

Thirty-third session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Opening statement by

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Mme. Chairperson,
Distinguished experts of the Committee,
Colleagues and friends,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to New York to the 33rd session of the Committee.

Since your last session, one more State, Monaco, acceded to the Convention on 18 March with reservations, thus bringing the total number of ratifications to 180. Cameroon acceded to the Optional Protocol on 7 January, during your last session, bringing the total number of States parties to 71. There were no additional acceptances of the amendment to article 20.1 – the number remains at 45. Among the seven core human rights treaties, the Convention thus remains the instrument with the second highest number of ratifications/accessions, but still short of universal ratification.

I would like to highlight recent developments that have a bearing on the work of this Committee. I will focus on the intergovernmental process, especially the outcome of the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as the activities implemented by the Division for the Advancement of Women since your last session.

The Commission on the Status of Women undertook, at its forty-ninth session earlier this year, a comprehensive 10-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In preparation for the session, 134 States responded to a questionnaire of the Division, which synthesized this extensive information into a report that served as basis for discussion in the Commission. I am pleased to note that a very large number of States referred to the Convention and its continuous implementation at the national level as a critical component of their follow-up to the Platform for Action. Well over half of the responses referred specifically to the critical area of concern of human rights of women, while most others also discussed the impact of the Convention and women's human rights in relation to other critical areas as well. Violence against women was another area that received comprehensive and detailed attention from Member States, with 129 reporting on action taken. In addition, trafficking in women was an area that was clearly a priority concern of many States. These are all areas where this Committee consistently engages with States parties in a constructive dialogue to find better ways of achieving compliance with Convention obligations.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) adopted a declaration in which it reaffirmed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General

Assembly. The declaration recognized that the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the fulfillment of the obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women were mutually reinforcing in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

I wish to highlight that one of the eight interactive panels organized by the Division during the Commission, focused on the “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 panel discussed ways to ensure a more effective use of both instruments by a diverse range of actors to achieve gender equality. Speakers in the panel included the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Chairperson of the Committee, and representatives of Member States including Ms. Simonovic, and non-governmental organizations. The resulting summary of the debate clearly highlighted the importance which all stakeholders attribute to the reinforcing links and consistent use of both, the global policies and legal obligations for the practical realization of the principle of equality of women and men. Your Chairperson will report in more detail about the event.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Manalo for her important contributions to the forty-ninth session of the Commission, including during the opening. A number of other experts of this Committee also attended the Commission, either as part of non-governmental organizations, in their capacity as experts or on governmental delegations, to reinforce and underline the central role of the Convention in the achievement of the goals of the Platform for Action. The Division is also most grateful to CEDAW experts who contributed to the expert group meetings we organized in preparation for the session in November 2004 and February 2005, in particular Ms. Dairiam, and Ms. Tavares da Silva.

This year, the Commission adopted ten resolutions, including on themes that the Commission had not dealt with before in this manner. These included resolutions on “eliminating demand for trafficked women and girls for all forms of exploitation”, “the economic advancement of women”, and “indigenous women beyond the ten-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action”. These resolutions made explicit reference to the Convention. In addition, the resolution on “the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan” urged the Government of Afghanistan to fully implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

One resolution will require your specific input. The subject matter is the advisability of the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women, bearing in mind the existing mechanisms with a view to avoid duplication. The Commission will consider this issue at its fiftieth session in 2006. The Division for the Advancement of Women, which will prepare the report, will solicit contributions from you, as well as from relevant United Nations bodies, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Member States.

The Division also continued its work on the Secretary-General’s in-depth study on violence against women, which was mandated by General Assembly resolution 58/185. While the study was expected to be submitted to the General Assembly at its 60th session in the fall of 2005, many factors, including the intensive work in conjunction with the 10-year review and

appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action, made it difficult to devote the time and attention necessary to engage in a sustained and broad-based consultative process with all stakeholders. Preparation of the study is a unique opportunity for highlighting the continuing challenges in combating all forms and manifestations of violence against women, many of which this Committee consistently addresses in the consideration of States parties reports. The study is a vehicle for galvanizing attention to the issue, enhancing political commitment at the highest levels and strengthening concerted action and accountability for preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against women, at all levels. Therefore, the Division will be submitting an interim report to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, and the study itself will be issued at the 61st session.

As we are reviewing and analyzing the work of this Committee, as well as that of other human rights treaty bodies and special procedures, we are also eager to receive the Committee's – or individual member's – views on the key issues to be addressed in the study, and strategic recommendations to be included in the study. Mme Chairperson, I would thus like to reiterate the invitation extended to you and the other members of the Committee to provide comments on the areas to be addressed in the study. We would also welcome your views on reasons for insufficient implementation, at national level, of the international legal and policy framework on violence against women and ways for overcoming constraints to implementation.

I am also very pleased that two members of the Committee, Ms. Heisoo Shin and Ms. Dorcas Coker Appiah, have agreed to serve on the Advisory Committee for the study. We look to the Advisory Committee for strategic guidance at critical junctures of the study.

Mme Chairperson,
Distinguished experts

Our endeavours to support implementation of the Convention through our advisory services and technical assistance programme are becoming increasingly important in ensuring that international human rights standards for women are translated into actual benefits for women at the national level. Since the last session, the Division has engaged in several initiatives to support States parties in their efforts to implement the Convention, and I would like to mention the main activities undertaken in this regard.

One of the priorities of the Division's programme of technical cooperation includes the provision of sustained and comprehensive support to post-conflict countries to implement the Convention. As part of this programme, we hope to support States parties emerging from conflict to take advantage of the opportunity that the process of post-conflict reconstruction offers to review their legislative and policy framework and carry out the reforms needed to align their laws and policies with the provisions and obligations of the Convention. We are grateful to the Government of New Zealand for providing funding for this programme.

In Sierra Leone, the Division convened two training workshops for government officials on implementation of the Convention from 4-8 April 2005. These activities were the second stage of our support to Sierra Leone, following a series of high-level consultation held in October 2004. The first workshop was designed to enhance the catalytic role of the national machinery

for the advancement of women in the promotion and implementation of the rights in the Convention vis-à-vis other ministries and non-governmental organizations, and in the development of national gender policy. The second workshop examined the role of key line ministries in implementation of the Convention and its relevance and applicability in a number of substantive sectors including health, education, justice and economic development. A total of 35 government officials attended both workshops, many of whom had never encountered the Convention in the course of their work. We are grateful to Ms Dorcas Coker-Appiah, a member of this Committee, and Ms Elize Delpont of the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria, for facilitating the discussions at the workshops. We plan to continue our efforts to build the capacity of the government of Sierra Leone to implement the Convention, and hope to return in the coming months to provide support in the preparation of the country's initial report to this Committee which was due in 1989.

Our programme to support countries emerging from conflict also extends to Afghanistan and Timor-Leste. A high-level consultation mission, intended to sensitize ministers and senior officials in key ministries in Afghanistan on the provisions of the Convention and to develop appropriate recommendations for priority action for enhanced implementation, was scheduled for May 2005. However, due to a deterioration in the security situation in Afghanistan during the week preceding the mission, we were advised by our counterparts in Kabul to postpone it until later in the year and we are currently discussing alternative dates for the mission. We are grateful to Ms. Salma Khan and Ms. Feride Acar for their long-standing support for this project, and hope for their continuing commitment.

The Government of Timor-Leste, through the Office for the Promotion of Equality, requested our assistance in the facilitation of a series of workshops to discuss the responsibilities of the various line ministries in the preparation of Timor-Leste's initial report to this Committee, including the collection of appropriate sex-aggregated data and information. We are grateful to Ms Shanthi Dairiam of this Committee for agreeing to participate in the workshops in Timor Leste and for providing input and support to the Government in this process.

Our programme of technical cooperation continues to include regional judicial colloquia and workshops for government officials. In the past three years, approximately 55 judges from 29 countries have participated in our judicial colloquia and over 70 government officials from 37 countries have participated in our training workshops. These events have also been effective in enabling direct interaction and exchange of views on common challenges and strategies to overcome them amongst judges and government officials from different countries in a region.

In collaboration with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Division convened a three-day judicial colloquium on the application of international human rights law at the domestic level from 25-27 May 2005 in Santiago, Chile. Seventeen participants from nine countries attended the colloquium (Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay). The keynote speakers and main facilitators for the colloquium were Judge Cecilia Medina, former Member and Chairperson of the Committee on Human Rights and Judge of the Inter American Court of Human Rights and Rodrigo Jimenez, professor of international law at the University of Central America in Costa Rica. Discussions focused on the opportunities available under international human rights law,

and in particular the Convention, to achieve equality in the areas of marriage and family relations and violence against women. Participants adopted a statement that summarizes the challenges as well as the opportunities for action identified by the meeting. Like our previous judicial colloquia, this event was funded by the Government of Germany and we are grateful to them for their continued support.

A training workshop for government officials in implementation and reporting under the Convention was held after the colloquium, again in collaboration with ECLAC, from 30 May to 1 June 2005 in Santiago, Chile. Twenty-two government officials from nine countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay) attended the workshop, which was designed to enhance the capacity of government officials to more effectively implement the Convention at the national level and to prepare States parties' reports. Like our previous events, the workshop attempted to illustrate how the process of preparing and presenting a report to the Convention enables a State party to monitor and evaluate the extent to which it has been implemented, and identify gaps and challenges, as well as new strategies and opportunities for implementation and follow-up. Principal trainers and facilitators for the workshop were Ms Magalys Arocha, a member of this Committee, and Professor Rodrigo Jimenez of the University of Central America. We extend our thanks to both of them.

The Division continued development of training materials to support its technical cooperation programme and to assist in efforts towards raising awareness about the Convention and its Optional Protocol. Most notably, we are working on a manual on implementation of the Convention, an initiative called for by this Committee itself and which forms part of the joint work plan of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (see E/CN.6/2003/5, op.13). The manual is being prepared in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights at the University of Utrecht and its Director, Committee member Cees Flinterman, and with funding by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). A workshop was held in Utrecht, the Netherlands, from 12-14 May 2005 to assess the appropriateness and suitability of the draft chapters for the various constituencies for which the manual is intended. The manual, which is scheduled for completion before the end of the year, is expected to make a significant contribution to efforts designed at enhancing national capacity, including the strengthening of national institutional frameworks and improved consultative processes, to implement the provisions of the Convention and the concluding comments of the Committee.

Mme Chairperson,
distinguished members of the Committee,

Let me now turn to some of the issues on this session's agenda. The Committee will consider the reports of eight States parties, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Gambia, Guyana, Ireland, Israel and Lebanon. You will also continue your important work under the Optional Protocol to the Convention in regard to the petition as well as inquiry procedures. In this regard, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the five experts - members of the Working Group, for their diligent work during the fifth session which took place in February and the sixth session which was held last week.

The Committee will continue its work on a general recommendation on article 2 of the Convention. You will follow-up on the recommendations that emanated from the fourth Inter-Committee Meeting and seventeenth meeting of Chairpersons of treaty bodies. Your Chairperson will brief you on these matters in detail. You are also invited to provide your views and comments on a special rapporteur on discriminatory legislation, and on the Secretary-General's study on violence against women.

The Committee, in accordance with established practice, will meet with representatives of NGOs to hear information about the countries that are reporting at this session. Representatives of the UN system will meet with the Committee later this morning. I also understand that several lunchtime briefings and panels are being prepared, including by NGOs, on a range of topics of interest to the Committee.

The session of the Committee will be followed by the pre-session working group for the thirty-fourth session, which will prepare the list of issues and questions for the eight States parties that have confirmed their readiness to present their reports in January.

I wish you every success in your important work this session. I pledge the full support and commitment of the Division for the Advancement of Women in facilitating your task in every way possible to ensure the smooth completion of your heavy workload.

Thank you.