

**Third Committee of the General Assembly
Sixty-second session
Agenda item 63 (a)**

Statement by

**Ms. Dubravka Šimonović
Chairperson
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
New York, 15 October 2007**

Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great honour for me to address the Third Committee of the General Assembly for the first time in my capacity as Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

This week 25 years ago, from 18 to 22 October 1982, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women held its inaugural session. At that time, there were 42 States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The meeting time allocated to the Committee was only one annual session of two weeks.

We celebrated this important anniversary at our thirty-ninth session on 23 July 2007, with the participation of high-level guests. We reflected on the Committee's history and accomplishments, and charted our future vision for the promotion of gender equality.

The Committee is a body of 23 independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention. Since its inception, 107 women and 3 men from many different countries representing different legal systems and all regions of the world have served as members.

Much has been achieved in these 25 years. There are now 185 States parties to the Convention. The Committee has considered a total of 401 reports (many of these were combined reports) submitted by 154 States parties. It has adopted 25 general recommendations.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention was adopted by resolution A/RES/54/4 of 6 October 1999. As of today, it has been ratified or acceded to by 88 States. Under the terms of the Optional Protocol, the Committee is charged with implementing two procedures and, since its entry into force on 22 December 2000, the Committee has taken action on 10 communications submitted by individual women, and undertaken one inquiry.

The last two years, that is 2006 and 2007, have been exceptionally productive, thanks to the extended meeting time approved by the General Assembly in December 2005. Based on this decision, the Committee held three three-week sessions per year, and met three times in parallel chambers. This meeting time and work in parallel chambers enabled the Committee to consider the reports of 31 States parties in 2006 and of 38 States parties in 2007. Over two years, the Committee held constructive dialogues with well over one-third of the States parties to the Convention, enabling the Committee to carefully consider progress, and in particular the challenges, gaps and shortcomings encountered by States parties in the practical realization of the principle of the equality of women and men. In each instance, the States parties concerned have received detailed guidance about the steps the Committee expects them to take to accelerate implementation of the Convention so that women, in their everyday reality, fully enjoy their rights to equality and non-discrimination. All of these States parties are expected to submit their next periodic report by a given time.

I would like to express the Committee's appreciation to the 69 States parties that reported to the Committee in 2006 and 2007. I also extend our appreciation to the many national non-governmental organizations that provided information to the Committee, and now continue their advocacy efforts to ensure that the Committee's concluding comments receive the necessary follow-up by all stakeholders concerned. The Committee also benefited from the contributions of entities of the United Nations system. Today, I call especially on those present at the national level to offer their full support to States parties as they proceed to implement the Committee's concluding comments. The results of the three sessions of 2007 are in the document before you (A/62/38).

Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,

The last two years have allowed us to make significant progress in reducing the backlog of reports that awaited consideration, but we have not yet completely eliminated it. By the time we adjourned the 39th session, 31 reports remained to be considered, and additional reports have since been received. Given the four-year reporting cycle established by the Convention, 46 States should be submitting reports every year. In the last ten years, the average number of reports received per year has been approximately 23, but with more timely reporting by States parties and timely examination of reports by the Committee the average is certain to increase.

The Committee has also stepped up its efforts to encourage States parties with long overdue initial reports to comply with their reporting obligations, and we have

invited 12 States parties to submit their outstanding reports by a specific future date. Based on our past experience with this procedure, we are confident that the concerned States parties are making every effort to produce these reports so that we can engage in a constructive dialogue about the status of implementation of the Convention.

Given the Committee's workload, it is essential to secure a sustainable basis that will allow the Committee to deal effectively and in a timely manner with all its responsibilities under the Convention and the Optional Protocol. The Committee has therefore decided to submit to the General Assembly a request for an extension of meeting time which the Committee considers necessary to provide such basis.

In the first part of the request before this Assembly in decision 39/I, the Committee seeks authorization to hold three annual sessions, as a long term measure, which would be equivalent to the meeting time of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee. This extension of meeting time will allow the Committee to consider reports of States parties in a timely fashion after their submission, and to deal with cases under the Optional Protocol.

Taking into consideration that there are 185 States parties to the Convention, three sessions of three weeks provides a very limited amount of time for the Committee to carry out its work effectively. Thus, in the second part of its request, the Committee seeks the authorization of this Assembly, as a temporary measure for the biennium of 2008 and 2009, to meet in parallel chambers during one of each annual session in 2008 and 2009. This temporary extension of meeting time will ensure that we completely eliminate the backlog, prevent a new backlog from building up again immediately, and allow us to start an active process of engaging with States parties who ratified the Convention many years ago but have never reported.

The Committee is aware of the significant resource implications of this request. We had the opportunity to brief States parties in an informal meeting on 8 August, and I extend the Committee's sincere appreciation for the expressions of support we received at the time. Today, on behalf of the Committee I urge all Member States to support this request of the Committee and the respective resolution that needs to be adopted so as to secure a sustainable framework for the Committee's work in the future. Such support would be a further confirmation of the priority all States attach to our common commitment to eliminate ongoing discrimination against women and promote gender equality.

Chairperson,

Over the last twenty-five years, the Committee was supported in its work by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations. As per a decision of the former Secretary-General, responsibility for servicing this Committee will be transferred to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as of 1 January 2008. The Committee has discussed this transfer with officials of the Division and the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, as well as the High

Commissioner for Human Rights and officials of her Office. Next week, at the invitation of the Government of Switzerland, the Committee will hold a three-day informal working session in Geneva to discuss a number of substantive issues and matters pertaining to our working methods. We will also have an orientation session with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights intended to facilitate the transfer. On behalf of the Committee, I extend our sincere appreciation to the Government of Switzerland for this invitation.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the Division for the Advancement of Women for the professional and dedicated support provided to the Committee during these past 25 years. The Committee looks forward to maintaining strong links with the Division in the future, or with any new structure within the United Nations that might be entrusted with the promotion of gender equality.

Thank you very much.