



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women  
Twenty-fifth session**

**Summary record of the 509th meeting**

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 2 July 2001, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Abaka

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

### Opening of the session

1. **The Chairperson** declared open the twenty-fifth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

2. **Ms. King** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women), reporting on the developments since the Committee's previous session, said that the forty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women had taken place from 6 to 17 March 2001 and that the Commission had met in resumed session from 9 to 11 May 2001. It had adopted agreed conclusions on two thematic issues: gender and all forms of discrimination, in particular racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; and women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS. The two sets of agreed conclusions had been submitted to the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, respectively. The Committee had adopted resolutions on, inter alia, discrimination against women and girls in Afghanistan, and mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system. In addition, it had requested the Secretary-General to provide a further report on its communications procedure. It had also adopted a multi-year programme of work setting out the themes on which it would focus over the next four years: in 2002, eradicating poverty, and environmental management; in 2003, participation and access of women to the media, and women's human rights and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls; in 2004, the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality, and women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building; in 2005, implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls; and, in 2006, enhanced participation of women in development, and equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels.

3. On 21 March 2001, she had attended a workshop on building capacity for mainstreaming gender in development strategies held in preparation for the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, where she had stressed strategies for increasing women's participation in decision-making. She had been pleased to learn that many least developed countries had set specific goals in that area. From 1 to 7 April 2001, she had attended the 105th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) held in Havana, Cuba, where she had given the keynote address to women parliamentarians. Over the years, IPU had encouraged ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, and it had recently initiated a programme to promote parliamentary action to ensure that national laws were in conformity with the Convention's provisions. The Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women had made a statement on the Optional Protocol at a panel meeting held during the IPU Conference. The Division was currently working with IPU to produce a handbook on the Optional Protocol for parliamentarians. From 23 to 25 April 2001, she had attended a workshop on governance, poverty reduction and gender equality held in Vienna, Austria, under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. At the workshop, she had emphasized the importance of developing and maintaining non-discrimination policies and of reviewing legislation with a view to removing discriminatory provisions. She had also participated in an international symposium on the impact of women's training on socio-economic development held from 3 to 8 June 2001 in Haifa, Israel. While in Israel, she had had discussions with the three women judges of the Supreme Court on the need for ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. During the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, she had spoken at the round table on HIV/AIDS and human rights, highlighting the Committee's work in the area of health, reproductive rights and HIV/AIDS. She was pleased to note that issues affecting women and girls had been highlighted in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted at the special session.

4. Lastly, on a recent trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina and in meetings with the gender focal points in East Timor and Kosovo, she had emphasized the importance

of the Convention, particularly during the transition from United Nations oversight to an independent government in the latter two.

5. Her Office and the Division for the Advancement of Women had highlighted gender and human rights dimensions during the recent special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, and had stressed the importance of the Convention and the work of the Committee in preparations for the special session of the General Assembly to review the achievement of the goals of the World Summit for Children. Women's human rights concerns were also important in the preparations for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, to be held shortly, and the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Other important opportunities to stress women's human rights would be provided by the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council on the role of the United Nations system in supporting the efforts of African countries to achieve sustainable development, the International Conference on Financing for Development and the 10-year review of the implementation of Agenda 21, both scheduled for 2002.

6. Since the previous session of the Committee, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Mauritania had become parties to the Convention, bringing the total number of States parties to the Convention to 168. Sixty-seven States from all regions of the world had signed the Optional Protocol, while 22, including Azerbaijan, had ratified or acceded to it. She and the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women encouraged ratification of the Convention and the Optional Protocol and acceptance of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention concerning the duration of the Committee's sessions, which had thus far been accepted by only 24 States.

7. A panel discussion entitled "Advancing the rights of women and children through treaties: a multilateral treaty framework", organized by her Office, the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of Legal Affairs, would be held in preparation for the treaty signature/ratification event to take place from 19 September to 5 October with a view to

achieving universal ratification of United Nations treaties relating to the advancement of women. Among the 23 treaties singled out for special attention in that context were the Convention and its Optional Protocol, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which had been opened for signature in Palermo, Italy, on 15 December 2000.

8. Activities organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women since the previous session of the Committee had included a subregional training workshop on preparation of State party reports, held in February in Auckland, New Zealand. Ms. Cartwright, a former Committee member and current Governor-General of New Zealand, had participated in the very successful workshop, and there were plans for follow-up activities in the region, where the Convention had yet to be widely accepted. The Division had also organized a regional meeting to discuss needs assessment with regard to national machinery for gender equality in African countries, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in April, in which the Chairperson had participated. A consultation on enhancing women's participation and peace-building and an expert group meeting on the situation of rural women in the context of globalization — two themes frequently addressed by the Committee — had been held, respectively, in Addis Ababa in April and in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, in June.

9. In its programme of work for the current session, the Committee might also wish to discuss how its representatives to the forthcoming World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance should work to ensure that the gender dimensions of racism and discrimination would receive the attention they deserved. In conclusion, she referred to the Secretary-General's reappointment and said that he was deeply interested in gender and gender equality issues and was a very strong supporter of women's rights and, in particular, the work of the Committee.

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

10. *The agenda was adopted.*

**Report of the Chairperson on activities undertaken between the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth sessions of the Committee**

11. **The Chairperson** said that, at the twenty-fourth session of the Committee, she and Ms. Corti had been mandated to meet with the Secretary-General in order to discuss the future work and administrative location of the Committee. Thanks to the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, a meeting had been scheduled with the Secretary-General at which the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and the Special Adviser were also present, and at which she had reiterated portions of an earlier letter from the Committee addressed to the Secretary-General, concerning equal opportunity for all States parties with regard to the presentation of reports and the disadvantage for financially weak States of locating the Committee in Geneva. The letter had quoted from the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" and the Millennium Summit, at which the Secretary-General had played a major role in advancing the Committee's work, heightening the visibility of the Convention and urging those States parties which had not yet done so to ratify the Convention. She had also stressed the historical relationship between the Convention and the Commission on the Status of Women. As a result, the Secretary-General had decided that the Committee would remain in New York under the administration of the Division for the Advancement of Women. She read out a letter from the Secretary-General to that effect, which also expressed the hope that the work of the Committee would be enhanced by cooperation between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

12. Her participation in the session of the Commission on the Status of Women had been fraught with problems. She had had only five minutes to make her statement to the Commission on the occasion of International Women's Day and had had no opportunity to speak on the Committee's communication procedure, despite a request on her behalf by the Director of the

Division for the Advancement of Women and the concerns expressed by many representatives that duplication between the communication procedures of the two bodies should be avoided.

13. Her statement before the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Human Rights on the occasion of Women's Rights Day had been well received, and many participants had enquired whether the Committee had received communications. States had been urged to ratify the Convention to order to achieve the goal of universal ratification by the year 2000; Canada and Denmark, in particular, had encouraged States parties to ratify the Optional Protocol. During a panel discussion on women's rights and violence against women, she had discussed implementation of the Convention at the national and community levels and urged all actors to promote the Optional Protocol. On that occasion, Ms. Charlotte Bunch from New York University had expressed interest in pursuing research on the Committee's contribution to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

14. The extremely successful African regional workshop on needs assessment, referred to by the Special Adviser, had benefited from the participation of representatives of other regions, particularly Latin America, which had achieved universal ratification of the Convention. One of the objectives of the workshop had been to identify 10 national machineries on a pilot basis for strengthening with a view to implementation of the outcome document of the twenty-third special session.

15. She had also attended the meeting of persons chairing human rights treaty bodies, in which over 60 States parties had participated in order to raise issues relating to the Bayefsky report on the Organization's human rights treaty system and a workshop on improving working relations among States parties and reporting procedures which Australia and some other States parties had organized. She would be distributing copies of that report to Committee members and certain aspects of it would be discussed in closed meetings. At the former, a decision had been taken to convene an inter-Committee meeting for the discussion of common issues among chairpersons of treaty bodies and various experts serving on committees some time during the first half of 2002. She was pleased to announce that the budget for the meeting provided for the participation not only of the Committee chairperson but also of three

members. At her proposal, the meeting's provisional agenda would include the issue of reservations, which a key concern of the Committee. Working methods would also be discussed in the hope that the bodies participating could learn from each other. The Chairman of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had sensibly proposed that all human rights treaty bodies should hold brief meetings with States parties. In addition, the meeting of chairpersons had decided that it would submit a statement to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, which was now being prepared. She had been unable to convince the chairpersons to hold their first inter-Committee meeting in New York or Sweden. Lastly, she and Ms. Corti had participated the previous week in a fruitful five-year review of the Glen Cove meeting. Committee members would soon receive copies of the recommendations of that meeting for discussion in a closed meeting.

16. **Ms. González**, supported by **Ms. Livingstone Raday**, thanked the Chairperson for her hard work between the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth sessions and for the information she had provided to members of the Committee.

17. **Ms. Corti** thanked the Chairperson for all her activities and efforts, particularly those aimed at improving the Committee's working methods and image.

18. **Ms. Acar** welcomed the fact that the issue of the Committee's location had been settled in accordance with the wishes of the Committee and expressed her appreciation for the efforts of Ms. King and of the Division for the Advancement of Women.

19. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** inquired as to the availability of summary records of the discussions in the Commission on the Status of Women on the subject of communications and the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

20. **Ms. Connors** (Division for the Advancement of Women) said that no summary records were produced for the meetings of the Commission.

## **Implementation of article 21 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

### **Ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee**

21. **Ms. Connors** (Division for the Advancement of Women), introducing the above two agenda items, noted that the first of them was the subject for discussion in the Committee's working group II and the second, in working group I. She drew attention to the information relating to those items on pages 4 and 5 of the English version of the annotated provisional agenda (document CEDAW/C/2001/II/1).

22. **Ms. González** thanked the Division, and particularly Ms. Connors, for all the information and documentation which had been provided to members of the Committee well in advance of the beginning of the current session.

23. **The Chairperson** said that the panel discussion to be held on 5 July 2001, which Ms. King had mentioned in her statement, would provide an opportunity for creating improved awareness of the Convention and especially of the Optional Protocol, and for encouraging Governments to ratify the Protocol. She would attend that meeting with Ms. González, a selection which celebrated the universal ratification of the Convention achieved in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Most regrettably, however, interpretation services would not be available for the meeting.

24. **Ms. González** said that the universal ratification of the Convention in the Latin America and Caribbean region was the result of the determined efforts of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, the important work done by non-governmental organizations, and the commitment of the Governments of the region to support those organizations and make use of their expertise. Currently, meetings and seminars were being held to promote the ratification of the Optional Protocol. The Committee should know, however, that other groups were working with equal determination to prevent that goal from being reached. In March 2001, she had been invited to the session of the Legislative Assembly of Panama at which the ratification of the Optional Protocol had been discussed. During the session, attention had been drawn to a letter from the Permanent Observer for the

Holy See to the United Nations addressed to the Bishop of Panama urging him to oppose the ratification of the Optional Protocol on the grounds that it would broaden the scope of the Convention and facilitate the adoption of measures contrary to the very principles of the instrument. She was pleased to note that, notwithstanding those efforts, Panama had been one of two States from the region to ratify the Optional Protocol since the Committee's previous session. Nevertheless, it was important to avoid the dissemination of information that could give rise to erroneous interpretations of the purpose of the Optional Protocol.

25. **Ms. Regazzoli** said that the Andean Commission of Jurists, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, was also taking steps to raise awareness in the region regarding Convention and Optional Protocol issues. Since December 2000, it had been providing training on those instruments for judges and lawyers. Seminars had been held in Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador. She had recently attended one such event, at which she had made a statement.

26. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said that the Government of Germany, pursuant to recently adopted legislation, was soon to establish a human rights institute. She was pleased to report that human rights education would be one of the main tasks of the institute. She had been appointed deputy chairman of the institute's board of trustees.

27. **The Chairperson** said that Ms. Schöpp-Schilling's appointment would help to highlight the Committee's work. She noted, in that connection, that the Government of Austria had recently published a guide to the Optional Protocol.

28. **Ms. Achmad** said that the meetings of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies were an important example of coordination to promote human rights that should be emulated more widely within the United Nations system. Given that the provisions of the Convention were of concern to a number of different United Nations specialized agencies, it was important that those agencies should consolidate their efforts to mainstream gender in their human rights activities. There was also a need for the specialized agencies to provide greater assistance with the preparation of the reports of States parties on the implementation of the Convention.

29. **Ms. King** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women) said that many of the ratifications of the Convention and the Optional Protocol had been facilitated by the persistence and hard work of the specialized agencies. Her Office was in constant communication with them through the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality. When States ratified the Convention, the specialized agencies were always requested to provide assistance with the preparation of initial reports. She wished to pay tribute, in that connection, to the efforts of UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund and the International Labour Organization. The agencies had to prioritize, however, and the onus was on countries to request the assistance they needed. The members of the Committee could play an important role in that regard by raising awareness among Governments of what help was available.

*The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.*