



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

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Exceptional session

### Summary record of the 568th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 5 August 2002, 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**

*Opening statement by the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women*

1. **Ms. King** (Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women) said that the Chairperson and Ms. Jane Connors, Chief of the Women's Rights Section of the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), had attended the fourteenth meeting of chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies held in Geneva from 24 to 26 June 2002; the Chairperson had been elected Chairman/Rapporteur of the meeting. During that period, the chairpersons had held their fourth meeting with the special procedures mandate holders and had recommended that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should explore ways of encouraging further dialogue with the mandate holders by, *inter alia*, encouraging them to be present at treaty body sessions. At a concurrent meeting with States parties both on that occasion and at the 2002 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, various States had stressed the value of the Committee's informal meeting with States parties on 17 June 2002.

2. The first inter-committee meeting had been held immediately following the meeting of the chairpersons; the Committee had been represented by its Chairperson, Ms. Corti, and Ms. González; the former had also been elected to chair that meeting. Participants had focused on ways of strengthening cooperation among the treaty bodies and of harmonizing their working methods in order to emphasize the holistic nature of the human rights treaty framework. It had been recommended that a second meeting should be convened in two years' time.

3. On 25 July 2002, she had presented findings, challenges and recommendations emanating from the Secretary-General's soon-to-be-completed study on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the role of women in peace-building and the gender dimensions of peace processes and conflict resolution, mandated by Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), at an open

Council debate on conflict, peacekeeping and gender. The study was based on input from all United Nations entities participating in the Inter-agency Task Force on Women, Peace and Security, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Non-governmental Organization (NGO) Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, two former Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (Dame Margaret Anstee and Dame Anne Hercus), scholars, women working at the grass-roots level and one member of the Committee (Ms. Goonesekere).

4. The study provided a systematic overview of United Nations gender-related activities in the area of peace and security. It considered the impact of every stage of armed conflict on women and girls, revealing that pervasive violence against them during armed conflict often persisted as domestic violence when the conflict was over. It spelled out clearly the role of women and the obstacles they encountered in seeking to participate in all aspects of the peace process. It concluded that sustainable peace and lasting security could not be achieved without women's empowerment and full involvement. Consequently, it stressed the importance of issues such as protection, humanitarian law, girl child soldiers, disarmament, demobilization, resettlement and rebuilding. The report would be submitted to the Security Council in October 2002 to mark the two-year anniversary of resolution 1373 (2000).

5. In addition to its regular agenda, the Commission on the Status of Women would consider two thematic issues at its forty-seventh session in 2003: participation and access of women to the media and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women. In addition, it would be discussing women's human rights and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st century".

6. A total of 170 States were currently parties to the Convention; 75 States had signed the Optional Protocol thereto; and 35 had ratified the amendment to article 20.1 thereof. Her Office and DAW took every opportunity to promote States' accession to those

instruments and to encourage regular reporting under the Convention, its implementation and support for the Committee's work. DAW planned to hold a reporting workshop at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in November 2002 for East Asian States Parties which had yet to submit a report to the Committee; it was hoped that the Governments of Afghanistan and East Timor, which had expressed interest in becoming parties to the Convention, would attend.

7. In accordance with the General Assembly's wish, the exceptional session would be devoted entirely to consideration of the reports of States parties in order to reduce the backlog of reports awaiting review. Eleven States would be reporting: Argentina, Armenia, Barbados, the Czech Republic, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Mexico, Peru, Uganda and Yemen. A workshop on temporary special measures (article 4 (1) of the Convention), to be held on 17 August 2002 under the auspices of DAW, International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW) and the Permanent Mission of Germany, would keep the Committee informed as it prepared its general recommendation on that article.

8. The General Assembly's objective of having women fill 50 per cent of all United Nations posts at and above the professional level had not been met; as at 30 June 2002, women held 41 per cent of Secretariat posts subject to geographical distribution, 35 per cent of all Secretariat posts and 34 per cent of all posts in the United Nations system. She suggested that the Committee, under article 8 of the Convention, should call on States parties routinely to provide information on the number of women nationals who worked for international or regional organizations.

9. She was well aware of the heavy burden on the Committee at its current session and regretted that financial constraints precluded the extension of meetings beyond 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. and the holding of evening meetings. Every effort would be made to ensure that those restrictions did not adversely affect the Committee's work.

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

10. *The agenda was adopted.*

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

11. **The Chairperson**, reporting on her activities since the previous session of the Committee, said that the agenda of the fourteenth meeting of the chairpersons of the treaty bodies had included follow-up to the thirteenth meeting of the chairpersons, an update of progress since the thirteenth meeting, a meeting with States parties on follow-up to the World Conference against Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, a meeting with the specialized agencies and NGOs and a meeting with the special procedures mandate holders. Representatives of the Human Rights Committee and the Committee Against Torture had announced the appointment of follow-up rapporteurs. After expressing their disappointment at the adoption of General Assembly resolution 56/272 on the comprehensive study of the question of honorariums payable to members of organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations, the Chairpersons had declined to discuss the matter further.

12. The follow-up meeting with States parties had been well attended. They had welcomed the revisions in the working methods of the treaty bodies and had expressed concern regarding the involvement of NGOs in the reporting process and the accuracy of the press releases issued in Geneva. During the meeting with the specialized agencies, a representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had described the agency's restructuring. Subsequently, the Chairperson had mentioned the Committee's focal point on UNESCO (Ms. Gaspard), noted that the Committee's previous close relationship with that body had been less than satisfactory in recent years and expressed the hope that the situation would improve as a result of the restructuring. Representatives of NGOs had asked to attend the inter-committee meeting to be held immediately following the meeting of Chairpersons. However, as it was to be the first of its kind, the experts had denied the request, leaving open the possibility of NGO participation in the future.

13. At the fourth joint meeting with special procedures mandate holders, it had been recommended that special efforts should be made to raise funds for face-to-face exchanges of views between mandate holders and treaty bodies as part of the annual OHCHR appeal; in particular, the Committee had found it

difficult to meet with the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. In order to avoid duplication of work, it had been recommended that one document outlining the mandate holders' follow-up to the Durban Conference should be prepared. Alternatively, OHCHR might develop a document providing them with guidance on reporting to the treaty bodies on such follow-up. It had been suggested that the fifth joint meeting should focus on the impact of globalization on the treaty bodies, mandates and instruments. Lastly, it had been recommended that future meetings of the Chairpersons should be held over a five-day period as in the past.

14. The first inter-committee meeting had been opened by the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. A minute of silence had been observed in solidarity with all victims of torture. After a lively discussion, recommendations had been made on the issues on which consensus had been achieved. The next meeting, to be held in two years' time, would focus on a thematic issue; Ms. Corti had proposed non-discrimination. The meeting's agenda would include topics mentioned in the background document but not discussed owing to time constraints and issues on which no consensus had been reached. She thanked Ms. Connors for her efficient, prompt contribution to the success of the first meeting.

15. Lastly, she stressed that it had been difficult to gain approval for the Committee to hold the current exceptional session and urged members to make judicious use of the time available.

16. **Ms. Gaspard** said that it was her understanding that a representative of UNESCO would attend the informal meeting with the Committee and that the agency was interested in working on issues of common interest.

17. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** asked the Committee secretariat to arrange for members who served as liaison with other human rights treaty bodies to receive their documentation.

18. **Ms. González** said that she had been able to find many relevant reports, including the reports of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, on the Internet.

19. **Ms. Corti** said that the appointment of a new High Commissioner for Human Rights could provide an opportunity for the Chairperson to write a letter

requesting direct contact between the Committee and the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Such a relationship seemed like a natural step, especially since the Committee was working on a general comment on violence against women.

#### **Implementation of article 22 of the Convention** (CEDAW/C/2002/EXC/3 and Add.1-4)

20. **Ms. Connors** (Chief, Women's Rights Section, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that, as provided under article 22 of the Convention, the specialized agencies would be represented at the exceptional session; their representatives had already provided input for the pre-session working group. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) had provided reports, which appeared as addenda 1-4 of the report of the Secretary-General (CEDAW/C/2002/EXC/3).

21. Following an update on the status of documentation, she informed members that replies to the lists of issues had been received quite late from some States Parties; consequently, not all of the replies would be immediately available in all languages; they would be made available during the course of the session. It would also be possible to provide members with electronic copies of documentation, either on diskette or by e-mail.

22. **Ms. Corti**, reporting on the meeting of pre-session working group for the exceptional session in the absence of its Chairperson, Mr. Melander, said that the working group had prepared lists of issues and questions with respect to the reports of 11 States parties. The group had observed that, although the reports described implementation in countries with very different conditions and constraints on implementation, several concerns were common. They included persistent stereotypical attitudes towards gender roles, violence against women, unemployment and underemployment of women, entrenched job segregation and wage differentials, and the under-representation of women at all levels of decision-making. A severe and growing problem with trafficking and exploitation of women was also noted.

23. The introduction and implementation of gender mainstreaming policies was a positive development,

but did not eliminate the need for women-specific programmes, adequate national machinery and sufficient human and financial resources. It was also noted that de jure equality did not secure de facto equality for women. Concern was also expressed about the feminization of poverty and the deteriorating health and employment situation of women in countries in transition, those affected by structural adjustment policies and privatization of the public sector and those in economic crisis.

*The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.*