

Chairpersons of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979, states in article 19 that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) shall adopt its own rules of procedure, and that it shall elect its officers for a term of two years. The Committee's rules of procedure establish that the officers of the Committee shall consist of a Chairperson, three Vice-Chairpersons and a Rapporteur. While the length of the terms of office is laid down in the Convention, the rules of procedure add that the officers shall be eligible for re-election "provided that the principle of rotation is upheld".

The Bureau of the Committee has regularly consisted of five members, one from each of the five regions of the United Nations, except when a region was not represented among the membership. The first Bureau served for a three-year term, whereas each subsequent Bureau remained in office for two years, with the exception of the Chairperson of the fourth and fifth sessions, who remained in office also for the sixth and seventh sessions; and the Chairperson of the twelfth and thirteenth sessions, who remained in office, also for the fourteenth and fifteenth sessions.

The rules of procedure identify the general powers of the Chairperson. Under the rules, the Chairperson controls the proceedings of the Committee, including the direction of the discussion and decision-making process. Procedurally, the Chairperson works closely with the United Nations Secretariat in the preparation of the session, in ensuring the timely conduct of business, including the preparation of documents, the presence of States parties for the consideration of reports, and the general provision of backup to the Committee.

The Chairperson has been increasingly called upon to represent the Committee at various international activities and events, including international conferences and other intergovernmental meetings of the United Nations, in particular the Commission on the Status of Women and the General Assembly. The Chairperson participates on behalf of the Committee in the annual meeting of the persons chairing human rights treaty bodies, which makes recommendations to the General Assembly.

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As of the thirty-sixth session of the Committee, ten experts have served as its Chairperson. Ms. Dubravka Šimonović, the Committee's eleventh Chairperson, has been chairing the Committee since its thirty-seventh session in January 2007. The following is a list of the Committee's Chairpersons:

Ms. Luvsandanzangyn Ider (1982 - 1987)

A national of Mongolia, Ms. Ider served on the Committee from 1982 to 1988. Her career in the foreign service of her country began in 1963, and she has the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. She has attended many UN meetings and conferences and those of other international organizations since 1962. In 1979, she was Vice-Chairperson of the UN Commission for Social Development, and in 1985 she was nominated its Chairperson.

Ms. Desirée Bernard (1985 - 1988)

A national of Guyana, Ms. Bernard served on the Committee from 1982 to 1992 and from 1995 to 1998. She was appointed the first woman judge of the High Court of Guyana in October 1980, and was later appointed the first woman judge of the Court of Appeals of Guyana in May 1992. She later served as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Guyana. In her career, she has attended many national, regional and international fora, and has written and lectured extensively on the legal rights of women and children.

Ms. Elizabeth Evatt (1989 - 1990)

A national of Australia, Ms. Evatt served on the Committee from 1985 to 1992. From 1976 to 1988, she was Chief Judge of the Family Court of Australia, and from 1988 to 1993, she was President of the Law Reform Commission of Australia. She has also served as a part-time Commissioner of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. She served as member of the UN Human Rights Committee from 1993 to 2000.

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Ms. Mervat Tallawy (1991 - 1992)

A national of Egypt, Ms. Tallawy served on the Committee from 1987 to 1998. She was appointed Minister for Social Affairs in 1997. She was Ambassador to Austria and Permanent Representative of her country to the United Nations Office at Vienna. She was Deputy Director of the International Training and Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) for several years. Ms. Tallawy has represented her country at many UN meetings and conferences and those of other international and regional organizations since 1962. She was Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women from 1992 to 1993. Since 2000, Ms. Tallawy has been the Executive Secretary of UN ESCWA.

Ms. Ivanka Corti (1993 - 1996)

A national of Italy, Ms. Corti served on the Committee from 1987 to 2002. She was its Chairperson for two consecutive terms during the period leading up to, during and after the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), and was instrumental in ensuring the participation of the Committee at the Conference. She was elected Chairperson of the seventh meeting of the persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies in September 1996. Ms. Corti has contributed greatly to the increased visibility of the Committee. She was a member of the Italian Prime Minister's Commission for Human Rights.

Ms. Salma Khan (1997 - 1998)

A national of Bangladesh, Ms. Khan served on the Committee from 1993 to 2000 and from 2003 to 2006. She was the Director-General of the Bangladesh Management Development Centre. She was Divisional Chief Economist of the Ministry of Planning from 1993 to 1994. Ms. Khan's professional work and publications have focused on economics as well as women, children, labour, credit, and non-governmental organizations. In 2006, she became her country's Ambassador to Indonesia.

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Ms. Aída González Martínez (1999 - 2000)

A national of Mexico, Ms. González served on the Committee from 1982 to 1992 and from 1997 to 2004. She has been Coordinator for Women's Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1993, and Adviser to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs since 1990. She has been an Ambassador since 1978, and has represented her country since 1968 at the United Nations and other international organizations. In addition to international relations, Ms. González has focused on women's issues, human rights and labour and social welfare.

Ms. Charlotte Abaka (2001 - 2002)

A national of Ghana, Ms. Abaka served on the Committee from 1991 to 2002. She has represented her country in a number of UN meetings and conferences, as well as other international and regional conferences since 1989. She served as the Chairperson of the National Subcommittee on the CEDAW (an independent body to monitor implementation of the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action) since 1996. She has written many publications and lectures on women's issues, youth awareness, labour and gender equality.

Ms. Feride Ayse Acar (2003 - 2004)

A national of Turkey, Ms. Acar served on the Committee from 1997 to 2004. She has been an academic since 1977, at the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. She became Professor in 1994 and Chairperson of the Department in 2001. She was the founder and chairperson/director of the first degree-conferring graduate programme in Gender and Women's Studies in Turkey, at the same University. She has published and lectured extensively on women's human rights, and been an advocate for gender equality and implementation of the Convention in her own country and around the world.

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Ms. Rosario G. Manalo (2005 - 2006)

A national of the Philippines, Ms. Manalo served on the Committee from 1999 to 2006. She has been a career diplomat serving, since 1979, as her country's Ambassador to several countries in Europe as well as to international and regional organizations. She represented her Government at the Third World Conference on Women, in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985. As a lecturer at the Foreign Service Institute, she gave courses on gender issues and human rights, economic diplomacy, and international relations. She has also been a Professor at the Philippine Women's University Graduate School of Public Administration and De La Salle University on International Relations and Diplomacy. Among her particular interests has been the situation of migrant women.

Ms. Dubravka Šimonović (2007 - 2008)

A national of Croatia, Ms. Dubravka Šimonović has been a member of the Committee since January 2002, and served as its Rapporteur in 2005 and 2006. A career foreign service officer, Ms. Šimonović currently heads the Human Rights Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She represented her country at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995. She was elected Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women for 2001 and 2002, and served as a member of the UNIFEM Consultative Committee from 2001 to 2003. She has been appointed by the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe to its Task Force to combat violence against women, including domestic violence (2006-2008), and was its Chairperson in 2006/07. Ms Šimonović has published and lectured widely on women's rights.

(Source: United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women/Department of Economic and Social Affairs, July 2007)