



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**

**Twenty-seventh session**

**Summary record of the 550th meeting**

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 3 June 2002, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Abaka

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.*

### **Opening of the session**

1. **The Chairperson** opened the session and welcomed the participants.

2. **Ms. Hannan** (Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) made an opening statement on behalf of the Secretary-General. Ms. Angela King, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, had sent her best wishes to the participants, and would be attending during the second week of the session. Since the end of the twenty-sixth session of the Committee, the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women had continued their activities. The Commission on the Status of Women had met and discussed poverty and the environment from a gender-related perspective, and had focused on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan and the effect of HIV/AIDS on women and girls. The Commission on Human Rights had heard from and referred to the Committee in its discussion of human rights and extreme poverty, women's land-ownership and access rights, traffic in women and girls, violence against women and the right to a high standard of physical and mental health. It had urged all the entities of the United Nations system to pay attention to, and make better use of, the Committee's recommendations.

3. As part of the discussion of the outcome of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, the issue of the impact of those phenomena on women and girls had been raised. The Committee had been represented at the Second World Assembly on Ageing, which had discussed the particular needs of older women, and at the special session of the General Assembly on children, where emphasis had been placed on the need to sign and ratify international instruments on the rights of women and children.

4. The latest ratifications of the Convention had brought the number of States parties to 169. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the right of petition had been signed by 74 States, with 40 ratifications or accessions. The amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention to expand the Committee's meeting time had been accepted by 33 States parties. The Division for the Advancement of Women and the

Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women would continue to press for acceptance of the Convention, the Optional Protocol and the amendment to article 20 (1), for regular reporting on implementation of the Convention, and for support for the Committee's work. They had provided input and training in that connection around the world. Despite the financial constraints placed on the United Nations, the Division would do its utmost to support the work of the new session of the Committee.

### **Adoption of the agenda and organization of work**

5. **Ms. Corti** said that the Committee would need to discuss what course of action to take regarding Ms. Ferrer Gómez's absence. She had been unable to obtain a United States entry visa in time for the meeting.

6. **Ms. Connors** (Chief, Women's Rights Unit, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that the Secretariat had supplied Ms. Ferrer Gómez with the documents needed for her visa application. She was reportedly obtaining a visa that morning, and was due to travel to New York in the afternoon.

7. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said she believed that the Committee had decided in January 2002 to discuss with non-governmental organizations the future recommendation regarding article 4 (1) of the Convention. If her assumption was correct, she wondered why the matter was not on the agenda.

8. **The Chairperson** said that Ms. Schöpp-Schilling's observation was correct, and that the agenda would be amended accordingly.

9. *The agenda, as orally amended, was adopted.*

### **Report of the Chairperson on activities undertaken between the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh sessions of the Committee**

10. **The Chairperson**, reporting on her activities since the previous Committee session had ended, said that she had spoken before the Commission on the Status of Women at its March 2002 session. She had also taken part in the events to mark International Women's Day (8 March, dedicated in 2002 to the women of Afghanistan), bringing the Committee welcome added publicity. She had had a meeting with the States parties from Africa which had been well attended and well received, with the States parties emphasizing that they felt that presentation of their

reports to the Committee was like engaging in a dialogue rather than facing a tribunal. Her meetings with other States parties had included consultations with the Republic of Korea's minister responsible for gender equality. She had reassured the minister that the Republic of Korea's reservations to the Convention did not prevent it from ratifying the Optional Protocol. She had also been among those invited to address the Commission on Human Rights at its April 2002 session, and had participated in its Women's Caucus events.

11. Her impression had been that many non-governmental organizations in Geneva were not up to date with the newer issues handled by the Committee, and she wished to see the CEDAW web site better publicized, so that distance was not an obstacle for non-governmental organizations not present in New York. She thanked the Government of Sweden for hosting and sponsoring the Committee's informal seminar on working methods, held in Lund in April 2002. It was important for the Committee to make time to adopt formally the decisions taken at the seminar, a step required for all decisions taken outside United Nations Headquarters. That was particularly significant in the case of the decisions on dealing with reports to the Committee, to enable them to be translated into action immediately. The meetings held in Stockholm directly after the Lund seminar had provided an opportunity for the Committee to have discussions with Sweden's UNIFEM Committee, members of parliament and development agency (SIDA).

#### **Implementation of article 21 of the Convention** (CEDAW/C/2002/II/3 and Add.1-4)

#### **Ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee** (CEDAW/C/2002/II/4)

12. **Ms. Connors** (Chief, Women's Rights Unit, Division for the Advancement of Women), introducing the report in document CEDAW/C/2002/II/3, said that, in accordance with article 22 of the Convention, the specialized agencies were offered an opportunity to present information regarding specific articles of the Convention, and their representatives were invited to attend the pre-sessional working group to provide information regarding implementation of the Convention by individual States parties.

13. For each session, the Secretariat prepared a report on ways and means of expediting the work of the

Committee. The report for the twenty-seventh session (CEDAW/C/2002/II/4) included the decisions taken at the Lund meeting and draft revised reporting guidelines among its extensive annexes.

14. **Mr. Melander**, speaking as Chairperson of the pre-sessional working group for the twenty-seventh and the special sessions, said that the reports considered described the implementation of the Convention in States parties with widely varying social and economic conditions. Nevertheless, certain common themes ran through those reports; they included stereotypes about gender roles, violence against women, issues surrounding women's unemployment or underemployment, job segregation and wage differentials vis-à-vis men, and women's underrepresentation in decision-making bodies. Many States also reported severe problems with trafficking in women and exploitation.

15. Gender mainstreaming had not eliminated the need for special programmes for women and for adequate resources and, since it was also clear that de jure equality did not translate into de facto equality, more focus was needed on education programmes and temporary special measures to turn rights into reality. Concerns were also expressed about the feminization of poverty, especially in countries with economies in transition.

16. **The Chairperson** read out a letter from the Secretary of State for Equality of Portugal, informing the Committee of initiatives and actions taken to implement the recommendations contained in the concluding comments issued after consideration of the report of Portugal. That letter should be taken as an encouragement both to non-governmental organizations and to the Committee and an indication of the impact of its concluding comments, which provided a way to bring women's rights into the political arena.

17. **Ms. Corti** said that the Committee should urge other States parties to follow the example of Portugal in publicizing its response to the concluding comments.

18. **Ms. González** said that the response of Portugal was well-timed, since she had learned of efforts to undermine and discredit the Committee's work, at least in the Latin American region, in order to prevent the adoption of the Optional Protocol. The Committee should circulate the letter from Portugal widely in order to counteract those efforts and show how at least

one State party made use of the Committee's comments.

19. **Ms. Shin** said that follow-up to concluding comments and the backlash against the work of the Committee were both important topics that should be discussed during the forthcoming informal meeting with the States parties.

*The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.*