

**25th ANNIVERSARY OF THE WORK OF THE
COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST
WOMEN**

**Dubravka Šimonovi
Chairperson
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women**

**Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen**

The aim of this commemoration is not only to praise the work of the Committee and all its past and present members but to assess progress achieved in the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and challenges in front of the Committee at this particular point in time, as well as measures needed to enhance the Committee's efficiency in the short and long term.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is composed of 23 experts. I am very pleased to recognize and present each expert to you: Ms Magalys Arocha Dominguez, Ms Ferdous Ara Begum, Ms Meriem Belmihoub-Zerdani, Ms Saisuree Chutikul, Ms Dorcas Coker-Appiah, Ms Shanthi Dairiam, Mr Cees Flinterman, Ms Naela Gabr (who will arrive later this week), Ms Françoise Gaspard, Ms Ruth Halperin-Kaddari, Ms Tiziana Maiolo, Ms Violeta Neubauer, Ms Pramila Patten, Ms Silvia Pimentel, Ms Fumiko Saiga, Hanna Beate Schöpp-Schilling (who will not be able to attend the current session), Ms Heisoo Shin, Ms Glenda Simms, Ms Anamah Tan, Ms Maria Regina Tavares da Silva, Ms Xiaoqiao Zou, and myself, Dubravka Šimonovi . Following the resignation of Ms

Now, 25 years later, we meet for three three-week sessions per year – some of which in parallel chambers. With the steadily increasing number of States parties to the Convention, we have seen an enormous increase in our workload, and the meeting time allocated to the Committee has increased, albeit not fully commensurate with the needs.

Is 25 years a long or a short period in the life of a treaty body?

The CEDAW Committee is among oldest treaty bodies established under United Nations human rights conventions. Its experience and working methods can serve as important inspiration and guidance for newly established or future monitoring bodies.

25 years could also be seen as a relatively short time period for a conventional mechanism to produce visible changes at the national level.

Since its inception, the Committee has reviewed almost 400 reports – many of these have been combined reports and the overall number of reports considered under article 18 of the Convention is therefore much larger. Some States are now moving into their seventh reporting cycle, and the Committee can trace changes over time: some of these changes are highly visible, others are only very incremental. While Constitutions now commonly have equality provisions, in too many countries discrimination against women even in the law persists. In too few countries, the Convention is directly applicable in courts, and too few judges know about the Convention and use it for the benefit of women.

De facto discrimination against women remains universal.

There are also States that are now submitting their initial reports – last session we considered eight such reports, and we will keep careful track of progress when these States parties will next be before the Committee. But too many initial reports are overdue, some by as many as 25 years.

The Convention is a dynamic or “*living*” human rights instrument. It is the Committee as its monitoring body that significantly shapes this dynamism and growth.

Convention provisions and rights are interpreted by the Committee through its General Recommendations on the content and purpose of the substantive articles or themes of the Convention. Let me mention general recommendation No 19 on violence against women. As we all know, the Convention does not explicitly refer to violence against women. Through its interpretive work reflected in general recommendation 19, the Committee made it clear that violence against women falls squarely within the scope of the definition of discrimination and thus, is covered by the Convention. Or take general recommendation no 25 on temporary special measures, where the Committee not only elaborated on the meaning of the

policies and plans are indeed supportive of the achievement of Convention obligations.

Each and every substantive article of this Convention covers forms of discrimination that women around the globe experience directly, in their daily lives. The Committee is very aware of this reality when it examines reports. Our work is not an abstract exercise, but goes to the heart of women’s experiences – and we are committed to ensure the accountability of States for compliance with their obligations. States must take “all appropriate measures” and “without delay” for the practical realization of the principle of equality between women and men.

The Committee encourages States parties to engage in participatory processes at the national level not only in the preparation of reports, but also in follow up to concluding comments and Convention implementation generally – the Committee is aware that realizing women’s rights must involve the active and ongoing contribution of many stakeholders: Government officials, Parliament, independent institutions for the protection of human rights, NGOs and civil society, the judiciary, the private sector including the media, and others. Changing societal attitudes so that they are truly supportive of substantive gender equality cannot be achieved with a new law alone – it requires a concerted and committed effort of all stakeholders. The Committee will continue to make its contribution to this process.

And we must work harder to achieve universal ratification of the Convention – a goal we had hoped to achieve by 2000.

Dear participants,

The Committee has always taken a strong interest in developments that affect women’s enjoyment of their human rights. The current UN reform process is very relevant not only for the work of the Committee, but also to the conceptual approach of the United Nations to the promotion of gender equality. Intergovernmental bodies such as the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the Commission on the Status of Women and other functional commissions of the ECOSOC, but also the UN Secretariat and other entities contribute to our common responsibility for the realization of gender equality. Discussions about treaty body reform continue, the new Human Rights Council is moving forward with the establishment of its procedures and modalities, and Member States are considering the proposal for a new gender equality entity – it is therefore important to reflect carefully on the manner in which women’s rights will be addressed by the United Nations system in the future.

The Convention must be the basis and framework in all these discussions – it provides the universal standard of equality between women and men that we must all adhere to, and that we must all work to achieve. The Convention clarifies the obligations of States – these obligations must be foremost in the minds of those that

for joint technical assistance programmes with respect to implementation of the convention, reporting and follow up to concluding comments.

Enormous work is in front of the whole UN system. It requires all of us to invest all possible efforts to secure a very smooth transfer of the Committee to Geneva where we look forward to the same level, or even better servicing. Such support will enable the Committee to constantly improve its role in monitoring the elimination of discrimination against women and providing clear recommendations to its States parties on further actions necessary towards the practical realization of the principle of the equality of women and men.

Thank you very much.