

**COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

THIRTY-FOURTH SESSION

**Opening statement by
Ms. Carolyn Hannan
Director
Division for the Advancement of Women
16 January 2006**

**Madam Chairperson
Distinguished experts of the Committee,
Colleagues and Friends**

It is a great pleasure for me to warmly welcome you to the thirty-fourth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Let me start my comments by assuring the Committee of the full support of the Division for the Advancement of Women in your important work. We will spare no efforts to provide the best possible servicing to the Committee at this session, and in the future.

Distinguished experts,

Since the adjournment of your last session, the number of States parties to the Convention has remained unchanged. I am pleased to report that three additional States have become party to the Optional Protocol, namely: Burkina Faso, on 10 October 2005, San Marino on 15 September 2005, and South Africa on 18 October 2005, bringing the total to 74 States parties. There were two additional acceptances to the amendment to article 20; paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Committee's meeting time, namely: Georgia on 30 September 2005 and Liberia on 16 September 2005, which brought the total number to 47 States. I am especially pleased to report that on 9 December 2005, Kuwait withdrew its reservation relating to article 7(a) made upon ratification. This is an important follow-up to the Committee's concluding comments on Kuwait from its thirtieth session.

I am confident that this increase in ratifications of the Optional Protocol will be used effectively by women in the respective States parties who believe their rights have been violated to seek relief from the Committee.

Mme Chairperson,

Ms Mayanja has referred to the decision of the General Assembly concerning the Committee's meeting time. Resolution 60/230 on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by vote, authorizes the Committee to hold three annual sessions of three weeks each, with a one-week pre-session working group for each session, effective from January 2006 as a temporary measure. It also authorizes the Committee to meet, on an exceptional and temporary basis in 2006 and 2007 for up to seven days in parallel working groups during its third annual session in 2006, and its first and third sessions in 2007. Lastly, the resolution also authorizes the continuing convening of two annual sessions of the Working Group on Communications under the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

The question of the Committee's meeting time has been a constant concern ever since the seventh session. Since 1997, the Committee has met in two annual sessions of three weeks each. With the growing number of States parties adhering to their reporting obligations, as well as the entry into force of the Optional Protocol, the situation has become extremely serious in recent years. This decision of the General Assembly will allow the Committee to almost double the number of States it will consider in 2006, and to review an even larger number in 2007. The backlog of reports that await consideration will be reduced significantly – at the same time, I should alert you that 30 States have submitted reports in 2005.

The extension of the meeting time will pose new challenges for the Committee as well as the Secretariat. The demands on experts' time will expand significantly, and working methods for the parallel working groups must be considered. Much more preparatory work needs to be done to facilitate the smooth conduct of your sessions, including the pre-session working group. Let me assure, Mme Chairperson, that the Division for the Advancement of Women will do its utmost to provide you with the support necessary so that the Committee can successfully use the new opportunities this decision of the General Assembly has created.

Mme Chairperson,

Allow me to turn to some of the activities which were undertaken by the Division for the Advancement of Women since your last session.

Ms Mayanja has highlighted the results of the 2005 World Summit, and in particular the prominence accorded to gender equality and human rights. In October, the Third Committee considered the question of the advancement of women and follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, and I should like to express my appreciation to your Chairperson for her participation in the session, and decisive advocacy for the Committee's request for increased meeting time. In addition to its consideration of the status of the Convention and the request of the Committee, the Assembly also adopted resolutions on the Secretary-General's study on violence against women, on violence against women migrant workers, on the situation of women in rural areas, and on follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action. We were once again pleased with the attention

paid to the Convention, and the Committee's concluding comments, by Member States as well as in some of the resolutions.

Allow me to highlight one of our technical cooperation activities, aimed at enhancing the implementation of the Convention at the national level. We were very pleased to collaborate with our colleagues in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the implementation of a sub-regional workshop on follow-up to concluding comments/ observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This workshop was held in Cairo, Egypt from 19 to 22 December 2005, and hosted by the Government of Egypt. It was attended by government officials, members of human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations from Algeria, Egypt, Libyan Arab Jamarihiya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. The workshop focused on enhancing implementation of both Conventions through more effective follow-up and implementation of the concluding comments/observations of the respective committees.

The workshop was particularly timely as the CEDAW Committee is placing increasing importance on ensuring that States take effective action in response to its recommendations. Both CEDAW and CERD experts presented papers and facilitated discussions. We are especially grateful to Ms. Naéla Gabr for her encouragement and support in convening this workshop, and to Ms. Meriem Belmihoub-Zerdani, Ms. Françoise Gaspard and Ms. Dubravka Šimonovic for acting as facilitators at the workshop. We are also grateful to the Government of Germany for its financial contribution to the event.

The Division continued to support national machineries for the advancement of women in Africa in their efforts to enhance implementation of the Platform for Action and the Convention. Towards this end, we have worked in particular to facilitate the systematic and effective use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to achieve their goals, and in particular to enhance dissemination of national data on gender equality issues; improve networking at sub-regional and regional levels for sharing experience and good practices among national machineries; and increase the involvement in the preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis in 2005. After a series of sub-regional workshops in 2004 and 2005, we organized a panel of national machineries and ICTs during the Summit to build on the experience gained. The panel endorsed the development of an e-based regional network for national machineries and discussed a framework for future actions to ensure effective use of ICTs by national machineries.

Mme Chairperson,

The fiftieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women will take place from 27 February to 10 March. The priority themes chosen for consideration by the Commission focus on participation. Specifically, the Commission will deal with: (a) enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving

gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work; and (b) equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels. In preparation for these themes, the Division convened two expert meetings, in Addis Ababa, in October, and in Bangkok, in November. The Commission will also review its working methods, and develop a multi-year programme of work. It will consider the advisability of the appointment of a special rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women, an issue to which you contributed your views at your last session.

This Committee has consistently endeavoured to ensure that the Convention, and your work, are fully taken into account in the intergovernmental process so as to strengthen a holistic approach to the promotion of gender equality. Your Chairperson regularly addresses the Commission, and as a Committee, you have submitted important statements as inputs to the work of the Commission. This year's topic, participation, is an issue that figures prominently in the Convention, is the topic of a general recommendation, and a consistent area of concern in your concluding comments. As the Commission will consider its working methods, there may be new opportunities for enhancing this inter-action between the Committee and the Commission, for accelerated achievement of gender equality.

Mme Chairperson,

Let me now turn to the work of your session. The Committee will consider the reports of eight States parties, namely Australia, Cambodia, Eritrea, Mali, Thailand, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, and Venezuela. You will continue your important work under the Optional Protocol to the Convention. 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 seventh session which was held last week.

The Committee will continue its work on a general recommendation on article 2 of the Convention, and discuss the question of women migrant workers. You will consider ways to enhance your inter-action with entities of the United Nations system, as well as with national human rights institutions. You will also meet with the High Commissioner for Human Rights for a discussion on her reform proposals for the human rights treaty body system.

The Committee will be called upon to discuss, and put in place preliminary arrangements to respond to, the extension of your meeting time, in particular for the pre-session working group.

In accordance with established practice, you will meet with representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to hear information about the countries that are reporting at this session, this afternoon, as well as on 23 January. 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.

I wish you every success in your important work this session. I again 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.