

**Closing remarks
by
Ms. Dubravka Šimonović
Thirty-ninth session of the
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
New York, 10 August 2007**

Dear colleagues,

We have thus come to the end of the thirty-ninth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It is customary for the Committee's Chairperson to sum up the work completed and offer some reflections on our proceedings.

In many respects, this 39th session was especially remarkable. The workload was enormous – we started with a celebration of the 25th anniversary of the work of the Committee with the participation of high-level guests including the President of the General Assembly, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. We considered the reports of 14 States parties in parallel chambers – Belize, Guinea, Honduras, Indonesia, Hungary, Singapore, and Jordan in Chamber A; and Estonia, Brazil, Liechtenstein, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Norway and New Zealand in Chamber B - and of one State party – Cook Islands - in Plenary. We adopted decisions on three cases under the Optional Protocol. We met in an informal meeting with States parties to the Convention, and we met with entities of the United Nations system and national human rights institutions. We also had several lunchtime briefings by NGOs, in addition to our regular informal meetings with representatives from NGOs.

I want to extend my appreciation and congratulation to the States parties that engaged in excellent constructive dialogues with the Committee. All States sent delegations from Capital – and many were headed by Ministers or senior Government officials, and we were able to examine in great detail the current status of implementation. We identified gaps and challenges and in all instances Committee experts together with representatives sought to identify strategies for further action and to find solutions to the challenges of persistent discrimination. In all cases, we recommend that the Convention form the basis for States parties' efforts aimed at achieving gender equality.

We were especially pleased to examine for the first time a seventh periodic report – the report of Norway. We also had the opportunity to review progress in six States parties that had been before the Committee in 2002 and 2003 – approximately four years ago – namely Brazil, Kenya, Estonia, Hungary, Norway, and New Zealand. Many Committee experts therefore had personal and direct recollections of the discussions that had taken

place at that time. These dialogues confirmed the importance of regular and timely reporting and consideration so as to ensure a consistent monitoring of progress. This regular interaction strengthens States' accountability for their compliance with their international treaty obligations.

I would like to sincerely congratulate Committee experts on the work of these last three weeks – for the commitment, knowledge, insights and expertise that members bring to the responsibilities entrusted to us under the Convention and the Optional Protocol.

Our 25th anniversary celebration provided the opportunity to reflect on our history, our accomplishments and on the challenges ahead. Let me mention just a couple of these challenges.

The first challenge is to put the Committee on a sustainable path for dealing with its workload. These last two years have been a tremendous challenge in clearing the backlog of reports awaiting consideration, and I believe that the Committee has done extremely well in dealing with this challenge. We have considered the reports of 69, I repeat 69, States parties. Each of these 69 States parties received a set of clear, detailed and country-specific concluding comments and we expect that each of them is undertaking sustained and effective follow-up action. It is important to recognize that the Member States have enabled us to do this work by granting the extension of the Committee's meeting time in 2005. While these two years have been crucial in tackling the backlog, we have not yet completely eliminated it.

Most importantly, however, we must aim to secure a sustainable solution to the Committee's increasing workload. For this to happen, it is essential that our current proposal to the General Assembly for an extension of meeting time is accepted and put into action. In my capacity as Chairperson, I will do everything I can to further explain this request, and I look to all of you to spare no efforts so that we can secure the full support of the General Assembly later this fall.

The first part of our proposal, namely to have *as a permanent measure*, three annual sessions of the Committee, will go a significant way in allowing us to plan ahead, to consider reports of States parties in a timely fashion after their submission, and to deal with cases under the Optional Protocol.

Taking into consideration that there are 185 States parties to the Convention, three sessions of three weeks are still only a limited amount of time. Thus, we do need, as a *temporary measure for the biennium of 2008 and 2009*, to meet in parallel chambers during one of each annual session in 2008 and 09. This will ensure that we completely eliminate the backlog, prevent a new backlog from building up again immediately, and allow us to start an active process of engaging with States who ratified the Convention many years ago but never reported. In fact, the Committee has invited twelve States parties whose initial reports are long – or very long – over due to submit those within a given timeframe.

Securing such a sustainable framework for our work – three annual sessions of three weeks – and as a temporary measure chamber meetings whenever this may be necessary in the future based on our assessment of our workload – needs to receive our priority attention, and we call on Member States to support the Committee in this regard.

A second issue I want to flag is the manner in which we, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, are strengthening our impact on the wider human rights machinery and framework. I refer to our interaction with other human rights treaty bodies on issues of common interest, especially within the framework of the inter-committee meeting and the meeting of chairpersons. This can include for example, harmonization of working methods, the elaboration of joint general recommendations, or joint days of general discussion. While I believe that our Committee is making a significant and determined effort on both levels, I am also of the view that our workload has placed serious constraints on our contribution to such common endeavours. I trust that with the reduction and eventual elimination of the backlog, we will be even better able to help shape the harmonized treaty bodies system and developments in the human rights area generally.

Lastly, let me reflect on the issue that has been on the minds of all of us during this thirty-ninth session, namely the fact that this is the last session, after twenty-five years of work, that we were supported by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations. As of 1 January 2008, responsibility for supporting this Committee will be transferred to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. We have discussed this transfer formally with officials of the Division and the Special Adviser, as well as the High Commissioner and officials of OHCHR. We have also had many opportunities to discuss this transfer informally. At this point, I would like to thank the Government of Switzerland for the invitation extended to this Committee to hold a three day informal working session this fall in Geneva to discuss a number of substantive issues, but also to enable us to have an orientation session with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Dear Committee experts,

I extend the Committee's appreciation to Ms Rachel Mayanja, Special Adviser for Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, and her continuing support to our work. Let me take this opportunity to thank the Division for the Advancement of Women for the support provided during these 25 years, the professionalism, dedication and hard work of several generations of staff. It is my sincere hope that all of them, those that have worked with the Committee in 1982 when it met for the first time in Vienna, and all those that over the years have been involved with the Committee up to the current team, will always remain committed to the promotion of gender equality and women's enjoyment of all their human rights. I thank Carolyn Hannan, the Director of the Division and all the staff of the Division who in one form or the other have supported us over these years.

Thank you very much.