

Keynote statement
Ms. Dubravka Šimonovi
Chairperson
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

**to launch the general debate on the priority theme of “The elimination
of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child”**

26 February 2007

Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates and participants,

It is my honour and privilege, as the Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to contribute to the launching of the general debate at the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women, on the priority theme of “The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child”.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been ratified or acceded to by 185 States. It is the only legally binding international instrument to prohibit all forms of discrimination against women committed by public authorities or by any person or organisation in the full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural areas, and covering both public and private life. The Optional Protocol to the Convention, under which the Committee considers communications submitted by or on behalf of individuals or groups of individuals who claim to be victims of a violation of rights in the Convention and inquires into grave or systematic violations of the Convention’s provisions, now has 85 States parties.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women welcomed the invitation by the Commission to contribute to the discussion on its priority themes for 2007 and 2008. The Committee discussed this invitation at its thirty-sixth session in July 2006 and was of the view that its contribution could consist of an analysis of the theme concerned drawing from the concluding comments and overall experiences and findings.

Distinguished participants,

I would like to start with a general poin

discrimination and violence against the girl child and young women as reflected in the Committee's constructive dialogue with the State parties, country specific concluding comments, and general recommendations.

Chairperson,

The Convention (articles 2 f and 5 a) pays specific attention to the impact of stereotypes on the achievement of equality for women. It requires modification of social and cultural patterns of conduct of women and men, and the elimination of practices based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes. Such stereotypes often restrict rights and opportunities for girls from a very early age, and affect their education, health, reproductive roles, and participation in public life and decision-making. Those discriminatory stereotypes take different forms in different countries but in all those instances, the Committee takes the firm view that States parties have a clear obligation under the Convention to change such practices and to act forcefully and creatively to eliminate such discrimination de jure as well as de facto.

The Convention requires that States parties ensure equal rights of women with men in the field of education at all levels. Compliance encompasses girls' and women's equal access to education and training at all levels, as well as the quality of education they receive. This provision is of primary importance to girls and young women, yet the Committee continues to see lower levels of girls' education, and large gender disparities in school enrolment rates of girls and boys, almost always to the detriment of girls. Girls' high dropout rates, owing to a series of factors including early and forced marriage and pregnancy also persist. Likewise, discriminatory stereotypes are found in school curricula and textbooks that often project inferior roles of women and girls.

The Committee consistently emphasizes the role of education as a human right and as a basis for the empowerment of girls and women, and regularly calls for a range of actions by States to enhance compliance with article 10 of the Convention. In some instances, legislative measures are required to ensure de jure equality. More commonly, and also in line with the MDG goals, policy and programmatic measures are necessary to achieve universal primary education for girls and to eliminate gender disparity in school enrolment rates at all levels. The Committee also calls for awareness raising measures, to overcome traditional attitudes that constitute obstacles to girls' education and for measures to ensure equal access of girls and young women to all levels of education, to retain girls in school and ensure that pregnant girls stay in school during pregnancy and return after delivery. Curricula reform and enhanced teacher training, incentives for young women to enter traditional male-dominated fields of study are other steps the Committee regularly recommends so as to eliminate discrimination against girls and women in education.

Importantly, the Committee emphasizes the consequences of girls' educational choices for their later opportunities and chances in the labour market as well as for their equal participation in public life and decision-making at all levels. The Committee also

tackles discrimination and inequality of girls and young women in the area of work, where it has flagged for example, the exploitation of girls in domestic work, and related consequences for girls' education.

Chairperson,

The Convention addresses women's health in general and also focuses on reproductive health and services related to pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period. In its general recommendation 24 on article 12, the Committee clarifies that women's health must be addressed throughout women's lifespan, and thus must also focus on girls and young women. It highlights particular vulnerabilities faced by girls and adolescents, and draws attention to unequal power relations and their impact on women's and girls' ability to enjoy health-related rights.

the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Committee's general recommendation 21.

The Committee calls for awareness-raising and other measures to ensure compliance with such laws, and to combat stereotypes so that a woman can indeed exercise her right freely to choose her partner. The Committee also points to the importance of the registration of all marriages as a means for enhancing compliance with minimum age of marriage, and the protection of the rights of children, as well as to establish equality between the partners.

Chairperson,

Trafficking of women and girls and exploitation of prostitution of women and girls are addressed in article 6 of the Convention. The Committee consistently calls for special efforts to prevent violence against and exploitation of young women and girls and regularly calls for targeted interventions to respond to the specific needs of girls and young women. It calls for the effective prosecution of offenders; support to girl victims of trafficking, and for an end to the exploitation of young prostitutes, or of girls working as domestics and are victims of sexual and economic abuse and exploitation.

Chairperson,

In all areas discussed, the Committee is increasingly concerned about intersectional discrimination of particular groups of women including girls that are also discriminated on the other grounds such as race, ethnicity, or because they are migrants, or live in rural or remote areas.

The Commity arm(regcc-1.2re alss increls)7(asinglfoiscloi)TJ123545 0 TD0.0003 Tc070954 Twkin