



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

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

Thirty-second session

Summary record of the 666th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 10 January 2005, at 10 a.m.

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

Chairperson: Ms. Manalo

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Temporary Chairperson** declared open the thirty-second session of the Committee and welcomed the members of the Committee, particularly the 11 new and re-elected members.

2. **Ms. Mayanja** (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women) said that the dramatic events of 2004, including heightened economic and social threats, had raised questions of fundamental importance for the future of the United Nations and its global work for peace, development and gender equality. It was vitally important for the Committee to understand the crucial nature of the moment. While human rights had been recognized in law and guaranteed in international instruments, enjoyment of those rights was essential to the well-being of the individual, the community and the world. Many women were still being denied their basic rights while others were still subject to abuse, exploitation and violence. Moreover, the problem of human trafficking, especially in women and children, had brought the international community face to face with twenty-first century slavery.

3. In the United Nations Millennium Declaration, world leaders had recognized the link between peace, development and human rights and had committed themselves to work hand in hand to address common threats and to promote human rights and democracy. In his report to the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration (A/57/270 and Corr.1), the Secretary-General had noted that the target of achieving parity between girls and boys in primary and secondary education by 2005 was being met or nearly so in most regions of the world, except sub-Saharan Africa and Southern and Western Asia. However, wage-employment rates for women had changed little in any region since 1990 and were far below those for men in all regions, except Latin America and the Caribbean and Eastern Asia. Women also continued to be vastly underrepresented in national parliaments in most regions. Only in the Nordic countries did women hold 40 per cent of the seats in parliament. In Northern Africa, Southern and Western Asia and Oceania, they held less than 10 per cent.

4. Many of those trends were also apparent in the work of the Committee, which regularly brought up its concern about the participation of women in decision-making in its dialogues with States parties. The Committee noted that the increasing educational achievements in many countries did not seem to translate into achievements by women in the labour market. The high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly to be held at the commencement of its sixtieth session would provide an opportunity to review the progress made in that area. Combating HIV/AIDS was another important Millennium Development Goal for women, who were falling victim to the pandemic in increasing numbers. In sub-Saharan Africa, a striking 76 per cent of young people living with HIV were female. It should be noted that violence against women and girls was linked to their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection, and that issue had been a constant concern of the Committee for some time.

5. She wished to emphasize the importance of the rule of law for the promotion of gender equality. The rule of law meant first and foremost that no one was above the law and that no one should be denied its protection. It was not enough as a mere concept. Laws must be put into practice and permeate the fabric of people's lives. Those who championed equality for women strongly relied on the power of the law and the protection that it could offer to overcome discrimination and disadvantage. In that connection, the Convention remained a catalyst for constitutional and legislative change in many countries. Implementation of the Convention contributed significantly to enhancing the rule of law and fostered a climate in which violations of the rights of women were not tolerated.

6. While not sufficient in itself, women's de jure equality was nevertheless a prerequisite for the practical realization of the principle of gender equality. The Committee was concerned not only about remaining discriminatory laws in States parties but also about laws whose effect resulted in discriminatory treatment and was especially concerned about the denial of women's access to justice. The availability of an international means of redress for their grievances, such as the procedures afforded them under the Optional Protocol, was increasingly seen as an integral part of both access to justice and full protection of the law.

7. **Ms. Hannan** (Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that, at its fifty-ninth session, the General Assembly had adopted a number of resolutions on the advancement of women. However, the Assembly had taken no action on the Committee's request for additional meeting time, and the Committee might consider reiterating that request for possible consideration at the sixtieth session. The forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, to be held from 28 February to 11 March, would conduct a comprehensive review and appraisal of the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Agreement had been reached on the number and content of the interactive events and panels, one of which would address the synergies between the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

8. It was expected that the same panel would also consider further opportunities to promote gender equality through a more systematic, coordinated and integrated use of those two instruments in the development of national laws, policies and programmes. Moreover, it was expected that the results of the Commission's session would contribute to the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly, to be held in September 2005, which would undertake a comprehensive review of the progress made towards fulfilling all the commitments contained in the Millennium Declaration.

9. The Division for the Advancement of Women had undertaken several technical-assistance activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of Governments to implement the Convention, notably including discussion with officials of the Government of Timor-Leste on capacity-building activities and a consultation mission to Sierra Leone. In November 2004, the Division had organized a round table in Morocco, together with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which had brought together national human rights institutions and national machineries for women's advancement with a view to discussing opportunities for collaboration and joint strategies for the promotion of gender equality.

10. The Division had also continued its collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, holding a one-day briefing session for parliamentarians from countries whose reports had recently been, or would soon be considered by the Committee. Since the closure of the

Committee's thirty-first session, Micronesia and the United Arab Emirates had become parties to the Convention, bringing the total number of States parties to 179. Furthermore, 70 States had ratified or acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention, and 45 States parties had accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention.

Solemn declaration by the new and re-elected members of the Committee

11. *Ms. Arocha-Dominguez, Ms. Dairiam, Ms. Gaspard, Ms. Maiolo, Ms. Pimentel, Ms. Schöpp-Schilling, Ms. Shin, Ms. Simms, Ms. Tan, Ms. Tavares da Silva and Ms. Zou Xiaogiao made the solemn declaration provided for in rule 15 of the Committee's rules of procedure.*

12. *The meeting was suspended at 10.30 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.*

Election of officers

13. **The Temporary Chairperson** invited nominations for the office of Chairperson in accordance with article 19, paragraph 2, of the Convention and with rules 16 and 17 of the Committee's rules of procedure.

14. **Ms. Khan**, speaking on behalf of the Asian States, nominated Ms. Manalo for the office of Chairperson.

15. *Ms. Manalo was elected Chairperson by acclamation.*

16. *Ms. Manalo took the Chair.*

17. **The Chairperson** thanked the Committee for the trust that it had placed in her and invited members to proceed with the election of three Vice-Chairpersons to serve for a term of two years, until 31 December 2006.

18. **Ms. Simms**, speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States, nominated Ms. Pimentel for the office of Vice-Chairperson.

19. **Ms. Garr**, speaking on behalf of the African States, nominated Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani for the office of Vice-Chairperson.

20. **Ms. Tavares da Silva**, speaking on behalf of the Western European and Other States, requested that the nomination by those States be deferred until a later

date, since the candidate had not yet arrived in New York.

21. *Ms. Pimentel and Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani were elected Vice-Chairpersons by acclamation and the election of the third Vice-Chairperson was deferred until a later date.*

22. **The Chairperson** invited the Committee to nominate candidates for the office of Rapporteur of the Committee.

23. **Ms. Popescu**, speaking on behalf of the Eastern European States, nominated Ms. Šimonović for the office of Rapporteur.

24. *Ms. Šimonović was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work (CEDAW/C/2005/1/1)

25. *The provisional agenda and organization of work (CEDAW/C/2005/1/1) were adopted.*

Report of the Chairperson on activities undertaken between the thirty-first and thirty-second sessions of the Committee

26. **Ms. Popescu** read out the report on behalf of Ms. Açar, who was unable to attend the meeting for personal reasons. Shortly after the thirty-first session, the outgoing Chairperson had briefed the Secretary-General on the results of that session, focusing on four aspects: the Committee's work under the Optional Protocol (in particular the cooperation of Mexico in the first inquiry under article 8 with regard to killings and disappearances of women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico), the planned commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, the Committee's continuing efforts to enhance its working methods (in particular the request for additional meeting time), and the treaty body reform process. The Secretary-General had expressed his support for the Committee's work and the reporting process, and noted the importance of the cooperation of Mexico. In August, she had briefed representatives of the Permanent Mission of Mexico on decisions taken by the Committee with regard to the inquiry under article 8 of the Optional Protocol and its follow-up.

27. In October, she had presented the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (A/59/38) to the Third Committee of

the General Assembly, highlighting the Committee's work under article 18, the adoption of General Recommendation 25 on article 4, paragraph 1, and the Committee's continuing concern about women's human rights in post-war Iraq. She had also reported on the Committee's actions under the Optional Protocol, which had become operational with the Committee's first decision in response to a complaint, communication No. 1/2003, Ms. B. J. v. Germany, and its completion of its first inquiry under article 8. She had also reminded the Assembly of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention and encouraged Member States to use the occasion to consolidate its implementation and universal ratification. While it was highly commendable that 179 States were now a party to the Convention, 12 Member States were still considering the issue.

28. She had also emphasized the Committee's continuing efforts to enhance its working methods, in particular the progress achieved through the informal meeting hosted by Mr. Flinterman at the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights and financially supported by the Government of the Netherlands. She had noted the Committee's desire to achieve greater efficiency without jeopardizing the usefulness of constructive dialogue with reporting States. In that regard, she had underlined the constraints facing the Committee and the rationale behind its request for additional meeting time in 2005 and 2006 and for a long-term solution of three annual sessions as of 2007. While assuring the General Assembly that the Committee was well aware of the financial implications of the proposal and the ongoing discussion of treaty body reform, she had appealed to Member States to approve the Committee's request. No action had been taken by the Assembly, but she urged the Committee to continue its efforts on the matter, in particular when it came up again at the General Assembly's sixtieth session.

29. In October, she had moderated the round table discussion to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, which had been attended by high-level United Nations and civil society officials. She had also participated in a technical cooperation mission organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women to support the Government of Sierra Leone in implementing the Convention. The mission was the first phase of efforts to strengthen the Government's capacity for implementation, and the

experts' recommendations would provide the basis for further technical assistance activities.

30. With regard to activities conducted in her personal capacity, in December she had participated in the Sixth Annual Human Rights Forum, in Dublin, and in a high-level conference on patriarchal violence against women, convened by the Government of Sweden in Stockholm. At the latter, she had emphasized the need to enhance coordination to combat violence among women and to base all such efforts on the Convention. While the Convention and Committee were held in high esteem in women's human rights circles, the Convention's essential and legally binding character still needed to be underscored.

31. She had also taken part in the ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting on the 10-year Review of the Beijing Platform for Action, in Geneva, chairing the session on an Institutional Mechanism to Promote Gender Equality. The Chairpersons' Conclusions not only reaffirmed a strong commitment to the Platform for Action, but also emphasized the strong link between the Beijing process and the Convention. She therefore recommended that the Committee should consider ways of integrating its work with the upcoming review of the Beijing Platform for Action during the session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2005. Lastly, she stressed that the Committee must maintain its exemplary competence and integrity in order to continue effectively promoting and protecting women's human rights, and that its work must not be mainstreamed into invisibility.

Implementation of article 21 of the Convention

Ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee

32. **Ms. Brautigam** (Chief, Women's Rights Section, Division for the Advancement of Women) said, with regard to the implementation of article 21, that three of the United Nations specialized agencies invited to submit reports to the Committee on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their activities had done so: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) in documents CEDAW/C/2005/I/3/Add.1, 3 and 4 respectively. Later that morning, the

Committee would be meeting with representatives of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system wishing to present information on the States parties whose reports were being considered at the current session or on what the agencies themselves had done to promote the provisions of the Convention internationally and regionally.

33. With regard to the Committee's working methods, she drew attention to the report in document CEDAW/C/2005/I/4, which summarized recent developments in the human rights regime, including the treaty bodies, and action taken by intergovernmental bodies, as well as relevant Secretariat activities in support of the Convention and its Optional Protocol. The report also pointed out that, at its last session, the Committee had agreed to continue discussion of the proposals for draft guidelines on an expanded core document and treaty-specific targeted reports. Three experts had prepared a note that would serve as a basis for discussions.

34. She drew attention to the report of the Secretary-General on the status of submission of reports by States parties to the Convention (CEDAW/C/2005/I/2), including a list of overdue reports and of reports submitted but not yet considered by the Committee as of November 2004, to which should be added the reports of Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia and Mozambique. In all, 47 reports would be awaiting consideration after the current session. Twenty-eight States had submitted reports in 2004. Lastly, annex III to the report on the Committee's working methods (CEDAW/C/2005/I/4) contained the statement issued by the Committee on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.