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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
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the fifth legislature (2002-2007), or 22.9 per cent. For the first time, a woman from the Hmong ethnic group was serving as Vice-President of the National Assembly.

5. The Government had given priority to education and aimed to achieve nationwide compulsory primary education by 2010. Due attention was given to increasing the literacy rate of women, which had increased from 48 per cent in 1995 to 60 per cent in 2000 for women above 15 years of age. Primary school enrolment

18. The Committee recommends that the State party take measures to bring the Convention into the domestic legal system and ensure that it can be invoked in the courts. It also recommends that the definition of discrimination against women as set forth in article 1 of the Convention be incorporated in the Constitution or other appropriate legislation.

19. While noting the establishment of the National Commission on the Advancement of Women as the new national machinery, the Committee expresses its concern about the inadequate institutional structure and financial resources available to the secretariat of the Commission for gender mainstreaming and implementation of the policies of gender equality, as well as the heavy reliance on the Lao Women's Union, which is a mass organization without executive power.

20. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its national machinery by providing adequate human and financial resources as well as setting up mechanisms to strengthen gender mainstreaming in all ministries and at all levels of the Government. While recognizing the important work of the Lao Women's Union in advancing the status of women, the Committee recommends that the State party not relegate its obligation to implement the Convention only to a mass organization. It also recommends that it create governmental supervisory bodies at all levels to monitor the implementation of the national strategic plan for the advancement of women for 2005-2010.

21. While noting that 80 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, the Committee is deeply concerned about the pervasive poverty and underdevelopment of women, especially in rural and ethnic minority communities. The Committee is also concerned that ethnic minority women, without having any alternative sources of income, depend on production of opium poppies for their livelihood. While welcoming the reinvestigation into the matter of land titling, the Committee is concerned that the current reinvestigation and the reissuance of land titles are limited to nine provinces. The Committee is also concerned that while rural women carry out more than half of total agricultural production in every field, the additional workloads of housework and child-rearing also fall primarily on the shoulders of women. The Committee is very concerned that rural women are not fully represented in important decision-making regarding development programmes, nor on the village council.

22. The Committee urges the State party to accelerate its plan to eradicate poverty among women, especially rural and ethnic minority women, by more actively seeking international assistance and at the same time by applying gender perspectives in all development programmes and fully integrating women into decision-making on those programmes, as well as in their implementation processes. The Committee also urges the State party to step up its efforts to provide ethnic minority women who depend on opium poppy production with alternative and sustainable means of livelihood. The Committee recommends that the reinvestigation and re-registration of land titles be carried out in all provinces, with the expected result of eradicating discrimination against women, and requests the State party to provide detailed information about the results achieved in its next report. The Committee also recommends that the State party take measures to ease the double burden of women, including by providing new technologies for women farmers and educating men regarding the sharing of family responsibilities. The Committee

strongly recommends that the State party ensure the full and equal representation of rural women on the various committees at the village level.

23. Despite some progress, the Committee is alarmed at the still very high illiteracy rate of women, 40 per cent, and the large discrepancy between male and female literacy rates and between urban and rural women's education. The Committee is especially concerned at the extremely low literacy rate among ethnic minority women. The Committee is concerned that the initial plan to make primary education compulsory was postponed from 2000 to 2010.

24. The Committee urges that the State party immediately take all appropriate measures including temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation 25 on temporary special measures to reduce the illiteracy rate of women and to provide education to women, both formal and informal, especially in rural areas and including ethnic minority women. The Committee also recommends that free and compulsory primary education at the national level be implemented as soon as possible. It further recommends that the State party consider seeking international assistance for these purposes.

25. While noting improvement during the past years, the Committee is seriously concerned about the very high maternal and infant mortality rates and the high fertility rate, especially among women in rural and remote areas and among ethnic minorities. The Committee is concerned about the lack of health-care facilities and medical professionals in rural villages and remote areas as well as the lack of awareness among women and adolescents regarding reproductive health and family planning, including contraceptives and birth spacing.

26. The Committee recommends that the State party accelerate the implementation of its national population policy, focusing on expanding its network of health-care facilities and personnel throughout the nation and reaching out to rural and remote areas, inter alia to the benefit of ethnic minority women; to enhance its educational programmes, not only for women, but also for men and adolescents, on reproductive health and family planning; and to make contraceptives easily available.

The Committee is concerned about the prevalence of traditional gender-role stereotyping, which leads to disparities in leadership and decision-making in all spheres, including in the family, the community and in public life.

The Committee recommends that a concerted nationwide campaign be undertaken to eliminate the pervasive traditional gender role stereotyping and to promote public awareness on issues of gender equality in all spheres of life.

27. The Committee is concerned that the Lao People's Democratic Republic is increasingly exposed to the danger of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, in particular along construction and trade routes.

28. The Committee recommends that the State party take all measures necessary to raise awareness among men and women, especially in rural areas, around construction sites and existing and emerging trade routes, to the risk of HIV/AIDS infection.

29. While recognizing the new measures to combat the increasing incidents of trafficking in the nation and the region, including the strengthened law enforcement

to assess and to take remedial measures regarding any disadvantageous impact on women of economic reforms, including on women in the civil service.

35. The Committee is concerned that there is a lack of awareness or recognition of domestic violence, including marital rape, as a form of discrimination against women and as a violation of their human rights. The Committee is concerned that domestic violence is considered to be fairly normal by young people, both boys and girls, and the Criminal Law grants exemption from penal liabilities in cases of physical violence without serious injury or physical damage. The Committee is also concerned that the traditional attitudes on gender-role stereotyping keep women and girls in a subordinate position, preventing them from getting equal education and life opportunities, especially in rural areas.

36. The Committee recommends that the State party undertake measures to increase awareness of all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence and marital rape. It recommends that domestic violence and marital rape be criminalized and that more studies and data be collected on various forms of violence against women, especially domestic violence. The Committee

