



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Fifty-fifth session

Summary record (partial)* of the 1128th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 8 July 2013, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Ameline

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Chairperson declared open the fifty-fifth session of the Committee.

Statement by the representative of the Secretary-General

Mr. Salama (Director of the Human Rights Treaties Division of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), updating the Committee on the progress of the intergovernmental process of the General Assembly on strengthening the treaty body system, said that the Committee's representatives had made important contributions. When the co-facilitators of the process had met in Geneva in April, Ms. Ameline, Ms. Haidar and Ms. Schulz had travelled at their own expense to provide valuable input; while at the Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of Chairpersons of the Human Rights Treaty Bodies, Ms. Ameline had been one of the most influential of the 10 chairpersons.

The Annual Meeting of Chairpersons had been held in New York for the first time in 2013, heralding a historical shift in the manner in which treaty bodies interacted with States Members. The chairpersons' contributions to the meeting had been of an exceptionally high quality, elevating them to the status of near de facto parties to the negotiations even though, legally, their input was limited to influencing rather than intervening – a line that they had been careful not to overstep. In a carefully worded closing statement, the chairpersons had called on States Members to respect the five principles essential for a successful outcome to the treaty body strengthening process: enhanced human rights protection; independence; reinvestment of cost savings in the treaty body system; use of modern technologies to increase accessibility and visibility; and, lastly, the need for a comprehensive and sustainable solution.

The discussions were continuing in New York, centred almost exclusively on the proposals set out in the relevant report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the views of the treaty body experts. The fears of those who had seen a political risk in taking the issue to the General Assembly had thus been allayed. The only risk remaining was that the minor divergences still to be resolved might prevent the negotiations from being concluded in 2013, despite the current momentum, and that the process might be deferred until 2014.

Other events of interest to the Committee had included the Vienna+20 Conference in June, at which women's rights had been the focus of a thematic working group that had drafted a set of action-oriented recommendations due to be submitted to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly later in 2013. At the Human Rights Council's annual day of discussion on women's rights, also in June, the focus had been on violence against women. That discussion had resulted in the adoption of a resolution urging States to eliminate all forms of violence against women and, in particular, to prevent and respond to rape and other forms of sexual violence. The Security Council had also turned its attention to violence against women in June 2013, adopting resolution 2106 which dealt with conflict-related sexual violence. Lastly, although few details were known, the G8 Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, adopted in London in April 2013, and the associated plan to draft a non-binding international protocol on the investigation and documentation of such violence were interesting developments to monitor.

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

The Chairperson drew attention to the provisional agenda contained in document CEDAW/C/55/1 and said that, if she heard no

objection, she would take it that the Committee wished to adopt it subject to any necessary adjustments.

It was so decided.

Report on activities undertaken between the fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth sessions of the Committee

The Chairperson, updating the Committee on activities and issues of interest relating to the Convention and Optional Protocol since the previous session, said that there had been no change to either the number of States parties to the Convention or the number that had accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, or the number that had ratified the Optional Protocol. Azerbaijan, Brunei Darussalam and Denmark had submitted their initial and/or periodic reports.

Immediately after the fifty-fourth session, she had travelled to New York to deliver a statement at the Fifty-Seventh Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in which she had conveyed the Committee's position on the proposed legally binding instrument on violence against women. She had also had very fruitful meetings with the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and the former Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms. Michelle Bachelet. With the Secretary-General, she had discussed the importance of a human rights-based approach to development that was centred on gender equality. She had since sent him a concept note on women and development, prepared with input from Ms. Pomeranzi and Ms. Haidar. The meeting with Ms. Bachelet had been very useful as a starting point for reinforced cooperation with UN-Women and would be developed further at a meeting with the Acting Head of UN-Women, Ms. Puri, during the current session.

At the meeting of the co-facilitators of the intergovernmental process held in Geneva in April, she had reported that the Committee had adopted the Addis Ababa guidelines and a position statement on the High Commissioner's report, and that it was exploring ways to reduce the report backlog, expand its work on individual communications and use new technologies, such as videoconferencing, while at the same time dealing with resource constraints. At the Annual Meeting of Chairpersons in New York, all the chairpersons, had emphasized that any structured calendar of reporting and consideration should meet a number of criteria, including predictability, efficient utilization of resources, compliance with reporting obligations and periodicity, as well as the elimination of backlogs and ad hoc requests to the General Assembly for additional meeting time. The chairpersons had also adopted a joint statement on the post-2015 development agenda that underlined the critical link between development and the full range of human rights and, importantly, stressed that the current Millennium Development Goal of gender equality did not ensure equality between women and men and the elimination of discrimination against women.

Ms. Patten reported that she had spent 10 days in Palestine providing training for judges, prosecutors and lawyers and had participated in a preparatory workshop ("mock session") in Afghanistan.

Ms. Schulz said that an e-mail in which she had expressed concern about the treaty bodies' lack of visibility in the Human Rights Council had prompted an invitation to participate in the Council's annual day of general discussion. Other events in which she had participated had included training sessions organized by the universities of Bern and Geneva, an NGO-sponsored presentation about the Convention's role in preventing violence for human rights activists and young people from the French-speaking countries of Africa, a seminar sponsored by the International Labour Organization on social protection and the right to food and a particularly enlightening seminar organized by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.

Ms. Gabr, noting that some States were critical of the Convention and some had even expressed a desire to withdraw from it, said that she had been working with academics and civil society to raise awareness and explain the pertinence and importance of the Convention, not only for Egypt but for the Arab and Muslim world as a whole. She had also contributed to training sessions for United Nations Peacekeepers (Blue Berets) working in Arab and African countries at which the focus had been women's and children's rights.

Ms. Neubauer said that she had attended a very fruitful meeting with representatives of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The aim had been to explore ways in which UNICEF might better utilize the general comments and concluding observations of the different committees and how cooperation in general might be enhanced. She had also spoken at two events sponsored by the Council of Europe: a Human Rights Council side event to promote awareness of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) and a thematic meeting in Belgrade focused on sexual and reproductive rights and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014.

Ms. Bareiro-Bobadilla said that she had been involved in a number of academic activities. The most interesting of those had been a study of violence in the context of State terrorism sponsored by the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin American and the Caribbean in which she had worked alongside judges from the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda. The resultant corpus of work, which made frequent reference to the Convention, would provide key input to the truth and reconciliation process in many countries. In addition, she had attended a meeting in Uruguay about political participation that had led to training in the State party's obligations under the Convention for public sector employees nationwide.

Ms. Jahan had attended the "mock session" in Afghanistan with Ms. Patten, and, in association with the Senate of Belgium, had organized a briefing session on the Committee's work that had been attended by around 30 women ambassadors.

Ms. Halperin-Kaddari had participated in an international briefing about the problems associated with Jewish divorce organized by New York University's Centre for Human Rights and, at the national level, had contributed to a university-led project to enhance the implementation of all human rights treaties in Israel.

Ms. Pimentel had attended a seminar organized by the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights (CLADEM) to evaluate the efficacy of cooperation between the various bodies that worked to defend women's rights, including the Committee, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Organization of American States. A protocol on access

to justice was being drafted as a result of the discussions.

Ms. Šimonović had given training on the Optional Protocol at the Gender Training Institute in Bulgaria and had formed part of the working group on women's rights at the Vienna+20 Conference.

Ms. Nwankwo said that she had been invited by the Center for Reproductive Rights to speak at its first East Africa Regional Reproductive Rights Litigation Workshop, held in Nairobi in May, where she had explained how the Convention could be used to safeguard women's reproductive rights before national courts.

Ms. Al-Jehani said that she had taken part in a seminar at Kuwait University on the issue of citizens who married foreigners; women in the Gulf States were unable to pass on their nationality to their children. The Committee should lead efforts to strengthen women's rights in that area, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and all United Nations bodies, particularly UN-Women, needed to make further efforts, as the Convention was being misinterpreted in the region. She had also attended a conference where the views expressed ran counter to the Convention and the Commission on the Status of Women. There were pressure and lobby groups working against the Convention, and the United Nations must promote the instrument, which was not well known or properly implemented in the region. She had also participated in workshops and seminars in connection with an academic study on matters relating to accession to the Convention, its ratification and implementation.

The Chairperson suggested that a meeting with representatives from UN-Women and the Committee in the region might be useful.

Ms. Acar said that, in March, she had conducted a seminar with high court judges in Turkey on the connection between the Convention and national laws concerning violence against women. In April, she had attended a meeting of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men in the Turkish parliament, where article 7 of the Convention had been discussed. In March, she had also attended the European Conference on Politics and Gender in Barcelona, where she had co-presented a paper on links between the Convention and the Istanbul Convention. She had also participated in a panel discussion on the relationship between the Convention and the global rise of conservatism. In May, she had participated in an international meeting of police forces from 11 countries on the role of the security forces in preventing and responding to violence against women.

The Chairperson requested that a copy of Ms. Acar's paper on the links between the Convention and the Istanbul Convention should be made available to the Committee.

Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani said that despite progress made in many areas since the adoption of the Convention, there was still much work to be done regarding women's inheritance rights in countries with Muslim law. Although in many countries equality was guaranteed by the constitution, women and girls nevertheless received smaller shares of inheritance than men and boys. Muslim law did not prohibit the donation of goods; donations could be made by a living person, thus facilitating the transfer of property and avoiding burdensome taxes. The countries concerned had ratified the Convention without making any reservations regarding inheritance. She suggested that the Committee should establish a working group to formulate specific proposals on inheritance rights in Muslim countries with the aim of achieving full parity between men and women; it was a legal, not a religious issue.

Ms. Pomeranzi said that she had been invited to a training session in Italy for students following Master's programmes relating to human rights in conflict situations, where she had explained the work of the Committee. She had also met the former Italian Minister for Equal Opportunity, who, together with civil society organizations, had carried out an audit on violence against women in the country. Italy had signed the Istanbul Convention which was currently the subject of debate in the country; it recognized the work of the Committee.

Ms. Bailey said that she had participated in a regional workshop in the Caribbean organized by a law school in the United States of America aimed at raising awareness of State responsibility to exercise due diligence regarding violence against women. She had also supervised a PhD candidate from Utrecht University in the Netherlands, regarding article 5 of the Convention and strategies for its implementation in Jamaica.

Ms. Haidar said that she had taken part in various activities, including on matters relating to the transmission of citizenship. In Lebanon, a significant campaign by civil society organizations had resulted in some progress in that regard, and the question of the right of mothers passing on their nationality to their children had reached parliamentary level. She agreed with other members that the matter should be accorded priority in the countries concerned in order to ensure further progress.

The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic was causing serious human rights violations, especially towards women. She had helped to establish networks to assist Syrian women and, in May, had attended a meeting in Cairo in that connection. The common denominator among all the networks was the Convention; no national associations could participate without supporting and ratifying the Convention. She welcomed the active involvement of civil society in that area. She had also attended a symposium in Beirut organized by the Carnegie Middle East Center on the Syrian refugee crisis, where women had had a strong presence.

Ms. Gbedemah said that she had been invited by the Institute for Democratic Governance in Ghana to examine the Convention in relation to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and to draw possible lessons from the Convention, particularly concerning the reasons for the relatively low levels of ratification of the Charter. She had also been involved in an exercise which had drawn on the Committee's concluding observations in connection with the enactment of new legislation.

Ms. Schulz said that she had been in contact with TRIAL, a Swiss NGO that fought impunity and had brought cases before the International Criminal Court. Its director was interested in meeting members of the Committee. She requested members who were interested to contact her so that suitable arrangements could be made.

Ms. Gabr, referring to the sharing of best practices among Arab and Muslim countries, said that the Committee required more assistance in order to play a positive role, particularly with regard to the countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Having focused on the issue during the Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, she concluded that support was required not only from NGOs, but also from the media, which played an invaluable role in defending human rights and disseminating relevant information. She had given courses on the subject in Egypt.

The Chairperson said that any further written input from members on their activities would be welcome. The discussion with the Director of the Human Rights Treaties Division would be deferred till the next meeting.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 11.10 a.m.