

As Delivered

THIRTY-FOURTH SESSION
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Opening statement

By

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Distinguished experts of the Committee
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and privilege to address you at the opening of the thirty-fourth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and to extend a warm welcome to all of you and to wish you a Happy New Year. I am delighted to see you, Madame Chairperson, preside over this session of the Committee.

We begin this New Year building on the momentum and achievements that resulted from the intense activity by Member States, United Nations entities, international organizations and NGOs since you adjourned your 33rd session.

In his report to the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, “*In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*”, the Secretary-General called on us to “act boldly and act together to make people everywhere more secure, more prosperous and better able to enjoy their fundamental human rights.”

First among the achievements is the historic consensus of the 2005 World Summit where Heads of State and Government reaffirmed that progress for women is progress for all and that the full and effective implementation of the goals and objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly is an essential contribution to achieving the internationally agreed development goals. Echoing the Secretary-General’s call, the Heads of State at the World Summit also reaffirmed the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and inter-relatedness of all human rights and resolved to create a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic world.

The review and appraisal of implementation in 2005 made it clear that progress has been made in achieving gender equality and empowerment of women at national level, particularly in such areas as:

- Establishment of specific policies and strategies, and plans of action, for gender equality;
- Greater diversity and effectiveness of mechanisms established to promote gender equality;
- Increased participation of women in the economy;
- Improved access to education for women and girls;
- Greater attention to women's participation in the public sector;
- Increased attention to the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and girls;
- Greater recognition of women's role in peace and security;
- Increased mechanisms to protect and promote women's rights; and
- Significant progress in promotion of women's rights, with 180 States being party to the Convention, and 74 also to its Optional Protocol.

Despite these gains, women continue to encounter challenges in accessing and benefiting from opportunities in the economic, social and political spheres, including in employment.

World leaders expressed the commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women in the 2005 World Summit, resolving to eliminate pervasive gender discrimination by:

1. Eliminating gender inequalities in primary and secondary education;
2. Guaranteeing the free and equal right of women to own property and housing ;
3. Ensuring equal access to reproductive health;
4. Promoting women's equal access to labour markets, employment and labour protection;
5. Ensuring equal access to productive assets and resources, including land, credit and technology;
6. Eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls; and
7. Increasing women's representation in Government decision-making bodies.

The World Summit also placed strong emphasis on human rights and the rule of law. The world leaders:

- resolved to improve the effectiveness of the human rights treaty bodies, including through more timely reporting, improved and streamlined reporting procedures and technical assistance to States to enhance their reporting capacities and further enhance the implementation of their recommendations;
- also resolved to integrate the promotion and protection of human rights into national policies and to support the further mainstreaming of human rights throughout the human rights system; and
- acknowledged the need to pay special attention to the human rights of women and children and an undertaking to advance them in every possible way, including by bringing gender and child-protection perspectives into the human rights agenda.

World leaders also recognized the need for universal adherence to and implementation of the rule of law at both national and international levels. They called upon States to continue their efforts to eradicate policies and practices that discriminate against women and to adopt laws and promote practices that protect the rights of women and promote gender equality.

I wish to further highlight the prominence given in the World Summit to the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and their commitment to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

These commitments are indeed a firm basis for moving ahead. The challenge is to translate them into reality, building on the gains that have been made so far.

Distinguished experts,

I am extremely pleased that the Assembly at its 60th session approved your request for additional meeting time so as to enable you to more effectively, and in a more timely manner, discharge your critical role in monitoring women's enjoyment of their human rights in the States parties to the Convention. The accountability of States parties for the fulfillment of their obligations under the Convention is critical to women's realization and enjoyment of their human rights. The Assembly's approval of the extension of meeting time demonstrates in a very practical manner the importance which Member States attach to the Convention and its role in the promotion and observance of women's human rights. The decision, however, was not an easy one given the financial constraints and the many competing priority areas. The membership expects that the resources provided would enable the Committee to eliminate the backlog of reports. I stand ready to assist you as you take on this additional responsibility.

Madam Chairperson,

Since your last meeting the Security Council held an open debate on women, peace and security, to mark the fifth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325. Since the adoption of this landmark resolution, the image of women has changed from

that of solely victims of war to one of active participants as peacemakers, peace-builders and negotiators. This has been demonstrated in countries, such as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Columbia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, and Timor-Leste. In many instances, the CEDAW Convention has been a powerful tool for women advocating for change.

Madam Chairperson,

I undertook a mission to Sudan in September last year, where I met with Sudanese authorities and women in the South and in Darfur, including those in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. The overall situation of Sudanese women continues to be dire, abject poverty, destroyed health facilities, limited access to decision-making, three generations without schooling and facing scarcity of water and food, economic deprivation and social discrimination, to name just a few challenges. In my meetings with government officials, I urged them to move swiftly to accede to the Convention. Every opportunity must be used to encourage the government of Sudan to accede to the Convention.

Madam Chairperson,

Your Committee has long taken a very active interest in the situation of women migrant workers. I had the opportunity to attend an International Conference for Women Leaders on “Migration and Gender Issues within the Millennium Development Goals”, in Israel, in September 2005. The participants at the meeting, many of whom were Ministers, urged that given the prominent role of women migrants, full attention should be paid to the gender perspectives of this trend. The Commission on the Status of Women will consider women and international migration as an emerging issue at its 50th session. The 2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration, prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women, serves as an important resource.

Madam Chairperson

I have noted with great interest the important linkages this Committee has made, especially in recent sessions, between implementation of States’ international legal obligations under the Convention, and their follow-up to global policies such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Declaration. Effective use of these linkages facilitates a comprehensive approach to gender equality that includes legal obligations and policy commitments, and must find its expression in legislative measures, policy and administrative steps, awareness raising and educational efforts. It must also involve all branches of Government – the legislature, judiciary and executive – as well as all sectors of the State and civil society, at different levels. I look forward to your continuing practice of advocating for a holistic approach to the realization of substantive gender equality.

Discrimination against women persists – in States that are party to the Convention and in those that remain outside the binding obligations of the treaty. At each session, as you engage in constructive dialogue, and guide States on the way forward, you open up new avenues for change. I encourage you to build on your past efforts, and use the momentum of change and reform to strengthen your own contribution to the goal of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Distinguished experts,

Today, we have reason to celebrate as we join, although from a distance, the women, men, boys and girls of Liberia in the inauguration of the first woman President in Africa. We hope that this inauguration will usher in a new way of life founded on democratic principles and the rule of law. Earlier, Germany elected the first woman Chancellor and Chile has just joined Germany and Liberia in electing the first woman President. These are great achievements and I have no doubt that the Convention, supported and monitored by this Committee, have played a role in these particular gains. These three women will need all our support in their daunting tasks.

I wish you success in your deliberations during the next three weeks and pledge the full support of my Office in facilitating your tasks.

Thank you.