

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Thirty-third session

5-22 July 2005

Agenda Item 3: Report of the Chairperson on activities undertaken between the thirty-second and thirty-third sessions of the Committee.

Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women,
Ms. Carolyn Hannan, Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and gentlemen.

It is indeed a great pleasure to see you once again here in New York to start the thirty-third session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. I hope that all members are well and I look forward to working with you during another productive session.

Distinguished members

I would like to extend my special thanks to Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and Ms. Carolyn Hannan, Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women for their opening statements in which they have briefed us about the work undertaken by the Secretariat in support of the implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocol. They also highlighted important issues which I also believe require the Committee's attention.

I am very pleased to report to you on my activities undertaken between the thirty-second and thirty-third sessions. The Committee will be asked to discuss, and take follow-up measures in regard to some of these activities. We will have the opportunity to focus on these matters further in the course of our three-week session.

In accordance with established practice, I attended the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women which undertook a ten-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly of 2000. I addressed the opening meeting and drew the Commission's attention to this Committee's statement prepared as a contribution to the 10- year review process. I emphasized in particular the important synergies between the implementation of the Platform for Action and the Convention, the increase in the number of States parties, as well as the adoption, entry

into force and operationalization of the Optional Protocol as milestones in the protection and promotion of human rights of women since the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Committee's statement was circulated to the Commission.

I drew the Commission's attention to our ongoing efforts at enhancing the methods of work, especially in relation to the constructive dialogue with States parties, and noted the results of our 32nd session. Most importantly, however, I impressed on the Commission the increase in the Committee's workload, and the constraints faced in the implementation of all our responsibilities in a timely manner because of our limited meeting time. I conveyed the Committee's disappointment with the lack of action by fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly in regard to our request for a solution to the question of the Committee's meeting time. I also briefed the Commission about the Committee's intention to discuss this matter further at the present session.

I was also pleased to participate in a panel discussion 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", a topic selected by the Bureau of the Commission, and which formed part of the proceedings of the session. I pointed to the Committee's assessment of the status of implementation and then proceeded to providing examples of the ways in which the Platform for Action provides concrete and practical recommendations for achieving progress. I then moved on to highlight some of the ways in which the Committee has addressed the mutually reinforcing nature of these two instruments for the realization of equality between women and men.

A very lively discussion followed the presentations by the six panelists. It was a great pleasure and honour for me to share the podium with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Minister for Social Services and Community Development of the Bahamas, as well as fellow CEDAW expert Ms. Dubravka Šimonović, in her capacity as Head of the Human Rights Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Croatia, among other panelists. The panel discussion, which was extremely well attended, gave significant visibility and prominence to the Convention and the work of the Committee.

During my stay in New York, I had the opportunity to meet with several delegations to discuss matters related to the implementation of the Convention and reporting. Significantly, I had a chance to meet, at my request, representatives from several of the Nordic countries who are traditionally the main sponsors of the resolution on the implementation of the Convention in the General Assembly, and whom I briefed in some detail on the Committee's concerns about its meeting time. I informed the delegations that the Committee will be taking up the matter again at this session, and that we would be looking for the support of Member States at the 60th session of the Assembly.

Distinguished experts,

It has been a tradition for some time now for the Chairperson of the Committee to address the Commission on Human Rights, under the item on the integration of the human rights of women and the gender perspective. This year, the Commission decided that Chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies would be given an opportunity to address the Commission under the item referring to the implementation of human rights instruments. As I was personally unable to participate on the date provided, I greatly appreciated the willingness of Mme Belmihoub-Zerdani to travel to Geneva. However, the Bureau decided that only Chairpersons would be able to speak. In the end, only the Chairperson of the third Inter-Committee meeting and 16th meeting of Chairpersons addressed the Commission, while my statement was made available in the room.

Most recently, I attended the fourth Inter-Committee meeting from 20-22 June 2005, where I was ably accompanied by Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani and Ms. Hanna Beate Schopp-Schilling, as well as the seventeenth meeting of the Chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies, from 23 – 24 June in Geneva. In accordance with the agenda, I had an opportunity to elaborate on the Committee's working methods, and action taken in this regard at the 32nd session.

One of the major issues of discussion during the ICM were the proposals for harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties and guidelines for an expanded core document and treaty-specific targeted reports, on the basis of a revised proposal by the Secretariat. The Committee's preliminary comments were among the documentation for the meeting. Mr. Kamel Filali, rapporteur on this issue, presented an oral report on his consultations with the treaty bodies. I expressed regret that he had been unable to meet with this Committee due to circumstances beyond his control. The ICM put forward recommendations for the next steps on the Committees' consideration of these proposals. We also discussed a number of other matters, including the question of reservations to treaties, terminology, follow-up to concluding observations and national human rights institutions. This Committee is called upon to follow-up on these matters, and we will have opportunity to take them up in closed meetings in the course of the session.

The ICM also had the opportunity to meet with the High Commissioner for Human Rights who briefed the ICM on her Plan of Action. Of particular interest to the meeting were her proposals for short- and long-term approaches for the functioning of the human rights treaties. During my stay in Geneva, I had the opportunity to call on the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Louise Arbour, and invited her to have a dialogue with the Committee. She accepted the invitation and intends to be with us at the 34th session in January 2006. We will set aside time to discuss issues raised in the Plan as they pertain to this Committee in the course of the session.

Let me only briefly mention the useful exchange of views the ICM had with representatives of the United Nations system, as well as non-governmental organizations. Topics of discussion were in particular the follow-up to concluding comments/observations at the national level, and the reform proposals.

I should like to thank Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani and Ms. Schopp-Schilling for their contributions to the ICM, and I look forward to their further additions later in the session.

The ICM was followed by the meeting of Chairpersons where I would like to mention in particular our informal meeting and dialogue with States parties, which was attended by more than 80 States. Much of the discussion concentrated on the proposed common core document and the congruent substantive provisions of the treaties, as well as the High Commissioner's proposals for a standing unified treaty body. Once again I stressed that before considering moving the Committee from New York to Geneva, the Member States should take into account that the Convention had been prepared by the Commission on the Status of Women. Therefore, I suggested that the Commission on the Status of Women should be consulted before action is taken.

The Chairpersons also met with the Expanded Bureau of the 61st session of the Commission on Human Rights for an exchange of views on ways to strengthen the dialogue between the treaty bodies and the Commission on Human Rights as well as the reform proposals for the various bodies. I raised the issue of the treaty body representation at the Commission on Human Rights and the limited time allocated to the chairpersons. The chairpersons also had a useful meeting with the special procedures mandate holders whose annual meeting takes place in parallel to those of the treaty body chairs. Interaction between such mandate holders and committees was one of the issues discussed. The decisions and recommendations will be distributed to experts and we will take up the various issues during the course of our session.

Dear colleagues,

I would also like to mention that a working group of experts of this Committee met in April in Bangkok to discuss work on a general recommendation on migrant women. We hope to meet again in October in Manila to continue this work.

Thank you very much.