

**OPENING STATEMENT
BY
Ms. Naéla Gabr
Chairperson
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against
Women
at the
Forty-fourth session**

20 July 2009

**Excellencies
Distinguished colleagues
Ladies and Gentleman**

I am very pleased to welcome you once again to the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and to the forty-fourth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It is also a great pleasure for me to welcome Ms. Jessica Neuwirth, Director of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in New York.

I am delighted to report that, since our last session, one State has accepted the Convention thereby bringing the total number of States parties to CEDAW to 186. I would like to congratulate the Government of Qatar for its accession to the

Convention and encourage other States to follow their example. I would also like to pay a special tribute to my predecessor, Ms. Dubravka Šimonović, for her efforts which was a significant factor leading to the accession of Qatar to the Convention.

It is also a pleasure for me to report that one further State has accepted the Optional Protocol to the Convention thereby bringing the number of States parties to this important instrument to 97. Let me also congratulate the new State party to the Optional Protocol, Turkmenistan for its accession to this treaty. As you know the Optional Protocol provides the Committee with two important oversight mechanisms: receipt and consideration of individual petitions and the competence to conduct inquiries into grave or systematic violations of the rights in the Convention.

Currently, also, there are 55 States which have accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1 of the Convention on the Committee's meeting time. The latest State party to accept the amendment is Argentina. Further acceptances are required before the amendment enters into force.

Distinguished Colleagues,

It is only a few months since the forty-third session of the Committee ended. However, I have

engaged in quite a few activities in my capacity as a Chairperson of the CEDAW Committee and other issues that may be of interest of the Committee.

Before I do so, I would like to recall that three weeks ago, I participated, with (Ms. Pimentel and Ms. Kaddari) in the ninth Inter-Committee Meeting of human rights treaty bodies and the twenty-first Meeting of Chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies. The outcome of these meetings will be discussed during this session, particularly as the tenth inter-committee meeting is scheduled in December this year. The report of these meetings as presented to the General Assembly is included in members' files. I have asked the Secretariat to ensure that sufficient time is allocated during this session to allow Committee members to discuss thoroughly the important recommendations endorsed by the Meeting of Chairpersons.

In March 2009, on behalf of the Committee, I attended the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women, where I focused on the main outcomes of the past three sessions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. In particular, I touched upon the Committee's working methods, the extension of meeting time, and the transfer of the servicing of the Committee to OHCHR. I also expressed our gratitude to the General Assembly for granting an extension of the Committee's meeting time to three annual sessions of

three weeks, each preceded by a one-week working group, from 2010 onwards. I believe that this decision clearly reflects the commitment of States parties to ensuring compliance by the Committee. Once again, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to all Member States that supported this decision. I also drew attention to the improvements to our Concluding Observations, such as the inclusion of subject headings in the concluding observations, and our new follow-up procedure. I provided information on the Committee's efforts to encourage States to report, indicating that it extends a special invitation to States parties with long overdue initial and periodic reports to submit these by specific future date, failing which it takes up these countries in the absence of a report.

I also indicated that the Committee has taken full advantage of the support provided by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In particular, I highlighted that during its forty-third session, the Committee strengthened its cooperation with other United Nations human rights mechanisms. It met with the Special Rapporteurs on violence against women, and on the right to health, and, in light of the fact that the reports of Haiti were before the Committee, the Independent Expert on Haiti. Some members of the Committee also met informally with the Working Group of the Advisory Committee currently working on draft guidelines on gender-mainstreaming within the UN system. I also indicated

that the Committee continued to work in cooperation and coordination with other treaty bodies on issues of common concern and interest, including through participation in the annual meetings of chairpersons. I informed Member States that during the forty-third session, the Committee's Bureau met with the Bureau of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and that a joint working group has been established with a view to exploring areas of common concern.

From 20 to 24 April 2009, I represented the Committee at the Durban Review Conference. In my statement to the Conference, I stressed the importance of Governments intensifying efforts and cooperation to combat poverty as one of the main root causes of discrimination, segregation, and as an impediment to the advancement of women. I also shared the need for States parties to keep under review and carefully monitor the impact of laws and policies on migrant women with a view to taking remedial measures that effectively respond to the needs of those women, including through using a gender perspective in the action plan for immigrants.

My activities as a Chairperson also included meeting with the media in Egypt to discuss the new law on quotas for women in Parliament and its compliance with the Constitution and article 4 of the Convention. I also met with NGOS, and attended a meeting on CEDAW at the League of Arab States.

In spite of this progress we know that more needs to be done, more efforts are needed from all stakeholders on the implementation of the Convention and the concluding observations if we want to see results on the ground and in the lives of individual women. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should find ways to strengthen its efforts to increase its support to the Committee by allocating additional human and financial resources, as well as providing technical assistance for reporting or implementation of concluding observations to States parties that have such needs.

This year we all should use 30th anniversary of the CEDAW Convention and 10th of the Optional Protocol to raise their visibility and their impact on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Our ultimate goal should be the increase of ratifications of both instruments, and the withdrawal of reservations. We should strive to make this anniversary one of commitments.

In this regard, I am pleased to inform you that some members of the Committee met recently in Washington with representatives of the Government of the United States of America to discuss the possible ratification of Convention. I look forward to our

discussion during the session of this important meeting.

Before turning to our programme of work for this session, I would like to warmly thank the distinguished representatives of UNHCR for the Joint CEDAW and UNHCR Seminar on the Protection of Women of Concern to UNHCR which was held in this room last week. Although I could not participate due to prior commitments, I attach high importance to this event, which I understand was very successful and adopted recommendations which will contribute to strengthening the joint work of CEDAW and UNHCR for the protection of displaced and stateless women and girls worldwide. I will ensure that sufficient time is allocated during the session to discuss these important recommendations.

As you are aware, we have a very full, but interesting agenda during this session. The Committee will consider seven periodic and four initial reports, considering the former in parallel chambers: Chamber A, will consider the periodic reports of Spain , Bhutan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Chamber B, will consider the periodic reports of Denmark, Japan, and Azerbaijan. Switzerland was to be considered in Chamber B, while Argentina would be reviewed in Chamber A. As Argentina has requested that the examination of its report be postponed, Switzerland will be considered in plenary. The initial reports of Tuvalu,

Timor Leste, Liberia and Guinea Bissau will be considered in the Plenary. The Committee will also consider cases under Optional Protocol to the Convention and discuss various issues, such as draft general recommendations on article 2, on older women, and on economic consequences of divorce, which will be tabled by the members of the Committee. We will also meet with many non-governmental organizations, representatives of national human rights institutions and parts of the UN family. I would like to pay particular tribute to these stakeholders who provide such valuable input into our work.

We will take advantage of the Committee's presence in New York to meet with representatives of the Division for the Advancement of Women, UNIFEM, and the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI). These exchanges are of utmost importance in our quest to strengthen the existing linkages between the Committee and these entities, as they are essential to our work.

The Committee will also meet with the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Ms. Gay McDougall, to discuss the recommendations of the Forum on Minority Issues adopted at its first session, as well as the participation of the Committee at the second session of the Forum.

Colleagues and friends,

As we begin our session, I am happy to take any questions you may have before we meet in closed session to organize our work. I would also be delighted to hear from Committee members who have represented the Committee at official meetings or undertaken work related to the activities of the Committee during our closed meetings.

Thank you very much for your attention.