."