

Commission on the Status of Women
Forty-ninth session
28 February to 11 March 2005

Panel I: “Synergies between national-level implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women”

Summary submitted by the Moderator (Romy Tincopa)

1. At its 7th meeting, on 3 March 2005, the Commission on the Status of Women held a panel discussion followed by a dialogue on synergies between national-level implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The panellists were: Louise Arbour, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Rosario G. Manalo, Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; Dubravka Šimonović, Head of the Human Rights Section, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Croatia; The Honourable Melanie S. Griffin, Minister for Social Services and Community Development of the Bahamas; Valerie Knowles, Bahamas Family Planning Association in the Bahamas; and Sanja Sarnavka, B.a.B.e (Be active, Be emancipated) in Croatia. An issues paper prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women provided the framework for the discussion.
2. Participants noted that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was the central international human rights instrument for the protection and promotion of women’s human rights and the elimination of discrimination against women. As a policy instrument, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action complemented the Convention and provided practical and concrete recommendations for action to achieve gender equality. They mutually reinforced each other and, together, provided the framework as well as practical tools for action to combat discrimination and to realize gender equality through legislative reform, policy and programme development and other measures, in all areas. Both were critical guideposts for ensuring gender equality. The synergies between the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention provided opportunities for their enhanced implementation at the national level.
3. The women’s movement had played a crucial role in raising women’s concerns onto the national and international agenda, especially in the area of human rights. Participants commended the efforts of civil society, especially of women’s groups and networks to support implementation of the Convention and the Platform for Action. They had taken concrete actions to provide services to women, raise awareness, and had also undertaken lobbying and monitoring activities.
4. Participants highlighted the importance of partnerships and collaboration among diverse stakeholders at the national level in the implementation of the Convention and the Platform for Action. Joint efforts of Governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society were essential for progress towards gender equality. The importance of collaborative efforts between Governments and non-governmental organizations in the reporting process under the Convention,

including follow-up to the Committee's concluding comments, was also stressed. The format of the panel, which included representatives of Government and non-governmental organizations from the same country, was seen as a good initiative to highlight the importance of collaboration in the implementation of the Platform and the Convention.

5. Participants welcomed the increase in the number of States parties to the Convention since the Beijing Conference, as well as the adoption, entry into force and use of the Optional Protocol as examples of concrete results of actions called for in the Platform. The high number of States adhering to these two instruments was indicative of increased global awareness and political will to uphold the principles of non-discrimination and gender equality at the national level. Participants welcomed the attention paid by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to the implementation of the Platform in the exercise of its mandate.

6. Participants gave examples of progress in the implementation of the two instruments at the national level, including constitutional and legal revisions, reform of personal status laws and family codes, penal and employment codes and laws related to inheritance, nationality and land rights. National plans of action and policies on gender equality and the advancement of women had been put in place, and quotas and other measures had been adopted to increase the number of women in decision-making positions and in public life, including in Parliament. The Convention and the Platform for Action had guided the work of Governments and non-governmental organizations to improve access for girls and women to education at all levels, improve healthcare services, and expand micro-credit and business opportunities for women. Court and judicial procedures had become more gender sensitive, thus improving women's access to justice.

7. The Platform for Action and its follow-up and implementation process, together with the Convention, had facilitated the strengthening of national machineries, including the establishment of ombudspersons, observatories and parliamentary committees. Mechanisms mandated to follow-up on the concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had also been established.

8. Participants agreed that despite progress in implementation, significant gaps remained between the legal and policy frameworks of these instruments and women's daily reality. A lack of resources, particularly in developing countries, was seen as a persistent obstacle to implementation. The synergies between the two instruments had been insufficiently utilized, and measures to promote gender equality remained fragmented. Furthermore, discriminatory laws were still in place in many countries. Violence against women, a fundamental human rights violation, remained alarmingly prevalent, and the increasing infection rates of women with HIV was indicative of the effects of gender-based discrimination. Many States also maintained reservations to many of the provisions of the Convention. Women's ability to claim their rights remained limited, due to lack of legal literacy and awareness about the Convention and the Platform for Action. Women's lack of empowerment to assert their rights was often compounded by insufficient or ineffective means of redress for violations at the national level.

9. Participants called for a reaffirmation of the goals and commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality,

development and peace for the twenty-first century”, and for enhanced political will to implement them. Participants called for multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approaches to achieve change towards gender equality. It was also necessary to address stereotypical attitudes, practices, cultural values and belief systems that discriminated against women. Adequate resources, including through international assistance to developing countries and support from the United Nations system, were necessary to achieve these goals and objectives, ensuring however the optimal use of limited resources, both human and financial. There was also a need for enhanced solidarity between women in the “North” and women in the “South”. The role of men in the promotion of gender equality should be further emphasized, and efforts to encourage men to contribute to change were called for. Likewise, a new generation of gender equality advocates needed to be nurtured and mentored.

10. Cooperation between Governments and non-governmental organizations for the promotion of gender equality should be enhanced, and Governments were encouraged to maintain open channels of communication with non-governmental organizations and women’s networks. At the same time, it was noted that non-governmental organizations alone could not achieve change, and should therefore continue to collaborate with government and other stakeholders, especially with parliamentarians.

11. Participants encouraged the 12 Member States of the United Nations who had not yet ratified the Convention to use the momentum of the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to intensify their efforts towards ratification. States parties to the Convention who had not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention were encouraged to do so. Further efforts were needed to withdraw all reservations to the Convention. At regional level, reporting under the Convention and in follow-up to the Platform for Action should be integrated, and related guidelines should be developed.

12. Support was expressed for an extension of the meeting time of the Committee. It was suggested that the Commission on the Status of Women create the mandate of a Special Rapporteur on Discriminatory Laws to accelerate progress in implementation of the Platform for Action and of the Convention.

13. In order to accelerate implementation of the Platform and the Convention, steps should be taken to incorporate gender equality and non-discrimination in legislation and monitoring mechanisms, to strengthen national action plans and integrate measures to follow-up on the concluding comments of the Committee. Programmes and policies for gender equality should include a rights-based approach. Steps should also be taken to guarantee women’s access to justice and raise awareness of their rights. Women’s use of the international human rights machinery should be encouraged. Public officials, in particular judges, prosecutors and law enforcement personnel, should be trained about the Convention. Greater efforts were also needed to mainstream gender perspectives in all policies and programmes.

14. The Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should continue to cooperate in the promotion of gender equality and women’s enjoyment of their human rights. Links between the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, other human rights treaty bodies and special procedures of the Commission on Human Rights should also be strengthened, including through the annual meeting of persons chairing human rights treaty bodies.