

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Thirty-first session
6-23 July 2004**

Agenda item 3: Report of the Chairperson on activities undertaken between the thirtieth and thirty-first sessions of the Committee

**Report by Ms. Feride Acar
Chairperson, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women**

Ms. Carolyn Hannan, Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women and Officer-in-Charge of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women,
Distinguished experts and dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen.

It is indeed a great pleasure being here, once again, at the start of a new session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. I am delighted that all members are well and we are looking forward to another productive session.

I would like to thank Ms. Hannan for her opening statement. She has briefed us about work undertaken by the Secretariat in support of the implementation of the Convention and highlighted important issues which I also believe require the Committee's careful consideration. I will have the opportunity to elaborate on some of the points raised by her.

We have just appointed a new Rapporteur for the Committee, Ms. Fatima Kwaku, and I would like to congratulate and thank her for taking on this task. This action was necessitated by the resignation of Ms. Christine Kapalata, who was also the Committee's Rapporteur for the last three sessions. Ms. Kapalata has taken on an assignment as Political Affairs Officer at the United Nations Mission for Liberia, a function incompatible with the exercise of the mandate of an expert on this Committee. I am very pleased that in the person of Ms. Kapalata the United Nations has recruited a professional of the highest competence and integrity, and I am sure that she will make a significant contribution to the achievement of the Mission's mandate. At the same time, I am very sorry that the Committee has lost an outstanding and committed expert. I am confident, as Ms. Kapalata noted in her letter of resignation to me, that she will bring to her new responsibilities the spirit of the Convention of women's rights to equality and non-discrimination and that in every way possible, she will support the implementation of the Convention within the framework of her new duties.

Dear colleagues,

I am pleased to report to you on my activities since the thirtieth session of the Committee.

The inter-sessional period since early February has been a particularly busy and hectic one. The Committee will be invited to follow-up on some of these activities, and we will have opportunity to discuss them further in the course of our three-week session.

In accordance with established practice, I attended the forty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women on 1 and 2 March, where I addressed the Commission at its opening session. The results of the Committee's thirtieth session were - as always - before the Commission for its information in a conference room paper. In my introductory statement, I specifically highlighted the Committee's consideration of the reports of eight States parties, the adoption of general recommendation 25 on article 4.1 of the Convention, the plans for an informal meeting of the Committee on working methods, the Committee's proposals for the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention by the General Assembly, and the Committee's statement on the situation of women in Iraq. During the short discussion time allocated by the Commission following all introductory statements, I was pleased to note the interest of delegations in the work of the Committee. In response to questions asked I had the opportunity to further elaborate on the Committee's consideration of the different options for discharging all its responsibilities under the Convention and the Optional Protocol, including that of meeting in parallel working groups.

I was also pleased to participate in a very well-attended panel discussion on 2 March, together with parliamentarians from the Republic of Korea, Jordan, and Uganda. The panel, which was hosted by the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and chaired by one of the Commission's Vice-Chairpersons, Ms. Carmen-Rosa Arias of Peru, focused on the role of Parliamentarians in the implementation of the Convention. The panel was an opportunity to flag the importance the Committee attaches to the role of Parliamentarians in the ratification of the Convention, its Optional Protocol and the acceptance of the amendment to article 20.1, as well as of opportunities to contribute to the preparation of reports and the follow-up to the Committee's concluding comments.

During the Commission's session, I also had the opportunity to meet with a number of high-level participants, including the Ministers for gender equality of the Republic of Korea, Pakistan and Norway, and interacted with other ministers who attended the Commission. As had been decided by the Committee, I met with representatives of the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations and I will brief the Committee about this meeting later.

Following her appointment, I wrote to the new High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Honourable Louise Arbour, in early March to congratulate her on this appointment and to express the Committee's full support in her work. I was very touched to receive her reply and commitment to devote all her energies to this task in the years to come.

I participated in the sixtieth session of the Commission on Human Rights, where I spoke under the item on the integration of the human rights of women and a gender perspective. While this was no doubt an important chance for me to brief and update the Commission on the work the Committee has undertaken in the last year, I must relay to you that due to the timing of the item and severe restrictions on speaking time, my interaction with the Commission was not fully satisfactory. In fact, the question of the effective participation of the Chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies in the Commission on Human Rights constituted a major agenda item of the sixteenth meeting of Chairpersons of treaty bodies held in Geneva two weeks ago. I will refer to that latter meeting shortly, but let me just say here that this issue was of particular importance at the meeting of the Chairpersons with the expanded Bureau of the Commission. The Chairpersons voiced their concern about the format of the present interaction which they considered to be less than satisfactory, however they also recognized the extreme time constraints imposed on the Commission. At the same time, there was a commitment to find better modalities within existing constraints to enhance the exchange between the treaty bodies and the Commission on Human Rights.

So far as CEDAW participation in the Commission on Human Rights goes, let me also say that, while other commitments unfortunately prevented me from staying for more than a day and from participating in a panel discussion organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on “Affirmative Action and Security Council resolution 1325: CEDAW General Recommendation 25 and Women’s Participation in Conflict Prevention and Resolution”, I was very pleased that Ms. Schöpp-Schilling, who was the driving force behind general recommendation 25, participated in this panel, along with the Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Hannan, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, and others.

As members will remember, shortly after the Commission, we all had the pleasure to convene at an informal meeting of the Committee at the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights at Utrecht. I would like to express the gratitude of the Committee and my deep personal appreciation to Mr. Cees Flinterman for the invitation, and through him, to the Government of the Netherlands which supported the meeting financially. I believe we had an excellent three-day meeting that allowed us to focus on many difficult but critical aspects of our working methods in a sustained and focused manner. The outstanding organization, the inspiring environment of Utrecht University and the opportunity to spend time socially over meals made this meeting very productive and memorable. It was also a special treat for members to be able to visit the International Court of Justice in The Hague at the invitation of Justice Rosalyn Higgins, who most graciously and knowledgeably gave us a private tour of the Court on a Saturday. We were most honoured to visit Ms. Akua Kuenyehia, a former member of this Committee and Vice-President of the International Criminal Court later that day at her home, and to learn about recent developments in the ICC over a delicious lunch. Again, thank you, Mr. Flinterman, and I am sorry that two of our members, Ms. Saiga and Ms. Gonzalez were not able to attend. You were very much missed.

The results of the Utrecht meeting will put the Committee on a solid path of continuing improvements of its working methods. These results will ensure that developments in other treaty bodies are also taken into consideration by our Committee. At the same time, they will ensure that we move ahead in our well-established commitment to innovation, adaptation and change so that the Committee can continue to make a significant contribution to the effective implementation of the Convention at the national level. The agreements reached at the Utrecht meeting have been annexed to the report of the Secretariat on ways and means for enhancing the work of the Committee. I suggest that we take action early in our session to formally adopt the agreements we reached at the informal meeting. While all agreements achieved are equally important, I would particularly like to highlight the Committee's proposals for an extension of its annual meeting time so that the Committee can discharge all its responsibilities in a timely manner. The much deliberated agreement was reached on the basis of the existing and potential reality of backlogs in the consideration of States parties' reports. The Committee feels very strongly that in order to ensure effective implementation of the Convention, the time lag between States parties' submission of their reports and their consideration by the Committee should be minimized so as to make sure that this time lag does not become a disincentive for States' timely reporting. On the basis of this consideration and the fact that it would only be reasonable to bring the meeting time of the CEDAW Committee up to par with that of other human rights treaty bodies - many of whom have considerably fewer States parties - we will adopt a decision seeking approval from the General Assembly of resources so that the Committee will be able to meet for an additional week at its 34th, 35th and 36th sessions, and in the long term, starting from 2007, to grant the Committee three annual sessions of three weeks each, each preceded by a pre-session working group.

Immediately following the Utrecht meeting, I participated as the keynote presenter in a three-day training workshop for Government officials on implementation of and reporting under the Convention for countries of the CIS region, in Almaty, Kazakhstan. 15 Government officials from 6 countries attended the meeting which was organized by the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in collaboration with the Division. The meeting provided an opportunity for those States whose reports were recently considered to share their experience with States that are still in the process of preparing their initial reports. I look forward to seeing the results of the event in due course.

Most recently, I attended the third Inter-Committee meeting and the sixteenth meeting of Chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies, from 21 to 25 June, in Geneva. Members will recall that Ms. Christine Kapalata and Mr. Flinterman had been designated by the Committee for participation in the Inter-Committee meeting and in Utrecht, we agreed that Ms. Kwaku would replace Ms. Kapalata. Ms. Kwaku was unable to attend that event for personal reasons, and I was very sorry to hear about her loss which prevented her from traveling.

The Inter-Committee Meeting and Meeting of Chairpersons had very full agendas. While all recommendations deserve our attention, several of these require specific follow-up action. I will highlight some of the outcomes of the meetings.

The most anticipated item for discussion was the Secretariat's report with proposals for guidelines on an expanded core document and harmonized guidelines for reporting to all treaty bodies. Following the discussion, the Inter-Committee Meeting approved in principle the basic structure and content of the proposed common core document, although it was clear that further work is required. As a consequence, the Inter-Committee Meeting recommended that the Chairpersons forward the draft guidelines on an expanded core document and treaty-specific targeted reports to their respective committees for discussion as a priority item. The Inter-Committee Meeting also recommended the establishment of a mechanism for further consultations between the Committees on the draft and other matters relating to the harmonization of their reporting guidelines during the coming year. Mr. Kamel Filali, a member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, was entrusted with the task of rapporteur on this issue.

I thus have the honour to bring this matter to your attention. I should like to emphasize the importance attached by all Committee Chairpersons to a thorough and in-depth discussion of these proposals and which should include a careful weighing of advantages, shortcomings and areas for further improvement. I understand that the relevant documentation is in members' folders, including the advance unedited report of the meeting. I urge Committee members to consider these documents carefully. We will have an opportunity during this session to exchange views, starting from this afternoon's closed meeting when I, together with Mr. Flinterman, hope to brief you in more detail. At this session, we should aim to give preliminary indications to our three-member working group of our views, and areas of the draft guidelines we want to comment on so that we are ready to adopt our recommendations to the Inter-Committee Meeting in January. It is anticipated that the Inter-Committee Meeting will consider a revised set of guidelines at its session in 2005 that would incorporate the comments of all treaty bodies.

In addition to the expanded core document and harmonized reporting guidelines, the Inter-Committee Meeting and Meeting of Chairpersons followed up on the recommendations from last year. I am pleased to report that progress was made with regard to several of those recommendations, including by our Committee, such as on the lists of issues and questions, and procedures for dealing with situations of non-reporting. Committees were also invited to include a regular item on working methods on their agendas; something this Committee has done for many years. The Secretariat of each Committee was requested to produce a document detailing the Committee's respective working methods for inclusion in its annual report: a step this Committee took last session. Likewise, it was recommended that the Secretariat produce a comprehensive report highlighting the situation with regard to non-reporting by States parties. Members will recall that such a report was prepared for this Committee for our twenty-ninth session in July 2003.

I would further like to highlight a recommendation concerning reservations. In this regard, the Inter-Committee Meeting recommended that the Secretariat prepare a report, including a table showing all reservations made to the core human rights treaties and the nature of the provisions covered. It was also suggested that a working group be established consisting of one member from each of the treaty bodies to consider this report and to report to the next Inter-Committee Meeting.

My dear colleagues,

We have a very full agenda ahead of us. I trust the Committee will have the opportunity to discuss some of the points I raised during this statement, and will have a busy and productive thirty-first session. I take the opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to each of you, members of the Committee, whom I know have put an extraordinary amount of work into the preparations for this session. I have been in touch with many of you inter-sessionally and am truly overwhelmed with the commitment you have all displayed. I thank each and every one of you on behalf of the Committee and myself.

My report on activities undertaken inter-sessionally would not be complete if I were not to underline my appreciation to Ms. Christine Brautigam, Chief of the Women's Rights Section of the Division for the Advancement of Women, for the dedication and competence she has, once again, displayed in this very demanding period.

I thank you all very much for your attention.