



# Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Seventy-eighth session

### Summary record of the first part (public)\* of the 1793rd meeting

Held via videoconference, on Monday, 15 February 2021, at 4 p.m. Central European Time

*Chair:* Ms. Gbedemah

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\* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as document [CEDAW/C/SR.1793/Add.1](#).

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*The meeting was called to order at 4 p.m.*

### **Opening of the session**

1. **The Chair** declared open the seventy-eighth session of the Committee.
2. **Ms. Brands Kehris** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights) said that she was honoured to be opening the current session.
3. At a meeting of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies, held on 14 December 2020, the participants had discussed the two recommendations made by the co-facilitators concerning predictable review cycles and aligned working methods. The Chairs had also discussed the challenges of holding online meetings and the need for appropriate platforms with which to conduct constructive online dialogues with States parties. In that connection, the Chairs had urged Member States to consider establishing a dedicated online platform for all mandated activities of treaty bodies.
4. The regular budget adopted by the General Assembly for 2021 did not include the resources needed to support the treaty bodies' increased workload, which was mainly related to individual communications. The previous month, the Secretary-General had briefed the General Assembly on his 10 priorities for 2021. Reflecting on the devastating consequences of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, he had noted that human rights were facing a backlash and that the pandemic had had a detrimental impact on women and girls, exposing them to higher rates of poverty and gender-based violence.
5. The Secretary-General had prioritized women's rights in "The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights", which had been launched the previous year on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. The Secretary-General had stressed that the realization of gender equality underpinned every element of the initiative and that there was no such thing as human rights for all while half the global population was subject to the levels of violence, misogyny, exclusion, entrenched inequalities, economic disempowerment and the multiple forms of discrimination that many women and girls faced every day.
6. The Secretary-General's call to action focused attention on eliminating discriminatory laws and encouraging States parties to make use of temporary special measures. In that regard, a number of practical tools were being developed to encourage the United Nations system to consistently promote legal frameworks that guaranteed gender equality and enhanced women's participation and leadership. Such tools included a knowledge hub that provided information on gender-discriminatory laws in different countries and a checklist for conducting gender audits of legislation.
7. According to the report of the Secretary-General on cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights, issued in September 2020, there had been no decline in the scope and number of acts of reprisals against persons engaging with the human rights mechanisms, among whom persons working to defend the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other persons seemed to be particularly at risk. Persons cooperating with the United Nations had reportedly been subjected to threats of rape and other forms of sexual violence, online smear campaigns, stigmatizing public discourse, sexual assault in detention and humiliating and degrading treatment. Reports of attacks against the family members of human rights defenders had also increased. Furthermore, the majority of cases that were not publicly reported or that were kept confidential concerned women, who faced an increased risk of reprisals and further stigmatization if they engaged with the United Nations. In order to combat that problem, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was taking steps to ensure that the issue of reprisals would be addressed by the Security Council.
8. The Secretary-General's report also identified the particular risks faced by members of indigenous and minority communities, who were frequently targeted for using United Nations mechanisms to defend their right to land and resources or to raise concerns about environmental issues. In that connection, she welcomed the fact that the Committee was drafting a general recommendation on the rights of indigenous women and girls.

9. Although persons cooperating with the treaty bodies had reportedly been subjected to various acts of reprisal, it was encouraging to note that the treaty body system was well equipped to address them. In that regard, the Guidelines against Intimidation or Reprisals were a useful reference tool and almost all treaty bodies had designated focal points or rapporteurs on reprisals to ensure that they were addressed in a swift and coordinated manner. In the view of OHCHR, acts of reprisals against persons engaging with the treaty bodies must be addressed first and foremost by the treaty bodies themselves. OHCHR stood ready to support the treaty bodies by verifying allegations of reprisals or ensuring coordination with other United Nations mechanisms in addressing them.

#### **Solemn declaration by the newly elected members of the Committee**

10. *Ms. Bonifaz Alfonzo, Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen, Ms. Stott Despoja and Ms. Xia made the solemn declaration provided for in rule 15 of the Committee's rules of procedure.*

#### **Adoption of the agenda and organization of work (CEDAW/C/78/1)**

11. *The agenda was adopted.*

#### **Report of the Chair on activities undertaken between the seventy-seventh and seventy-eighth sessions of the Committee**

12. **The Chair** said that, since the previous session, the number of States parties that had ratified or acceded to the Convention had remained at 189. Similarly, the number of States parties having accepted the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention concerning the Committee's meeting time had remained at 80. In accordance with the provisions of the amendment, acceptance by 126 States parties was required in order to bring it into force. The total number of States parties to the Optional Protocol had remained at 114. Ten States parties had submitted their periodic reports, namely Albania, Armenia, Belgium, Finland, Georgia, Honduras, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, Tunisia and Turkey. Moreover, two States parties – Ireland and Romania – had informed the Committee of their decision to submit their future periodic reports under the simplified reporting procedure.

13. During the intersessional period, she had made a presentation at a virtual conference on eliminating violence against women in politics, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Executive Director of the Kofi Annan Foundation. On 26 November, she had delivered a goodwill message from the Committee at an online meeting on renewable energy and gender justice that was hosted by the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and co-sponsored by the International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific and the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development.

14. On 30 November 2020, she had been a facilitator at an online training workshop on youth in politics that was aimed at young leaders and organized by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Ghana. On 2 and 3 December 2020, she had participated as a panellist in a virtual discussion on working methods during the COVID-19 pandemic, hosted by the Geneva Academy on International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights and the Paris Human Rights Centre. On 8 December, she had attended the launch of a primer, entitled "Conducting Public Inquiries to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation", organized by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. On 14 December 2020, she and three fellow African members of the Committee had participated in an online discussion, hosted by the African Regional Programme of the International Commission of Jurists, with Swazi women human rights defenders. Lastly, on 16 December 2020, she had participated in a webinar considering a feminist analysis of general recommendation No. 28 (2010) on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention, hosted by the International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific.

15. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** said that, on 3 December 2020 in Georgia, she had given a keynote presentation at a meeting with civil society organizations and activists working for the rights of women and girls with disabilities. On the same day, she had given a presentation on intersectional solutions to eliminate violence against women and girls with disabilities. On 21 December 2020, she had participated in the online launch of the OHCHR resource

package to help monitor and implement the Sustainable Development Goals with a disability rights perspective.

16. On 13 November 2020, she had participated in a discussion at the Chamber of Deputies in Argentina on the non-voluntary sterilization of legally incapacitated persons with intellectual disabilities. On 25 November 2020, she had participated in a high-level event, organized by the European Commission, on the European Union's Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 and the European Union's contribution to the implementation of the 25-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

17. On 27 November 2020, she had taken part in a training session on using the Optional Protocol to submit individual complaints regarding the violation of the rights of women and girls with disabilities. On 13 January 2021, she had taken part in a training session on the prevention of sexual harassment against women and girls with disabilities. Both training sessions had been organized by the Women's Foundation of the Spanish Committee of Representatives of Persons with Disabilities.

18. **Ms. Manalo** said that, in February, she had participated in a meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women and had been invited by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine, together with those of Botswana and Maldives, to speak on women's human rights and environmental sustainability. In October 2020, she had given a talk on women and politics before the Senate of the Philippines.

19. **Ms. Akizuki** said that, on 14 November 2020, she had given a lecture on the Convention and the Sustainable Development Goals at a symposium organized by the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women. On 24 November 2020, she had delivered a lecture on the United Nations human rights mechanisms and the roles of the Convention and the Committee at an event organized by Ferris State University. On 12 February 2021, she had also given a talk on the Goals and gender at a training session organized by the Human Rights Education Liaison Council of the city of Ube Shi in Japan.

20. **Ms. Narain** said that, in December 2020, she had given a virtual presentation on the Committee's recent work on individual communications. At the dialogue between Committee members and Saudi women human rights defenders, which, as had been noted, had been facilitated in part by Ms. Haidar, she had spoken on the Optional Protocol, discriminatory remnants of colonial laws, customary law and temporary special measures.

21. **Mr. Safarov** said that he had given a talk on women's rights and economic empowerment at a conference organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. He had also spoken on that topic at a conference in Azerbaijan and worked on the development of a gender equality curriculum for civil servants of the countries of the Caucasus region.

22. **Ms. Bethel** said that, earlier in the day, at the Convention of the Federation of International Women Lawyers, she had given a presentation on the economic rights of women. In December 2020, in the Bahamas, she and a group of some 30 other women had appeared before Bahamian lawmakers to urge them to make greater efforts to combat gender-based violence against women and ensure that women participated more fully in the country's public life. In November and December, as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign, she had spoken on article 5 of the Convention, the Committee's general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, and the guidelines on such violence that the Committee was currently developing.

23. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that she had participated in a number of virtual events since the closure of the previous session. Together with Ms. Peláez Narváez, for example, she had represented the Committee at an online meeting of organizations of women with disabilities that had been sponsored by the Georgia office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). She had also represented the Committee at a virtual meeting at which she had spoken on the Convention and the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, she had taken part in a number of online meetings, including one on women's human rights in Arab States, in her personal capacity.

24. **Ms. Ameline** said that she had been in contact with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to discuss the consequences of the pandemic. She had worked with the Inter-Parliamentary Union to promote gender parity in the National Assembly of Nigeria, supported the development of a global charter on inclusive artificial intelligence, been active in the informal working group on COVID-19 established by the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies and monitored preparations for the Generation Equality Forum, a global gathering for gender equality that was to be chaired by France and Mexico.

25. **Ms. Haidar** said that during the recent 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign, she had made herself available for a number of interviews at which she had spoken about such issues as women human rights defenders and the role to be played by the Committee in the event of reprisals against such defenders. Her activities since the closure of the previous session, most of which had been virtual, had also included her talk on the Committee's practices at a workshop organized by the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights and her participation in a forum, organized by the International Commission of Jurists, on enhancing access to justice for women in the context of religious and customary laws. Later, in December 2020, she had taken part in a meeting, also organized by the Geneva Academy, on the work of national human rights institutions. She and former Committee member Ms. Verges had helped lead a five-day course on human rights reporting obligations. The course, which had been organized by the Arab Women League, had been attended by the authorities of countries in North Africa, including the Sudan.

26. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** said that, in the midst of the death and disruption caused by the pandemic, most of her intersessional activities had been informal. She had nonetheless participated in formal events, including in November 2020, when she had been invited to a meeting held to discuss the inclusion of provisions on women's rights in the new Constitution of Chile, which was to be drafted by a constitutional convention in the coming months. Also in November, she and Ms. Bonifaz Alfonzo had taken part in a dialogue on the links between Latin America and the Convention. Later in the month, she had been on a diverse panel that had discussed the adoption of a general recommendation on the rights of indigenous women and girls. As Ms. Peláez Narváez had noted, she had also given a talk on the Optional Protocol to the umbrella organization for women and girls with disabilities in Spain, Fundación Cermi Mujeres.

27. In early December, she had participated in a dialogue, including with two female justices of the Supreme Court of Mexico, on the application of the Convention in Mexico. She had also discussed the implementation of the recommendations of the treaty bodies, and the Committee in particular, with Costa Rican officials and NGOs. Lastly, she had been invited by the Organization of American States to make a statement calling on States members of the Organization to nominate women jurists to fill vacancies on the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

28. **Ms. Gabr** said that the focus of her recent activities had been on combating trafficking in persons, particularly in women and girls. Those activities had included awareness-raising through the media and meetings with NGOs based in Cairo and elsewhere in Egypt. She had also been involved in training activities, including for judges, diplomats, social workers and civil aviation personnel.

29. In addition, she had sat for a number of interviews, organized panel discussions, participated in virtual workshops and, at an international film festival in Cairo, presented an award for the best film on the subject of trafficking in persons. She had spoken about the Committee's draft general recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration on a number of occasions, including a meeting of the League of Arab States.

30. **Ms. Reddock** said that, in October 2020, she had taken part in a meeting that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights had organized to review the human rights situation in the Caribbean during the pandemic. Later that month, she had taken part in an online panel discussion on the theme "Colonialism, education and sexualities" organized by the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London. In January 2021, she had been

involved in two judicial training workshops, both for members of the judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago, on attitudes to gender-based violence.

31. **Ms. Toé-Bouda** said that she had given a presentation on a set of recommendations that the Committee had made in its concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Burkina Faso. The audience for presentation, which had touched on the recommendations that had been made to combat the rights violations experienced by rural women, had included a wide range of NGOs and public officials.

32. **Ms. Rana** said that, in early November 2020, she had moderated the opening panel discussion of the global symposium on engaging men and boys in gender equality, the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium. On 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, she had made a brief appearance in a video recording in which she had stated that her work with the Committee was among her most important contributions to ending violence against women in the context of the pandemic. She had spoken on the Committee's perspective on gender-based violence against women at a meeting organized by the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens of Nepal. On 27 November, she had served as a resource person for a workshop organized for Nepalese lawmakers, while on 30 November, she had given a keynote address at an event organized by a council of women's organizations from Singapore.

33. On 8 December, she had been a panellist at the Second International Workshop on Dignified Menstruation in Kathmandu and, on 16 and 18 December, she had facilitated parliamentary dialogue on sexual and reproductive health rights at an event organized by the United Nations Population Fund and the Ministry of Health and Population of Nepal. On 25 December, she had given a presentation on the Committee's perspective on the monitoring and implementation of the Convention to Nepalese government officials. She had also co-hosted a webinar organized by the Asia Pacific NGO Committee on the Status of Women.

#### **Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention**

34. **Ms. Bethel**, speaking in her capacity as the Chair of the pre-sessional working group for the seventy-eighth session, said that the working group had met remotely from 13 to 17 July 2020. It had prepared lists of issues and questions with regard to the reports of Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Indonesia, Peru, the Russian Federation, South Sudan and Uzbekistan, in addition to lists of issues prior to reporting for Norway, Slovakia and Slovenia.

35. The working group had drawn on a number of sources of information to prepare the lists of issues and questions, including the core documents of the States parties and, with the exception of Norway, Slovakia and Slovenia, which would use the simplified reporting procedure, their periodic reports. It had also drawn on the Committee's general recommendations, draft lists of issues and questions and lists of issues prior to reporting prepared by the secretariat and other pertinent information, including concluding observations adopted by the Committee and other treaty bodies. States parties' follow-up to the Committee's concluding observations on their previous reports was likewise a significant source of information, except in the case of South Sudan, which had submitted an initial report.

36. In addition, the working group had received information from entities and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, NGOs and national human rights institutions. The lists of issues and questions had been transmitted to the States parties concerned.

37. **The Chair** said that, in the light of the ongoing pandemic, the Committee had decided to postpone the consideration of the reports of the States parties mentioned in the pre-sessional working group's reports. The ninth periodic report of Denmark, a State party for which a list of issues and questions had been adopted by the pre-sessional working group for the seventy-sixth session, would be considered on an exceptional basis.

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**Follow-up to the consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention**

38. **Ms. Nadaraia** (Rapporteur on follow-up), briefing the Committee on follow-up reports received from States parties, said that, at its seventy-seventh session, the Committee had decided to postpone the assessment of follow-up reports to its seventy-eighth session. It had also decided to increase the number of such assessments from 8 to 12 for its seventy-eighth and seventy-ninth sessions.

39. For the current session, the seventy-eighth, follow-up reports had been received from Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Ireland, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Luxembourg, Mexico, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine and Thailand. First reminders regarding the submission of follow-up reports should be sent to Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Botswana, Colombia, the Congo, the Cook Islands, Ethiopia, Liechtenstein, Myanmar, Samoa, Serbia and the United Kingdom. A meeting with representatives of the Marshall Islands on the State party's overdue follow-up report should be scheduled.

*The first part (public) of the meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.*