

Sixtieth session of the General Assembly
Item 64: Advancement of Women
Item 65: Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women

STATEMENT BY

MS. ROSARIO MANALO
CHAIRPERSON
COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

11 October 2005

Check against delivery

**STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE
ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
MS. ROSARIO MANALO
60TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

Chairperson
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen

It is an honour and privilege for me to address the Third Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations as Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and to present the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (A/60/38). I wish to emphasize the importance which the Committee attaches to this opportunity to present our work to the General Assembly, as called for in the Convention. Protection and promotion of the human rights of women, the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and practical realization of the principle of equality of women and men requires concerted efforts of all stakeholders, at all times. Member States have made important commitments at the 2005 World Summit some weeks ago to strengthen security, development and human rights for all.

Much unfinished business remains, in all parts of the world, towards enhancing women's enjoyment of their human rights without discrimination, epitomized in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and elaborated in greater detail in the Committee's general recommendations. Policy documents such as the Beijing Platform for Action, and resolutions of this Assembly spell out further measures and actions to be taken. As this Assembly embarks on important discussions to strengthen the human rights and peace-building machineries, the agenda for gender equality and women's enjoyment of their human rights must remain a consistent and high priority.

One hundred and eighty States are now party to the Convention, an increase by two States since my predecessor addressed you last October, namely the United Arab Emirates (October 2004) and Monaco (March 2005). The number of the States parties to the Optional Protocol has reached 73, an increase by six, namely Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gabon, Nigeria, San Marino, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. 47 States have accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, concerning the Committee's meeting time.

Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates

At its thirty-second and thirty-third sessions held in 2005, the Committee considered the reports of 16 States parties, namely Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Croatia, Gabon, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Gabon, Gambia, Guyana, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Paraguay, Samoa and Turkey. Six of these 16 States parties reported for the first time. I would like to thank these States parties for submitting their reports and engaging in the constructive dialogue with the Committee. I also extend the Committee's sincere appreciation to the many, predominantly national non-governmental organizations that submitted information to the Committee. Participation by national NGOs is a critical aspect in the continuing work to implement the Convention at the national level, and I commend all those – NGOs, Governments and UN entities alike – who facilitate and financially support the attendance of NGOs at the Committee's sessions. The Committee was also very pleased to receive for the first time information from a national human rights institution.

I trust that all 16 reporting States are now actively engaged in follow-up to the concluding comments. Such follow-up needs to involve all sectors and levels, as well as branches of Government. The media and the private sector also have a role to play, and I am confident that NGOs are doing their best in ensuring that systematic action is being taken to implement the Committee's recommendations. I also encourage the international community, and in particular the entities of the United Nations system that are active in the 16 reporting countries, to support Governments' and NGOs' efforts at enhancing implementation of the Convention at the national level. Together, these efforts must be geared towards accelerating the practical realization of the principle of equality between women and men called for in article 2 of the Convention.

Among the Committee's milestone outputs this past year was its work under the Optional Protocol. Notably, the Committee adopted its views on the merits of communication 2/2003, *A.T. v Hungary*, a case involving a situation of domestic violence, finding a violation of the author's rights under several articles of the Convention. The Committee made recommendations to the State party on action to be taken in regard to the author, as well as general recommendations to prevent violence against women. 7 further cases have been registered. The Committee completed its first inquiry under article 8 of the Optional Protocol, which had included a visit to the territory of the State party – Mexico. The Committee's substantive findings and recommendations emanating from its inquiry, together with the State party's observations, have been published. I wish to express the Committee's appreciation to States parties for cooperating with the Committee in the examination of communications and implementation of the inquiry procedure. I encourage all States parties to disseminate information about the procedures so as to make them widely known, as called for in the Optional Protocol's article 13.

During the past two sessions the Committee continued its practice of adopting statements in relation to particular events. I wish to highlight the Committee's statement on the occasion of the 10-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which received significant attention during the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The Committee was very pleased with the focus

on women's human rights, and the synergies between the Platform for Action and the Convention during the review session, including in the Declaration adopted by the Commission. It was most gratifying to see that States increasingly use both, the Convention as a legally binding human rights instrument, and the Platform for Action as a comprehensive agenda for gender equality, in a complementary and mutually reinforcing manner to eliminate discrimination and achieve substantive equality for women.

The Committee responded to the Tsunami disaster that took place in South-East Asia in December 2004 by calling upon those who provide assistance and relief and contribute to the reconstruction of the devastated communities to respond fully to the gender-specific needs of women and girls. The Committee also continued to monitor the situation of women in Iraq, and urged the Government of Iraq to ensure that the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination are fully reflected in the new Constitution. (The three statements are contained in the Committee's annual report).

Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates

The Committee has continued its efforts to enhance its methods of work so as to achieve great efficiency. I wish to highlight only some of them. We now prepare lists of issues and questions for initial, as well as periodic reports. Only two meetings per State party are allocated for the constructive dialogue. We have issued guidance on the length of reports, and of written responses so as to limit the volume of documentation. The Committee has started to use country task forces for the constructive dialogue, and will continue to use this method flexibly at the next session. The Committee has taken steps to monitor implementation of the Convention in States whose reports are significantly overdue. I would like to thank both Cape Verde and Saint Lucia who, at the Committee's invitation submitted all their overdue reports as combined reports in time for consideration next year.

The Committee provided its views on the advisability of a Special Rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women, at the request of the Commission on the Status of Women. It also discussed the Secretary-General's study on violence against women. The Committee held a preliminary discussion on the Plan of Action of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and looks forward to meeting her personally in January 2006. We have also made a significant contribution to, and played a very active role, in the efforts to further harmonize the reporting procedures within the framework of the Inter-Committee meeting and the Chairperson's meeting.

Chairperson,

I will now turn to the Committee's request, addressed to this Assembly for action, concerning the extension of meeting time. Many of you will recall that already last year, we had put forward such a request. The question of its meeting time is a long-standing problem, dating back to the seventh session in 1988, when the first extension of the

meeting time was granted to enable the Committee to discharge its responsibilities in a professional and serious manner.

Member States are aware of the numbers: The Convention, with 180 States parties, is the treaty with the second highest number of ratifications. The Optional Protocol, with 72 parties, entrusts additional responsibilities to the Committee. States themselves are making steady progress in adhering to their reporting obligations under the Convention: while there were 256 overdue reports in July 2003, there were only 187 in July 2005. A record of 34 States submitted reports in 2004, and as of today, 27 States have submitted reports in 2005. The Committee has streamlined the manner in which it considers reports, but also is of the view that the significant effort States – and NGOs – invest in the reporting process as integral part of the implementation of the Convention cannot be reduced further if it is to remain meaningful.

The Committee appreciates the fact that this Assembly has enabled it to meet twice a year for a three-week session since 1997. This is nevertheless significantly less than treaty bodies with comparable responsibilities. The Committee's capacity has reached a ceiling with consideration of the reports of 16 States per year. This is less than half of the reports it received in 2004. Reports that are received now will sit on the shelf for four years – the length of the reporting cycle under the Convention – before they can be taken up. This clearly must be a disincentive for timely reporting by States.

Against this background, the Committee puts before this Assembly a request for extension of its meeting time contained in decision 33/I of the annual report. There is an urgent need to find a long-term solution that will allow the Committee to implement its responsibilities under the Convention and its Optional Protocol in an effective and timely manner as well as place the Committee on an equal footing with other human rights treaty bodies in regard to its meeting time. Accordingly, the Committee requests authorization for a third annual session of three weeks. It also requests authorization, as a temporary measure for 2006 and 2007, to meet in parallel working groups to address the backlog of reports awaiting consideration.

Chairperson,

I thank you for your attention and I wish you well for this session.