

Check against delivery

**Closing remarks
by
Ms. Dubravka Šimonović
Thirty-seventh session of the
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
New York, 2 February 2007**

Dear colleagues,

We have thus come to the end of the thirty-seventh session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. I am sure you will all agree that it was a very intense session during which the Committee not only reviewed the reports of fifteen States parties but also discussed and took action on a number of matters towards the overall goals of the Convention and its implementation in all States parties, including through the use of the Optional Protocol.

Let me begin with a word of congratulation to Colombia who ratified the Optional Protocol on 23 January, the day before its constructive dialogue with the Committee, bringing the total number of States parties to the Optional Protocol to 84. I hope that this well-timed action will be an inspiration for the States parties who are scheduled to present their reports in May and in August of this year.

Dear colleagues,

Let me say a few words about our consideration of reports of States parties on the implementation of the Convention at this session. We have considered one initial report, by Tajikistan, and 14 periodic reports. I believe the Committee was once again privileged that many delegations were represented at a high level, led by Ministers, to present their reports and to engage in a constructive dialogue with the Committee. Leadership at that level is critical not only as an expression of political will and commitment to the rights of women, but is necessary for effective follow up to the Committee's concluding comments.

The Committee was also very pleased that the political leadership of many delegations was complemented by high-quality expertise in many of the areas covered by the Convention. I believe that the strength of the delegations also contributed significantly to the quality of the constructive dialogues in the two Chambers.

The Committee was privileged to consider implementation of the Convention in a very diverse group of countries – I would like to single out India, with a population of over one billion in an entire sub-continent, and the Maldives with a population of some 360,000 and consisting of a group of islands – each with its own broad range of challenges in the implementation of the Convention. All States parties, no matter how large or small, have accepted the obligations upon

ratification of the Convention – to work, without delay, for the practical realization of the principle of equality of women and men.

We have been able to see a good amount of progress in these last three weeks. We were impressed by the significant number of new laws, such as comprehensive gender equality laws, equal treatment laws, or laws on domestic violence, which several of the reporting States adopted since they were last examined by this Committee. We have also been able to assess the scope and content of gender equality policies, or gender perspectives in national development policies, that are significant vehicles for promotion of gender equality. We have heard about programmes and activities to improve women's access to health, education and economic opportunities, to full and equal participation in public life and decision-making and to protection from all forms of violence.

We once again benefited enormously from the inputs from many dedicated civil society organizations that keep the pressure on Governments to work for women and we encourage all reporting States to strengthen consultation with women's NGOs in the follow-up to the Committee's concluding comments.

Such progress, however, is not yet as consistent and systemic as we would like it to be and as is required for compliance with Convention obligations. We have seen many gaps and challenges. They differ in specifics and in scope, but the overall and structural challenges are similar: There are significant gaps in implementation, monitoring and evaluation of progress is insufficient. The impact of laws, policies and programmes is not consistently assessed, which makes it more difficult to respond to new needs, or correct unsuccessful approaches.

In many States, we also found persistent weaknesses in the institutional mechanisms responsible for promoting gender equality, and for coordinating implementation of the Convention and the use of the gender mainstreaming strategy across all sectors and levels of Government. Such weaknesses may be a lack of resources and capacity, limited power and authority to monitor and evaluate Government performance in this area, or a mandate that is too limited to allow for real and consistent change. We have also noted repeated change in institutional structures, the broadening of mandates to encompass different forms of discrimination, multiple structures for different tasks or levels – while such diversity is not *a priori* a concern, it can be a concern if it leads to a weakening in the visibility, authority, and dedicated resources required to bring about lasting change for women.

We have also pointed to the persistence of stereotypes, and their role in perpetuating discrimination against women. While there has been some progress in women's participation in public life and decision-making, we also noted that in several States, women's share of elected office dropped – a very worrisome situation indeed. We have also increasingly focused on women's participation at local and municipal level, and been very concerned that the situation is frequently quite unsatisfactory.

Dear colleagues,

Much more could be said about trends and specificities in the implementation of the Convention in the 15 States we have examined. But let me briefly turn to a couple of other issues we dealt with during this last session.

The first point I want to make pertains to our work in chambers. I trust that I speak for all of us when I say that this experience has been a very positive and satisfying one overall. Let me add that we have also taken a critical look at our own performance, and we will take these lessons into the August session where we will again meet in chambers. I want to underline that this working method has allowed us to indeed tackle the backlog of reports that await consideration. This conclusion is an extremely important one, as we now have the opportunity to engage much more actively with those States parties that have not submitted their initial reports, although they ratified the Convention many years ago, in some instances as much as 25 years. We have decided to invite four States parties to submit their reports by March 2008, for consideration in early 2009. Should these reports not be submitted, we will proceed with consideration of the implementation of the Convention in the absence of a report. I am confident that these States will indeed prepare their reports.

We have also carefully reviewed our current and future workload, and have come to the conclusion that three annual sessions, at least one of which in parallel chambers, is required for the Committee to effectively implement all its responsibilities, and in a timely and effective manner, on a consistent basis. I appeal to all States parties to the Convention and to all Member States of the United Nations, to support the Committee in this request.

The second point I would like to make is linked to our future work, and specifically to the servicing arrangements for the Committee and the locations of its future sessions. The Committee met with the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the question of the transfer of responsibility for servicing the Committee from the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Committee proposed that the current arrangements pertaining to the dates of the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth sessions, in May and August of this year, as well as the location and servicing will remain in place, and looks forward to the new arrangements that will be made for 2008.

Dear colleagues,

This was my first session as Chair of this Committee. I am grateful to all of you for having given me this opportunity, and I am especially grateful to my colleagues in the Bureau for their wise counsel and advice on the many issues that we have tackled.

My appreciation also goes to our Secretariat, to Ms Mayanja and Ms Hannan, and the team that has supported us over these past three weeks.

I wish you all a safe trip home, and I look forward to seeing you on 14 May here at United Nations Headquarters.

Thank you very much.