

Twenty-fifth anniversary of the work of the
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Statement by
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Madam Chairperson,
Fellow members of the panel,
Members of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,
Excellencies, colleagues and friends.

It is a pleasure to be here today to participate in this special ceremony to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

On December 18 1979, the General Assembly, with delegates drawn from a wide spectrum of legal systems, cultures and religious traditions, adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Convention,

the Convention from aspiration to reality. From its first session, the membership of the Committee was markedly different from that of other human rights treaty bodies, and this remains the case today. Members, who have with three exceptions been women, have been drawn from diverse backgrounds: law, politics, economics, public life, education and health services, different political and economic systems, and developing and developed countries. Most have had personal or professional experience of the obstacles faced by women, and all have been strongly committed to equality and non-discrimination. Many have been part of networks and communities outside the structure of Government directed to the realization of the rights of women and girls. This diversity of experience and commitment, and linkage with the non-governmental sector, has ensured that the Committee's work has been relevant for all women in all parts of the world. It also ensured that the various limitations of the Convention, the interpretation of its provisions and the steps required for full implementation could be addressed creatively so that its full promise for women and girls could be realized.

Let me touch on some of the Committee's achievements. Although faced with an explicit limitation in the Convention of its meeting time to two weeks annually, the respect and confidence the Committee gained from States parties, in particular because of the innovative working methods it has introduced, have resulted in the provision of more and longer sessions. I am very hopeful that the upcoming session of the General Assembly will approve the Committee's request to meet annually for three sessions, a request I enthusiastically support, given the broad acceptance of the Convention and its Optional Protocol.

The Committee's determination to place the Convention on an equal footing with other human rights treaties by expanding its monitoring procedures beyond consideration of reports only, was a major factor leading to the speedy elaboration of the already widely-accepted Optional Protocol to the Convention, which enables it to receive petitions and conduct *suo moto* inquiries.

But it is jurisprudence, developed via article 21 of the Convention, which empowers it to make suggestions and general recommendations to the General Assembly based on the examination of reports and information received from States parties, that perhaps represents the major achievement of the Committee to date. At the outset, these were narrowly focused and usually procedural. Now the Committee's general recommendations provide its collective view, grounded in its knowledge acquired through the consideration of reports from diverse States parties, of the appropriate measures States should take to fulfil their obligations under the Convention and how these obligations should be applied in varying situations.

The Committee's general recommendation on female circumcision was the first recommendation of a UN body on this practice. Similarly, the Committee was the first treaty body to adopt a general recommendation on HIV/AIDs. Its general recommendation on violence against women, which takes gender-based violence out of the private realm into the public arena of international human rights where it engages State responsibility, was a crucial building block in the recognition of gender-

Women and the various regional human rights instruments which address this violation. This general recommendn. Tsd051 -Ongmendn.s.b1w

