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Closing remarks
by
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Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
at the
thirty-ninth session of the
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
New York, 10 August 2007

Madam Chairperson
Distinguished members of the Committee
Ladies and Gentlemen

May I take this opportunity to congratulate you, Madam Chairperson, and all members of the Committee on the successful completion of the work of the thirty-ninth session. You have dealt with a challenging and significant volume of work. I wish to pay tribute to the commitment and hard work of all experts under the able leadership of the Chairperson and Bureau members in both chambers. Your expertise and experience have indeed resulted in a most productive session with many thoughtful discussions.

Madam Chairperson

You have held successful constructive dialogues with 15 States parties, with all the hours of work that this has entailed. Chamber A examined the reports of seven States parties, namely: Belize, Guinea, Honduras, Hungary, Indonesia, Jordan and Singapore; as did Chamber B which considered the reports of: Brazil, Estonia, Kenya, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Norway and Republic of Korea. One State party - Cook Islands - reported to the Committee for the first time since its accession to the Convention on 11 August 2006, and the Committee considered its report in plenary. You have studied voluminous materials submitted by the NGOs, and by the entities of the United Nations system.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the fifteen States parties for their reports, the written responses to the lists of issues and questions of the Committee, the oral presentations and the response to the questions and comments of Committee experts during the constructive dialogue. These questions and interventions, and the Committee's concluding comments will provide a solid basis for further work by all States parties in order to enhance women's enjoyment of their human rights.

Madam Chairperson

Your work and the significant public attention it generates at the national level in the reporting States, highlights the obligations of the States parties for action to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in accordance with the provisions of the Convention. It creates an additional momentum for the States parties to enact or amend legislation to prohibit all forms of discrimination against women in order to achieve gender equality and to introduce temporary special measures for acceleration of the practical realization of the principle of equality of women and men.

During these last three weeks, the Committee has been informed about revisions of marriage and family laws; better protection of women's rights in employment; new initiatives to enhance women's and girls' educational opportunities and achievements, and participation in public life. Significant steps have also been taken to redress various forms of violence against women, and strengthen support services for victims of violence. At the same time, the Committee has found continuing discrimination against women in relation to all the provisions of the Convention – as always, the Committee paid attention to each of these and elaborated strategies for narrowing and closing equality gaps.

Madam Chairperson

The high level of attendance of non-governmental organizations once again made a significant contribution to the work of the Committee and I encourage them to continue with their advocacy for the promotion and protection of women's human rights and the implementation of the Convention. I also wish to stress the important role which the United Nations entities play in supporting the implementation of the Convention and the work of the Committee.

Madam Chairperson

Distinguished members of the Committee

In addition to adopting concluding comments on 15 States parties, you have taken action on three cases under the Optional Protocol. You have continued your discussion on your draft general recommendations on migrant women and on article 2 of the Convention. You reviewed the results of the sixth Inter-Committee meeting and the meeting of Chairpersons. Significantly, you have already been able to share the outcome of your session in an informal meeting with States parties to the Convention. This was an excellent opportunity to exchange views regarding the Committee's working methods, in particular to up-date the States parties on the Committee's request for extension of meeting time and to encourage them to submit their long over due initial reports. I look forward to the General Assembly's positive consideration of the Committee's request to meet annually for three sessions, a request I strongly support, given the backlog of reports and the broad acceptance of the Convention and its Optional Protocol. I note with appreciation that the Government of Switzerland has extended an invitation to you to hold an informal meeting in October 2007 in Geneva, which will give you uninterrupted time to discuss matters relating to the Committee's working methods. And last but not least, you commemorated the 25 years of work of this Committee.

Madam Chairperson
Distinguished Members of the Committee

As I briefed you this morning, we are very heartened by the avid interest the Committee has shown in the United Nations reform processes as they pertain to gender equality and empowerment of women. We had an opportunity to discuss the Secretariat's concept note for a strengthened gender equality architecture, which the President of the General Assembly has transmitted to all Member States. We trust that Member States will agree that there is indeed a need for a much stronger voice on women's issues so that gender equality and women's empowerment are given the priority they deserve throughout the United Nations system. We count on the support of this Committee in these efforts.

Madam Chairperson
Distinguished Members of the Committee
Ladies and Gentlemen

This is the last time that the Committee has been serviced by the Division for the Advancement of Women. Since assuming my responsibilities as Special Adviser in 2005, I have greatly appreciated the opportunity of working with all of you and I have benefited from the many constructive dialogues I have had the chance to hear – your questions and comments have always been incisive and highly pertinent. I am confident that you will be in excellent hands in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. I intend to continue my close association with the Committee in the future, so as to ensure that the work of the United Nations on gender equality remains connected to your work and the implementation of the Convention. I also anticipate that the relationship between the Committee and the Commission on the Status of Women will continue, and I will make every effort to ensure that strong links are maintained with the future entity for women's empowerment and gender equality.

Let me thank you Madam Chairperson, very warmly for the leadership you provided and the excellent manner in which you have chaired the proceedings of the Committee. I extend my appreciation to all members of the Committee for the excellent work you are doing to promote gender equality and giving hope to women throughout the world.

Allow me, Madam Chairperson, to pay a special tribute to the staff of the Division for the Advancement of Women, in particular the staff of the Women's Right Section. For the past twenty-five years, they have dedicated themselves to the service of this Committee. They have done so efficiently and effectively. They have provided technical assistance and support to States Parties in the preparation of their reports. Over the past two and half years, I have observed them work through volumes of documents, assisting you in your meetings as well as assisting other stakeholders. I can say with confidence and pride that they have done an excellent job and theirs is no small contribution to the promotion and protection of the human rights and freedoms of women worldwide. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Carolyn Hannan, the Director of the

Division and Ms. Christine Brautigam, the Chief of the Women's Rights Section, for the leadership they provided in supporting the Committee.

In closing, I wish you, Madam Chairperson and all members of the Committee a safe journey home, and look forward to meet you again at future sessions. I extend my best wishes to the Committee as you settle in your new location in Geneva.

Thank you.
