



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

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

**Summary record of the 866th meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 7 November 2008, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Šimonović

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

### **Statement by the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

1. **Ms. Pillay** (High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that, since taking up her position in early September, she had pledged to support each of the human rights treaty bodies. She recognized them as the custodians of the international human rights norms on which she had relied throughout her legal career, as a practising lawyer, a human rights defender and a judge at the national and international levels. She had a particular knowledge of the Convention and the work of the Committee through her work as a women's rights activist. She was particularly aware of the Committee's work on violence against women and had relied on its general recommendation No. 19 on that topic in her work at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. She intended to be an energetic advocate for universal ratification of the Convention and its Optional Protocol and was pleased to note that Mauritius and Mozambique had just become parties to the Optional Protocol. She would also raise the question of reservations — which fortunately were being gradually withdrawn — with States parties, as well as full implementation and reporting.

2. The Committee's impressive work over the past 25 years had been well recorded in the book *Circle of Empowerment*, which testified to the passion and commitment of past and current members to the cause of elimination of discrimination against women on the basis of sex and achievement of gender equality. The Committee had worked hard to hone its procedures and address those elements of discrimination that existed in the very treaty by which it had been established. The Convention was the only human rights treaty which restricted the meeting time of its monitoring committee and did not give it competence to receive and consider petitions or undertake inquiries. Fortunately, as of 2010 the Committee would hold three annual three-week sessions and would have additional time for its working group. The Committee had contributed significantly to the adoption of the Optional Protocol and was receiving increasing numbers of communications. However, many more women could benefit from the procedures established by the Optional Protocol and it was critical that targeted legal literacy strategies be developed to encourage them to use the instrument. The Office of the United Nations High

Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union would revise the Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention and the Optional Protocol and she would also encourage others, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to develop materials to assist in publicizing the possibilities offered, in particular, by the Optional Protocol. The Committee's work would be a central part of the capacity-building activities of OHCHR and she would also look to other constituencies, such as the judiciary, where its work could have a significant impact.

3. The forty-second session had been particularly busy in terms of the number of reports of States parties considered, petitions taken up and other activities. She welcomed the adoption of the new recommendation on women migrant workers and the statement for the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There had also been many side events, including one on the question of a possible intergovernmental mechanism on discriminatory laws and one on older women. Many NGOs had participated in the session, as had representatives of the United Nations system, which testified to the profound effect of the work of the Committee.

4. She would be grateful to hear the Committee's views on the obstacles to full implementation of the Convention in States parties and the real challenges facing women and girls as they sought to claim their human rights in that important anniversary year.

*The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.*