



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

Distr.: General
6 February 2003

Original: English

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

Twenty-eighth session

Summary record of the 589th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 13 January 2003 at 10 a.m.

Temporary Chairperson: Ms. King (Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women)

later: Ms. Açar (Chairperson)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Opening of the session

1. The Temporary Chairperson declared open the twenty-eighth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and welcomed the 12 new members elected at the twelfth meeting of States parties held on 29 August 2002. In reporting on events of relevance to the work of the Committee, she recalled that Security Council resolution 1325 (2002) had called on the Secretary-General to prepare a study on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the role of women in peace-building and the gender dimensions of conflict resolution, which had been submitted to the Security Council (S/2002/1154). Its action points included accountability for violations of women's human rights during armed conflict, the integration of gender perspectives into all peacekeeping missions, strengthening the role of women in peace processes and increasing their participation in all stages of humanitarian assistance and reconstruction.

2. Ratifications and accessions to the Convention and its Optional Protocol had continued at a steady pace. Currently there were 170 States parties, and 49 States had ratified or acceded to the Optional Protocol, with 37 States parties accepting the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention.

3. At the current session, the Committee would consider the reports of eight States parties and discuss the issues contained in the report on ways and means of expediting its work (CEDAW/C/2003/I/4). She drew particular attention to the recommendations contained in the report of the first inter-committee meeting of human rights treaty bodies held in Geneva in June 2002.

4. **Ms. Hannan** (Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that, in addition to servicing the sessions of the Committee, the Division for the Advancement of Women endeavoured to support implementation of the Convention and the Committee's concluding comments at the national level and encourage universal ratification of the Convention and ratification of its Optional Protocol. It had held colloquia, workshops and seminars in collaboration with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), among others, and intended to increase its efforts to seek resources from

Governments and other sources to allow it to meet requests from States parties for advisory and technical services.

5. The Division had also prepared three reports for submission to the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly with particular relevance to the Committee's work: on violence against women, crimes against women committed in the name of honour, and trafficking in women and girls. It had also collaborated with the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the preparation of a handbook for parliamentarians on the Convention and the Optional Protocol.

6. The relationship between the Committee and the intergovernmental process for the promotion of gender equality had evolved steadily, especially since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. With the current focus on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, the organic link between the legal framework and the policy process had become even more important to ensure that gender equality remained a priority and was pursued not only as a goal in its own right but as a means to achieve other goals of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

Solemn declaration by the new members of the Committee

7. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani, Mr. Flinterman, Ms. Gabr, Ms. Gnancadja, Ms. Khan, Ms. Kuenyehia, Ms. Morvai, Ms. Patten, Ms. Popescu Sandru, Ms. Saiga and Ms. Šimonović** made the solemn declaration provided for in rule 15 of the Committee's rules of procedure.

Election of officers

8. **Ms. Gaspard**, supported by **Ms. González Martínez**, nominated **Ms. Açar** for the office of Chairperson of the Committee.

9. *Ms. Açar was elected Chairperson by acclamation.*

10. *Ms. Açar (Chairperson) took the Chair.*

11. **The Chairperson** said that she had always believed that the promotion and protection of women's human rights was a serious and important task that required genuine personal dedication and that, over the years, she had been extremely impressed by the Committee's heartfelt commitment to that cause. The recommendations and concluding comments that it

addressed to States parties were more than simple technical or bureaucratic communications: they were a clear reflection of its grasp of pertinent issues, provided insightful analyses of existing patterns of gender discrimination and contained powerful messages regarding the elimination of such discrimination. Owing to the dedication of its past and current members, the Committee now occupied a central position in the international human rights arena and within the United Nations system. It provided policy guidelines for Governments and decision makers, supported the international women's movement and was also a valuable source for academics worldwide. Its work would be influential in shaping a discrimination-free world.

12. Turning to the relationship between the Committee and the United Nations Secretariat, she said that it relied on mutual respect and common dedication to the cause of eliminating discrimination against women. She thanked Ms. King, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, for her tireless efforts to ensure the effectiveness of both the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee and hoped to further the cooperative relationship with the Secretariat, in particular the Division for the Advancement of Women, which now constituted a valuable source of expertise and experience. She hoped that, in the future, the Division would carry out more training activities involving Committee members.

13. The support of United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, especially those with field offices and operations, had proved extremely valuable in the past, and every effort should be made to strengthen cooperation between the Committee and those organs, particularly the United Nations Development Fund for Women, in order to give priority to the protection and promotion of women's rights at the national level.

14. The development of the Optional Protocol to the Convention had been a source of great satisfaction to the Committee, which was proud to have played a major role in its introduction. Nevertheless, it would need to find new and creative methods of encouraging more States to ratify the Protocol. The Working Group on the Optional Protocol had carried out extensive studies on how to deal with complaints submitted under the Protocol, and the continuation of that work should constitute a major component of the Committee's

agenda in the near future. However, ratification of the Protocol did not necessarily mean that it would be implemented. The Committee should, therefore, devote some time to studying ways of facilitating its utilization and making it more accessible to more women worldwide. Universal ratification of the Convention itself had yet to be achieved. Many non-ratifying States were receptive to the empowering effect that the instrument could have on women, but were hindered from ratifying it by material, technical or financial difficulties. The Committee's efforts to find solutions to those problems needed to be accelerated.

15. In conclusion, she stressed that violations of women's rights occurred at the national level, and therefore effective prevention of such violations was possible only at the national level. Year after year, the reports of States parties to the Convention bore witness to the multitude of social factors which discriminated against women and which were often responsible for eroding the impact of legal reforms and egalitarian legislation passed pursuant to the Convention and other international instruments. Furthermore, despite international and regional mechanisms designed to prevent or alleviate their negative social effects, poverty and conflict continued to contribute disproportionately to violations of women's human rights. In that connection, she believed that the Secretary-General's report entitled "Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration" (A/56/326), which underlined the need to build strong domestic protection systems for human rights and encouraged the United Nations to help individual countries build strong human rights institutions was very timely and pointed to an additional focus for the Committee's future work.

The meeting was suspended at 11 a.m. and resumed at 11.20 a.m.

Election of officers

16. **The Chairperson** invited the Committee to elect three Vice-Chairpersons.

17. *Ms. Ferrer Gómez, Ms. Shin and Ms. Popescu Sandru were elected Vice-Chairpersons by acclamation.*

18. **The Chairperson** invited the Committee to elect a Rapporteur.

19. *Ms. Kapalata was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work
(CEDAW/C/2003/I/1)

20. *The provisional agenda and organization of work (CEDAW/C/2003/I/1) were adopted.*

Report of the Chairperson on activities undertaken between the exceptional and twenty-eighth sessions of the Committee

21. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Abaka took a place at the Committee table.*

22. **The Chairperson** requested Ms. Abaka, the former Chairperson of the Committee, to report on activities undertaken between the exceptional and twenty-eighth sessions.

23. **Ms. Abaka** said that, at its fifty-seventh session, the General Assembly had considered, inter alia, the report of the Secretary-General on working towards the elimination of crimes against women committed in the name of honour (A/57/169), the report of the Secretary-General on trafficking in women and girls (A/57/170); the note by the Secretary-General on the situation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (A/57/129-E/2002/77); and the report of the Working Group on the future operations of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (A/57/330).

24. Those documents were important to the work of the Committee: the first two, in particular, because they concerned implementation of articles 5, 6 and 12 of the Convention. The issue of trafficking in women and girls would be discussed at the upcoming session of the Committee on the Status of Women, and CEDAW might wish to make a statement on the issue on the basis of the States parties' reports reviewed thus far. Trafficking in women and girls had taken on such a global dimension that not only did victims suffer discrimination under almost all articles of the Convention, but also their basic right to life was often threatened. The Committee should inform itself about that difficult situation and about the future work of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

25. Referring to her statement to the Third Committee at the fifty-seventh session of the General

Assembly, she said that almost all the delegations that had taken the floor afterwards had commended the Committee's work — especially its revised working methods — and many had highly praised the Committee for holding the first informal meeting with States parties during the twenty-seventh session. They had found that meeting extremely useful, especially regarding States parties' implementation of article 18. The Committee should abide by its decision to hold such meetings periodically. The representative of the Ukraine had told the Third Committee that his country was in the process of ratifying the Optional Protocol, while the representative of Suriname had joined the representative of Cuba and the representative of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in regretting both the fact that the Latin American and Caribbean region was underrepresented on the Committee, and the fact that the Caribbean subregion was not represented at all.

26. The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran had noted that his country was in the process of ratifying the Convention, which was a very welcome development. She had met with the Iranian delegation in April 2002, and the Committee might wish to follow up with the Mission in New York. The Iranian Parliament had apparently passed legislation giving women greater opportunities for divorce, and the policy on school uniforms for girls wearing veils had been relaxed. Both developments were commendable. The representative of Denmark, speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU) and the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the Union, had stressed that the primary international instrument for ensuring respect for women's rights was the Convention and its Optional Protocol, and urged States parties to accept the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention.

27. Addressing the Third Committee during the debate on poverty alleviation, she had pointed out that, according to States parties' reports, the feminization of poverty was due largely to the denial of equal opportunities, equal rights and equal status to women and girls throughout their life cycle, as well as all forms of violence against them. Poverty alleviation programmes should therefore address obstacles impeding the full enjoyment by women and girls of their rights under the Convention. She had also urged countries that had not yet ratified the Convention to do so and encouraged those States parties that had expressed reservations concerning articles that were

incompatible with the letter and spirit of the Convention to work towards withdrawing those reservations, in order to help reduce the feminization of poverty.

28. During her meeting with the Secretary-General in October 2002, she had expressed her thanks for his decision to keep the Committee in New York, and briefed him on the Committee's first informal meeting with States parties, mentioning the large number of States parties present and their active participation. That and the overwhelming participation of representatives at the twelfth meeting of States parties on 29 August 2002 had demonstrated the great interest of States parties in the Committee's work. Since many Missions in Geneva were overworked and could not effectively participate in the various meetings, it was to be hoped that the Secretary-General's decision to keep the Committee in New York would be a permanent one.

29. The report of the Secretary-General entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387) was of particular interest, especially paragraph 46, concerning elections to the Commission on Human Rights and its debates. In that paragraph, the Secretary-General pointed out that if elections and debates were dictated by political considerations, the credibility of the Commission would be eroded. That was also true of the treaty-monitoring bodies. The Secretary-General was to be commended for his report, and she had asked him to continue to emphasize the independence of the members on the various treaty bodies. The Secretary-General had agreed and had promised to bring the point to the attention of States parties. The Committee might also wish to discuss this issue.

30. The Secretary-General's report had also raised the issue of the obligation of States parties to report on the implementation of the current six human rights treaties to the respective monitoring bodies, and how that process might be streamlined. In that context, she had briefed the Secretary-General on the first inter-committee meeting of the six human rights treaty bodies in June 2002, which had addressed most of the issues raised in his report and produced good, workable recommendations, whose implementation could make reporting procedures easier and more effective. The recommendations also encouraged CEDAW to address the gender perspective of the five other human rights instruments as well. In conclusion, she noted that her

meeting with the Secretary-General had been most fruitful.

31. **Ms. González Martínez** said that she agreed that paragraph 46 of the Secretary-General's report (A/57/387) was indeed very important. The Committee should read the report carefully, and it was to be hoped that States parties, too, would heed his words on that matter.

32. *Ms. Abaka withdrew.*

Implementation of article 21 of the Convention

Ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee

33. **The Chairperson** asked Ms. Klein to introduce agenda item 7, on the implementation of article 21 of the Convention, and agenda item 8, on ways and means of expediting the Committee's work.

34. **Ms. Klein** said with respect to agenda item 7 that, at its twenty-seventh session in June 2002, the Committee had asked the Secretariat to report on its long-term programme of work regarding general recommendations. That report had been included in the Secretariat's broader report on ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee (CEDAW/C/2003/1/4). The Committee might wish to review the situation and decide on short-term and long-term steps to be taken in that regard. Efforts were already under way to draft a general recommendation on article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, and the Committee might wish to discuss further steps in that context. At its session in June 2001, the Committee had also agreed to consider the elaboration of general recommendations following its statements at the Durban World Conference against Racism and the Madrid World Assembly on Ageing. The Committee would also take up issues related to article 22 of the Convention and have before it a note by the Secretary-General with addenda containing reports of the agencies.

35. The Secretariat's report on agenda item 8 contained a summary of developments of relevance to the Committee's work in the international human rights arena since the Committee's previous session, an overview of reports received but not yet considered, information on the first inter-committee meeting of the six human rights treaty bodies in June 2002, and the pertinent section of the Secretary-General's reform

report concerning treaty body procedures and their continued streamlining. Annexes to the report included a list of ratifications to the Convention and the Optional Protocol. In the context of its long-standing efforts to encourage universal ratification of the Convention, the Committee had invited States that had not yet ratified the Convention to attend an informal closed meeting on 28 January regarding their future prospects for doing so. The reports which had not been referred to in the Secretariat's report, because they had been received after 12 November 2002, were the fifth periodic report of Bangladesh; the combined fourth, fifth and sixth periodic reports of Belarus; the combined second and third periodic reports of Nepal; and the combined initial and second and third periodic reports of Bhutan and Malta.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.