



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Forty-first session

Summary record of the 831st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 30 June 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Šimonović

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Chairperson** declared open the forty-first session of the Committee.

2. **Mr. Mbaidjol** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that the session was taking place at the same time as the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, whose work would be of interest to the Committee. The sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights would be celebrated on 10 December 2008, in a campaign that engaged the entire United Nations system. Together with local partners, United Nations agencies were advocating specific areas of human rights that were most pertinent to their work. The website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provided updated information on cultural initiatives, public discussions and the many other unfolding activities that would mark the forthcoming anniversary, and the Committee might wish to consider ways of contributing to that observance during the session.

3. On 3 May 2008, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities had entered into force and the Secretary-General would convene the first Conference of States Parties at the end of October 2008. The new Convention contained numerous references to the rights of women with disabilities, in particular in relation to violence.

4. On 18 June 2008, the Human Rights Council had adopted the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Protocol, which was expected to be approved by the General Assembly in December, invested the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights with competence to receive and consider petitions and conduct inquiries into alleged violations of the Convention's terms.

5. The creation of a new treaty body and the investing of an existing treaty body with new competence illustrated once more the need for continuing harmonization of the treaty body system. The recently concluded inter-committee meeting and meeting of chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies had highlighted areas requiring harmonization.

6. The first and second sessions of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group of the Human Rights Council had reviewed the national reports of 32 countries, which were then adopted at the eighth session of the Council. OHCHR had prepared compilations of United Nations information and stakeholders' summaries which were of particular relevance to the work of treaty bodies as they included treaty body concluding observations and other outcomes of relevance to the State concerned. Two of the countries that had been considered by the Universal Periodic Review Working Group, Finland and the United Kingdom, would be before the Committee at the current session.

7. The Council's most recent special session had been on the negative impact of the world food crisis on the realization of the rights to food for all. It had also held two panel discussions on the human rights of women focusing on violence against women and maternal mortality. OHCHR was committed to ensuring that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Optional Protocol achieved universal ratification and to supporting the work of the Committee.

8. **Ms. Mayanja** (Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women) said that the General Assembly had recently convened two informal consultations on the gender dimensions of system-wide coherence, and gender had been suggested for inclusion among the priority areas to be addressed during the forthcoming session of the General Assembly. Member States had made major advances in achieving gender equality through legislation, national gender equality policies, strategies and action plans, but despite those advances, gender inequality existed in differing degrees in all societies around the world. The combined effects of poverty, discrimination, violence and lack of opportunity affected women's economic standing, social well-being and prospects for political participation. The majority of the world's poorest were women; in armed conflict, women were increasingly the target of hostile action by warring factions and domestic violence against women and girls was on the rise in developed and developing countries alike. Women were still deprived of their economic rights and opportunities, and maternal mortality remained unacceptably high in many places. Women also lagged behind men in decision-making. Thus, a large gap remained between Member States' commitments to

women and reality at the country level. Action was therefore needed to strengthen the United Nations system to better support Member States in discharging their commitments to the world's women.

9. A Note on the United Nations system support to Member States on gender equality and women's empowerment had been submitted by the Deputy Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly. It provided a candid analysis of the situation that Member States needed to address and stressed that gender equality was essential to the achievement of peace, human rights and the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. The long-standing mandate to promote gender equality had been only partly implemented. Member States increasingly called on the United Nations system for assistance in implementing their programmes on gender equality and women's empowerment, yet it did not have the capacity to respond effectively to their needs.

10. While United Nations entities increasingly worked together on gender equality programmes and took steps to improve inter-agency coordination, the overall effectiveness and coherence of its actions remained limited. The lack of feedback between normative and operational work and clarity regarding the division of labour among the various entities often led to duplication of efforts and neglected priorities.

11. The Co-Chairs of the system-wide coherence discussions had sensed a strong desire across the broad membership to address effectively the manifest weaknesses of the United Nations system in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment as well as a broad-based momentum to move forward in the direction of strengthening the gender equality work. The Co-Chairs had requested the Secretary-General to prepare a paper which would focus on institutional aspects to present possible options for strengthening the system's performance in that area along with an assessment of each option and its implications. Preparations were under way to engage a consultant working closely with the Working Group to prepare the options note.

12. The need to strengthen the United Nations gender equality work was universally acknowledged by both Member States and the United Nations system. The world was faced with the new challenges of climate change, food crisis, water supply shortages, new

epidemics and other challenges with gender-differentiated impact. The world was learning that if women were marginalized, the world would lose at least half its creative and productive capacity to meet those emerging challenges.

13. She invited the Committee to reflect on how it could strengthen its work and enhance its support to Member States in order to contribute to the United Nations overall coherence and effectiveness as an Organization that was ready for current and future challenges.

14. **Ms. Hannan** (Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women) said that after servicing the thirty-ninth session of the Committee, the Division for the Advancement of Women had invested considerable time and effort in managing a smooth transfer of the servicing to colleagues in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, ensuring that complete records were handed over and that the Office had at its disposal comprehensive information about work processes and the status in all work areas, including a detailed procedural manual. Four Professional and one General Service posts had been moved from the Division to OHCHR. The Division had also provided assistance during the session in January 2008.

15. As part of its technical cooperation efforts, the Division was supporting countries emerging from conflict in their implementation of the Convention. It continued to provide capacity-building support to the Government of Liberia for the promotion of gender equality and the preparation of its report under the Convention. Three workshops had been convened in 2007 for staff of the national machinery for the advancement of women, several line ministries and other Government agencies. A report writers' workshop in May 2008 had been attended by almost 30 Government representatives with responsibility for drafting sections of the report. There were plans for a validation workshop on the draft report and the Government intended to submit its report to the Committee in September 2008.

16. The Division had also assisted Haiti in the preparation of its report and had conducted a high-level consultation mission to Haiti in April 2007. A validation workshop on the draft report had been held and the State party had submitted its report in May

2008. The Division hoped in particular to assist those States parties with long-overdue reporting obligations.

17. The issue of violence against women was receiving priority attention from Governments, civil society and other stakeholders. On the opening day of the fifty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Secretary-General of the United Nations had launched his system-wide multi-year campaign to eliminate violence against women and girls through 2015, coinciding with the target date for the Millennium Development Goals. The Division continued to contribute to the work of the United Nations system on violence against women, including through the development of a coordinated database on the subject. It was also working on indicators, and an expert group convened in October 2007 had proposed a set of prevalence indicators to measure violence against women. The Statistics Commission had created a group of Friends of the Chair to conduct an in-depth technical review of the proposed indicators.

18. A more recent expert group meeting had discussed good practices in legislation on violence against women, in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Experts from around the world had developed guidelines and a model framework for legislation on violence against women. The report of the meeting would be finalized in the summer.

19. The priority theme of the fifty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women had been “Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women“. The Commission had organized a high-level round table for ministers and other high-level representatives. Two high-level experts had initiated the discussion and experiences on policy initiatives had been shared by two expert panels. The agreed conclusions from the fifty-first and fifty-second sessions would be made available in brochure form during the present session of the Committee.

20. The priority theme for the fifty-third session of the Commission in 2009 would be “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS“. An online discussion on that theme would be held from 7 July to 1 August and experts from the Committee were encouraged to participate. She also hoped that a member of the Committee would attend an expert group meeting on that theme in September.

21. **Ms. Alberdi** (United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)) said that the Committee’s work was a central source of guidance for the efforts made by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to achieve gender equality and empower women. The Committee was continuing to develop its jurisprudence and would soon be issuing general recommendations on article 2 and on the rights of women migrant workers. The Convention had been ratified by nearly all Member States and its Optional Protocol was being increasingly applied. Moreover, there had been an improvement in government compliance with reporting obligations and a growing number of countries had adopted national plans of action to implement the Committee’s concluding observations. Throughout the world, UNIFEM had long contributed to the aims of the Committee, in particular by supporting legal and policy reforms and helping national partners to incorporate the principles of the Convention into national budgeting processes and development strategies.

22. The success of the Committee was part of a broader trend towards gender equality, reflected in achievements within the United Nations system, particularly the Commission on the Status of Women, which at its 2008 session had reached groundbreaking conclusions on financing for gender equality and women’s empowerment. Another high point had been the adoption by the Security Council on 19 June 2008 of resolution 1820 (2008) which built on its resolution 1325 (2000) in clarifying responsibilities for the protection of women against systematic violence and linked sexual violence more explicitly than ever before to the maintenance of international peace and security. It recognized the political and military use of systematic rape, urged sanctions for perpetrators and called on parties to armed conflict to step up their efforts to protect women and girls from targeted attack. Policy was thus being aligned with international law, as reflected in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and with the evolving jurisprudence of the ad hoc war crime tribunals. The resolution also reaffirmed States’ obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and specifically under the Convention.

23. Progress towards gender equality hinged on respect for women’s human rights, which was increasingly being achieved through the determined action of Governments, civil society organizations and

individual experts, notably among the Committee's members. The Committee was a beacon of hope for women around the world and would continue to receive the full support of UNIFEM.

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work
(CEDAW/C/2008/II/1)

24. **The Chairperson** drew attention to document CEDAW/C/2008/II/1 and said she took it that the Committee wished to adopt the proposed provisional agenda and organization of work, subject to any necessary adjustments.

25. *It was so decided.*

Report of the Chairperson on activities undertaken between the fortieth and forty-first sessions of the Committee

26. **The Chairperson** echoed the comments on Security Council resolution 1820, which requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on its implementation by 30 June 2009 and reaffirmed the obligations of States parties to the Convention and its Optional Protocol, particularly in regard to the eradication of sexual violence.

27. Since the fortieth session, she had participated on behalf of the Committee in the fifty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women. On that occasion, she had highlighted the major outcomes of the Committee's previous three sessions and noted that a number of States Parties had withdrawn or expressed their intention of withdrawing their reservations to the Convention, which clearly pointed to changing attitudes towards it and a growing acceptance of the principle of the equality of women and men as a universal human rights principle.

28. In a panel on financing gender equality and the empowerment of women held during that session, she had stressed the Committee's view that implementation of the Convention required adequate financing, as did national machinery and action plans for the advancement of women. She drew the Committee's attention to the conclusions of the Commission, which had invited the Committee to continue to give due consideration to that topic in its work.

29. On 4 April 2008, she had participated in her personal capacity in a panel organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on laws that

discriminated against women, where she had drawn attention to the Committee's views on the establishment of a special rapporteur of the Commission on such laws. She had indicated that the Committee's follow-up capacity had increased thanks to its efforts to reduce its backlog but that, because of continuing discrimination, it would consider developing a follow-up procedure.

30. In May 2008, she had taken part in an expert meeting on good practices in legislation on violence against women, organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women, as a follow-up to the Secretary-General's study on violence against women and General Assembly resolution 61/143. At that meeting, she had presented a paper on the Committee's concluding observations in respect of violence against women, which were key contributions to efforts to eradicate it. She had also attended the seventh inter-committee meeting and the meeting of chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies, both of which had confirmed the relevance of the Committee's proposal for a harmonized treaty bodies system.

31. Lastly, she emphasized that the ongoing commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was an excellent opportunity to highlight the importance of the Committee's contribution to its implementation through its work to promote equality between men and women. The way forward lay in full and effective implementation of the Convention, as a key part of the human rights treaties that served to translate the Declaration into legally binding norms. She invited the Committee to reflect on ways of highlighting the importance of that normative framework during the celebration.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention: report of the pre-session working group
(CEDAW/PSWG/2008/I/CRP.1)

32. **Ms. Shin**, speaking as Chairperson of the pre-session working group for the forty-first session, said that the working group had prepared lists of issues and questions with respect to the reports of the eight States parties to be considered, on the basis of all the relevant material and with input from country rapporteurs and NGOs. It had paid special attention to the States parties' follow-up to the Committee's

previous concluding comments and had also taken into consideration their previous reports.

Implementation of article 21 of the Convention and ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee

33. **Ms. Connors** (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that the working group on the general recommendation on article 5 would brief the Committee on progress achieved and that the Committee on Migrant Workers had made comments that the Committee might wish to discuss on the draft recommendation on women and migration. In addition, the Committee might wish, like other treaty bodies, to allow delegations and others to comment on final draft general recommendations.

34. Noting that, under article 22 of the Convention, specialized agencies could be invited to submit reports on aspects of its implementation within their purview, she drew the Committee's attention to the note by the Secretary-General contained in document CEDAW/C/2008/II/3 and to the reports contained in the addenda thereto.

35. Turning to ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee, she noted that the report contained in document CEDAW/C/2008/I/14 discussed developments regarding the Human Rights Council, issues raised in the Commission on the Status of Women and the General Assembly, reports to be considered at future sessions, practices of human rights treaty bodies in the absence of a report, working methods of the pre-session working group and relevant Secretariat activities.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.