

10 May

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Thirty-fifth session
15 May to 2 June 2006

**AGENDA ITEM 3: REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON ON ACTIVITIES
UNDERTAKEN BETWEEN THE THIRTY-FOURTH AND THIRTY-FIFTH
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.

I am honoured to present my report on inter-sessional activities since our January session. It will be a short report, as the most important activity was the informal meeting of the Committee in Berlin in early May in which most experts participated.

Let me first thank Ms. Mayanja and Ms. Hannan for their opening statements, and in particular the important information provided on the results of the Commission on the Status of Women and the current reform discussion in the United Nations. We are indeed very interested in these issues and look forward to an opportunity for a more in-depth exchange of views in the course of the session.

Dear colleagues,

Shortly after the adjournment of our 34th session on 3 February, I returned to New York to participate in the 50th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. In my statement at the opening meeting of the Commission, I provided an overview of our work under article 18 of the Convention, as well as under the Optional Protocol. I highlighted how the Committee intends to use the extension of meeting time approved by the General Assembly to expedite consideration of reports, and welcomed the generous invitation by the Government of Germany to host the fifth informal meeting of the Committee in Berlin. I also referred to the proposals for reform of the human rights treaty body system, and the proposed move of the servicing of the Committee. In this regard, I conveyed to the Member States our view that no decision should be taken at the present time on the question of a possible transfer of the Committee and its Secretariat. Instead, I pointed out that the Committee recommends strongly that further reflection take place once the details of the reform proposals are available, and that its own inputs be taken into consideration in the decision-making process. My statement is available to experts.

Traditionally in the spring, the Chairperson of the Committee participates in the session of the Commission on Human Rights - due to the decision to create a Human Rights Council, the Commission did not have a substantive session and instead, convened to complete its mandate. As you all know, elections to the Council took place on 9 May, and the first session of the Council will open on 19 June. I wish to emphasize the importance of ensuring that strong institutional links be established from the very outset between the Committee and the newly established Human Rights Council.

Let me now turn to the informal meeting of the Committee hosted by the Government of Germany from 2 to 4 May in Berlin. I wish to express the Committee's sincere and wholehearted appreciation to the Government of Germany for this invitation. This was the Committee's fifth informal meeting, and the second one hosted by Germany. With this second invitation, the German Government also wished to mark the 25th anniversary of the Committee. Our thanks go in particular to the Foreign Ministry for the excellent arrangements which greatly facilitated the discussions and allowed us to focus on a number of important issues in a very conducive environment that resulted in important agreements for our future activities. We are also very appreciative of the most generous hospitality and the opportunity extended to us to see a little bit of Berlin and to learn about its history – some of us who had the privilege of earlier visits were indeed impressed with the many changes that have occurred in that lovely city.

Colleagues,

We had set an ambitious agenda for the Berlin meeting. Two items formed the core of our discussions, namely the working methods for the parallel chambers starting this August, and the discussion of the proposal of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on a standing unified treaty body. I am happy to report to all here present that we have come up with very clear arrangements for the parallel chambers, and although we are aware that the work load of the Committee when it meets in chambers will be enormous, we are confident that consideration of reports in chambers will be conducted with the same level of attention, diligence and competence that States parties are used to from this Committee. We have reached agreement on the procedures for establishing the chambers and allocation of reports, for coordination among the chambers, the role of the Bureau and the country rapporteurs, as well as the adoption of concluding comments. I wish to emphasize that the Committee will continue to function as *one* Committee that is entrusted with monitoring the implementation of the Convention in States parties.

Let me add here a word on the contribution of non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system. The Committee welcomes and encourages their inputs to the reporting process, including in the follow-up to the constructive dialogue at the national level. While the role of these stakeholders was not a primary subject of discussion at the Berlin meeting, it is obvious that the parallel chambers together with the three annual sessions are placing significant additional burdens on them. While in the past, 16 States appeared before the Committee annually, 31 States will report in 2006 and 38 in 2007. I wish to express my sincere hope that we can continue to rely on shadow

reports from NGOs and the inputs of the UN system on as many States parties as possible.

During our three days in Berlin, we also held an in-depth discussion of the proposals of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for a standing unified treaty body, on the basis of her concept paper. Following our meeting with the High Commissioner in January, the Berlin meeting offered us the necessary time and space to explore in greater depth conceptual and practical issues, whereby Committee members noted in particular the need for attention also to alternative proposals to the one put forward by the High Commissioner. As a result, the Committee agreed to add some ideas of its own to the reform debate, and we intend to submit those ideas to the Inter-Committee Meeting for discussion.

Dear colleagues,

Much needs to be accomplished in the coming three weeks. Eight States will present their reports. We will meet with representatives of the United Nations system, as well as with non-governmental organizations who will provide country-specific information. I understand that IWRAW Asia Pacific has once again worked with national non-governmental organizations in many of the reporting countries towards the preparation of shadow reports, and I acknowledge the presence of these representatives here at the session. We will formalize the agreements reached in Berlin, and further prepare our contribution to the Inter-Committee and Chairpersons' meetings. We will continue to implement our responsibilities under the Optional Protocol, as well as our work on general recommendations.

May I take this opportunity to express my sincerely gratitude to all members of the Committee, as well as to Ms. Mayanja and Ms. Hannan and the entire staff of the Division for the Advancement of Women, especially the Women's Rights Section, for their continued support of the work of the Committee.

Thank you very much.