

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE
CONSIDERATION OF THE THIRD PERIODIC REPORT OF SURINAME
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF
ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)**

**37TH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

BY

Mr. JEFFREY JOEMMANBAKS

HEAD OF DELEGATION



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Esteemed Chair and members of the CEDAW Committee,

It is an honour for me today to lead the delegation of Suriname to present the Third Periodic Report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and efforts to further the recommendations from the initial and second report. Together with my delegation we expect to have a constructive dialogue with the members of this Committee.

I regret to inform you that the Minister also responsible for Gender affairs, who was initially assigned as Head of Delegation, could no longer be present at this meeting. He sends his best wishes for a fruitful session. He furthermore requested me to convey to you the commitment of the Surinamese Government to effectively implement the CEDAW Convention.

I would also like to congratulate you, Madame Chair with your election as chair, and all newly elected and re elected experts as members of this most important Committee.

Madame Chair,

Allow me now to introduce to you the members of the delegation of the Republic of Suriname:

Ms. Miriam Mac Intosh (Charge d' Affaires at the Permanent Mission)

Mr. Raymond Landveld (Counselor of the Permanent Mission)

Ms. Chitra Mohanlal, acting head of the National Bureau for Gender Policy

Ms. Dr. Irma Loemban Tobing-Klein, Advisor of the Ministry of Home Affairs on UN CSW issues,

and myself, Jeffrey Joemmanbaks, Coordinating Director for Gender within the Directorate of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Suriname has experienced a number of developments since March 2002.

This presentation will briefly touch on various highlights up to December 2006.

In the following periodic report of the Republic of Suriname we shall, of course, mention these developments in detail.

After we discussed our initial and second periodic report in June 2002, your esteemed Committee presented to us a number of careful recommendations. Suriname has seriously endeavored to fill the gaps which your Committee pointed out to us in order to meet the conditions of CEDAW.

Your recommendations were used to formulate various policy documents that contained proposals to remove discriminatory provisions in our national legislation. In our reply to the "list of issues and questions" of 4 August 2006, a number of the developments since March 2002 have already been mentioned.

Madame Chair,

"Discrimination" is defined in the Surinamese legislation by Article 8 Paragraph 2 of the Constitution, and Article 126 bis of the Penal Code. Gender discrimination is prohibited in our national legislation, while Article 35 Paragraph 2 of our Constitution explicitly lays down equality of men and women. A positive development is that the Ministry of Justice and Police installed a committee which is currently revising the Penal Code. One of the proposed adjustments is a more precise definition of the concept of violence against women, and increasing the penalty in case of discrimination of or violence against women. Specific provisions will also be formulated to protect boys, girls, minors, marital rape, human trafficking, and prostitution.

In this regard, it is useful to also mention that the Ministry of Home Affairs is extending the term of the National Committee on Gender Legislation. This Committee consists of representatives of various Ministries and non state actors, including representatives of the University of Suriname and women's organizations. The Committee will have a permanent character and the National Bureau for Gender Policy will act as its Secretariat. The Committee's task will be to continuously test national legislation against conventions, and to present concrete legislative amendments to the government (a more detailed terms of reference was provided in our report under consideration). This process will be undertaken in close cooperation with two other committees, which have been installed by the Ministry of Justice and Police, namely the Committee on Trafficking in Women and the Committee on Human Rights.

With regard to the Optional Protocol to the Convention, and in view of further legal protection of women through a communication and complaints procedure, this will be seriously addressed, as was expressed in a WRC workshop in January 2006 for Government and Non State Actors. One of the recommendations of this workshop was that our country should consider acceding to the Optional Protocol. Our responses to your Committee's list of issues can be found on page 14, under "Progress towards ratification of accession to the Optional Protocol", in which mention was made of the "strong lobby for signing and ratification by the Surinamese Government" of the Women's Rights Centre in collaboration with UNIFEM's advocacy tour. Later this year a WRC debate with the gender focal points will be held regarding the optional protocol. The Ministry of Home Affairs will provide for a session room.

Madame Chair,

During the discussions of the previous periodic report, your Committee also mentioned, among other things, collaboration between Government and Non State Actors (including Non Governmental Women's Organizations). The Government of Suriname attaches great value to this collaboration. This became especially apparent when the current, third periodic report was drawn up: various sessions with female non state actors preceded the formulation and final submission of this third periodic report.

Referring to the positive comment of your Committee (Article 34 with regard to the Integral Gender Action Plan 2000-2005), I am pleased to inform you that on Saturday 2 December 2006 the Integral Gender Action Plan 2006-2010 was launched simultaneously with the opening of a branch of the National Bureau of Gender Policy in the District of Nickerie, and in the presence of representatives of our National Assembly, Non State Actors (NGO's), international organizations and diplomatic corps. The aforementioned IGAP for the period 2006-2010 was drawn up by a consultant for the Government together with the NGOs. As in the preceding IGAP, the input of non state actors was essential in formulating various activities. NGOs will have the opportunity to carry out activities themselves in the framework of the IGAP, while the National Bureau for Gender Policy will facilitate the process and, where necessary make available expertise and other resources.

In this respect it is also worth mentioning that last Tuesday we had a fruitful meeting at the Suriname mission with the representative of the NGO's who also participated in your session on January the 22nd.

Madame Chair,

The Integral Gender Action Plan forms the core of the activities to be carried out in the coming years regarding the following priority areas:

1. Institutional arrangements for improved gender policy development.
2. poverty reduction from a gender based perspective.
3. macro economic planning from a gender based perspective to increase economic development and the participation of women in the labour market.
4. equal participation of men and women in decision making.
5. development of legal and policy instruments to enhance human rights.
6. elimination of domestic and sexual violence.
7. increased participation in education and reduction of gender stereotyping in the assignments of jobs.
8. inclusion of sexual and reproductive health, reduction of HIV/AIDS and suicide in strengthening of the primary health care.
9. increased access for women to ict and the elimination of gender stereotyping in the media.
10. gender balance in decision making processes related to the environment.

The National Bureau of Gender Policy itself is in a phase of upgrading its operations; at present 7 persons are already employed, including the two officials in the branch office in Nickerie.

Various specialized positions will shortly be filled after a recruitment process, for which the Ministry will use affirmative action for women. Affirmative action is also obvious in the recruitment of magistrates; currently 9 women versus 1 man are attending the course.

The National Bureau of Gender Policy will also establish more branches in the capitals of the other districts, preferably at the office of the district commissioner.

The "Committee on Gender Legislation", works in a number of fields. Research and the introduction of new legislation has resulted in recommendations for bills on maternity leave, concubinage, pension, domestic violence, marriage law, labor law, the environment, the media. Our report makes reference to some of these bills in more detail. One of these is a general maternity leave regulation, which will be modeled on a general old age pension regulation; the idea is to create a fund in which contributions can be made, so as to realize maternity leave for all women. Discussions to establish this fund will shortly commence within the Ministry of Social Affairs. It should be noted, however, that small businesses have raised many objections concerning the costs for participation in the fund or insurable options. Further discussions in this regard will be undertaken in a tripartite consultation between Government, Organizations for Employers and Employees.

Turning to the point of a human rights based approach to development and human rights education I would like to point out that the Government of Suriname, in its Policy Statement 2005-2010 again explicitly embraced the rights-based approach to development, and indicated that I quote: "... human rights and development are inseparable, because human rights are about respect for humanity, protection, and possibilities to develop human potential in an atmosphere of equality, equity, self-determination, peace and security" end quote.

Suriname believes that the rights-based approach to development is an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness and interdependence of economic, social and cultural rights, and that development will be achieved only when everyone is able to enjoy these rights. Moreover, the Multi-Annual Development Plan for Suriname 2006-2011 (a strategy for sustainable development) is based on the Millennium Development Goals, and contains the following development vision: "a fair society that guarantees human rights and basic social securities for all". The development mission is given in this document as: "improve the life of all Surinamese people".

The special importance of Human Rights education is recognized within the University of Suriname and in secondary schools, as well as by NGOs (such as the human rights organization *Moi Wana*, the United Nations Association Suriname, and the Organization for Justice and Peace), and various programs have been developed.

Under legal protection, the Government's Policy Statement explicitly mentions tackling domestic violence and drugs-related crime, while a special judicial committee is currently carefully investigating the adjustments required to bring national legislation in line with CEDAW. For instance, institutionalization of a Bureau for Women and Children whose main tasks will be to tackle domestic violence, act as a focal point and support center for victims of domestic violence. The draft Penal Code contains a provision for sexual harassment at work; in anticipation of adoption and effectuation of this Act, the Ministry of Justice and Police has established a complaints committee, where individual complaints can be submitted, with the possibility for sanctions when sexual harassment is proven. This committee has already successfully dealt with three cases. An Ombudsman's Office is being prepared by Government, which will focus on the observance of human rights of women on an equal footing with men.

The Committee on Gender Legislation will elaborate on an earlier proposal for a bill on equal treatment of men and women, in which positive discrimination (Article 4) will be incorporated. The Committee will also focus on eradicating trafficking in women and pimping. The Act on the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons has meanwhile become effective, and special attention is given to training, education, reception and counseling of victims and children. This Act also mentions a complaints committee, which will have the powers to impose sanctions.

With regard to the legislation on nationality, recommendations are being formulated, which will introduce equal rights for the father or the mother regarding the choice of nationality and surnames of children born in wedlock.

Existing programs to improve the situation of senior citizens will be extended, such as initiatives within the Association of Private Social Institutions (VPSI) and the Bigisma Platform (Older Persons Platform), while new initiatives have been developed in this regard, such as the Solidarity Fund and efforts to strengthen the financial position of senior citizens (such as improvement of old age pension by Government, the design of villages for senior citizens, computer training for seniors). It is noteworthy that older women remain active participants in processes aimed at reconciling the situation of older people with the basic principles for senior citizens, as formulated in the International Year of Older Persons (1999): "participation, care, self-fulfillment, independence, dignity."

With regard to the recommendations under points 40-72 of the CEDAW Committee's report of October 2002, the following is noted in support of what was already stated in our report and as a supplement thereof:

Amendment of legislation / domestic legislation: in June 2003 the current marital legislation (the Marital Act of 1973) came into force. With this legislation the Asian Marriage Act has been cancelled.

The Suriname Civil Code only provides for the legal minimum age for marriage, which is 17 years for boys and 15 years for girls. Some adjustments have been made to the Penal Code regarding Trafficking in Persons (TIP). This act came into force in April 2006; the penalty for trafficking in minors under the age of 16 has been sharpened (the penalty for TIP is a minimum of 8 years, but there is a minimum penalty of 10 years for trafficking in minors under the age of 16);

There is draft legislation regarding Domestic Violence. The bill for suppressing domestic violence was initiated and prepared by the Women's Rights Centre (NGO), and it also aims at protecting children against domestic violence. There is a child abuse prevention network to adequately deal with victims of child abuse. A strategic plan of action with special training for social workers, teachers, children and prison guards was developed. In 2005 a basic awareness training was held for, among others, police officers. In 2003 at a National Youth Congress on violence against children organized by the Child Rights Bureau, much attention was given to public awareness of the negative aspects of violence against children (in particular the girl child). In 2002, the month of April was proclaimed "child abuse prevention month".

Within the healthcare system, the Integrated Management of Maternal and Child Health (IMMCH) strategy has been introduced; this strategy will contribute to the mainstreaming of mother and childcare in national programs and standardization and implementation of updated norms and protocols for mother and childcare in general (including a breastfeeding policy). The Government Sector Plan for Health 2004 – 2008 has as its objective: Reduction of child mortality from 24.5 in 2004 to 10 in 2015; reduction of infant mortality from 19.2 in 2004 to 7 in 2015; reduction of maternal mortality from 85 in 2004 to 50 in 2015. A sexual and reproductive policy has been formulated and an implementation plan for maternal care will be developed. Efforts are being made to improve the national health information system, which should result in improved data gathering. The Medical Mission Service, which is the largest provider of primary health care in the interior, supports the outreach of health and nutrition services through training of village health care promoters. This is an important project to guarantee health care in the interior areas of the country.

The Government has approved a national Strategic Plan on HIV /Aids 2004-2008 (with policy interventions by the National AIDS Programme, supported by UN AIDS). The plan has the following specific targets: 25 % reduction of all new HIV infections in the age group 15-24 years and 25% reduction of all HIV-positive pregnant women.

Special prevention programmes for young people (for example, the prevention of mother to child transmission program) exist, while various joint activities of Government and NGO's aim at the reduction of stigma and discrimination and awareness raising of human rights in the context of HIV/AIDS.

The MDGs are guiding principles in the implementation of the Agricultural Sector Plan, ASP 2005 – 2010. A consultant was recruited to realize gender mainstreaming in the analysis, planning and budgeting of this Sector Plan;

A gender perspective has been integrated in production and development activities: because of their vulnerable position, women, people with a disability, and the youth are classified as priority groups in the employment policy;

The Education Sector Plan will focus on conducting a study to analyze gender issues in education, with a view to gender mainstreaming at all levels and types of education.

The analysis will make it possible to elaborate implications which will lead to the following:

- all levels and types of schools accessible to both boys and girls.
- gender awareness incorporated in the curricula at all levels of education and all stereotyping removed.
- gender awareness training for teachers, school principals and others involved in education.

Madame Chair,

I think that it is also important to mention that on the highest educational level recently an Institute for women, gender and development studies was proclaimed at the University of Suriname.

With regard to the participation of women at international and national forums, in 2006 more women became visible in high diplomatic positions: there are currently 5 female ambassadors. More women will be appointed shortly in high diplomatic and consular positions, as well as in boards of directors. 3 of the 17 Ministers in Cabinet (that is 18%) are women, namely the Minister of Transportation, Communication and Tourism, the Minister of Labor, Technology and the Environment, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The National Assembly, our highest legislative institution, counts 25% women; the clerk and acting clerks of the National Assembly are all women. Recently a special committee on Women and Children has been established in the National Assembly. In lower legislative and executive levels there is also an increase in the number of women. Although the political parties in general do not conduct specific campaigns to get women elected, there is nevertheless a noticeable change.

With the new coalition government in place after the 2005 general elections, the specific needs of women will now be addressed with more political backbone. The new coalition partner that entered government represents various Maroon segments, as a consequence of which the visions and wishes of the people of the interior can also be more adequately voiced.

Madame Chair,

In Suriname women are free to become a member of any political party of their interest. Political parties still do not have specific programs or measures in place to get more women elected while women form half of the constituency. There is however a tendency within some parties were women become more visible in the political arena and were women are also placed on the list of candidates to be nominated for the national elections on the national, district and regional levels.

While some legislation was adopted regarding the mentioning of the maiden name of the women candidate on the ballots these new regulations will become applicable at the next elections in 2010.

Madame Chair,

We are aware of our responsibilities to effectively implement what we agreed to when becoming a state party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and in this regard I would like to reiterate the strong commitment of Surinamese Government to continue making all efforts to improving the lives of women and work towards gender equality.

We are available to answer the questions you and your distinguished members may have and I thank you for your kind attention.