

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**by**  
**Ms. Silvia Pimentel**  
**Chairperson**  
**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against**  
**Women**  
**at the**  
**Fiftieth session**

**3 October 2011**

**Excellencies**  
**Distinguished colleagues**  
**Ladies and Gentleman**

I am very pleased to welcome you to the United Nations Office in Geneva for the fiftieth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Let me start by stating that as a Brazilian woman and a women's rights activist, I am very proud that my President, Dilma Rousseff, was the first woman to open the General Assembly's main annual debate in its 66 year history. President Rousseff told world leaders that women are now occupying the place they deserve in the world. She stated that: *“For the first time in the history of the United Nations, a female voice opens the general debate. It is the*

*voice of democracy and equality, reverberating from this, which has the commitment of being the most representative podium in the world. It is with personal humility, but with my justified pride as a woman, that I meet this historic moment.”* I know that as members of the CEDAW Committee, we were also justifiably proud of this momentous occasion.

I would also like to pay tribute to Nobel Laureate Wangari Muta Maathai, a champion in the global environmental and women’s rights movement who lost her battle with cancer recently. The Secretary-General called Maathai a globally recognized champion for human rights and women’s empowerment and a pioneer in articulating the links between human rights, poverty, environmental protection and security. Her death has left a gaping whole among the ranks of women leaders and her passing is a loss not only for Kenya and Africa, but the entire world.

### **Distinguished Colleagues,**

It has been a little more than two months since our last session ended. I wish to update you on the status of the Convention and Optional Protocol, and also highlight some of the activities that I have engaged in as Chairperson of the CEDAW Committee and other issues that may be of interest to the Committee.

Turning to the Convention, I would like to report that the number of States parties remains at 187. Palau recently signed the Convention on 20 September. In addition,

Singapore partially withdrew its reservation with respect to articles 2 and 16 of the Convention. The amendment to the Convention currently has 64 Contracting States. There are 102 States parties to the Optional Protocol.

Following the forty-ninth session, I attended a regional capacity-building training seminar organized by the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights (CLADEM) in Quito, Ecuador, which focused on national and international strategic litigation in the context of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, as well as the Inter-American system. At the seminar, I spoke about the complaint mechanisms available under the Optional Protocol as well as the new decision of the Committee relating to *Pimentel v. Brazil*, the first case relating to the Latin American and Caribbean region on issues of health and maternal mortality.

I will additionally be addressing the Third Committee on 10 October where I will report on the Committee's activities. I will also engage in an interactive dialogue with the Third Committee for the first time. My address will be circulated to the Committee shortly.

Committee Members have also been involved in CEDAW related activities as well as other panel discussions and seminars relating to women's issues in both

their capacity as members of the CEDAW Committee and in their personal capacities.

Ms. Patten participated in a training seminar for parliamentarians in Turkmenistan from 11 to 17 August and will be participating in another one at the end of the month in Budapest.

Ms. Patten and Ms. Simonovic participated in a mock CEDAW session in Oman from 13 to 17 September. Ms. Simonovic will also be attending a treaty-body strengthening meeting focusing on petitions under the Optional Protocol on 29 October organized by the Human Rights Treaties Division.

In September, Ms. Schulz participated in meetings with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs with respect to gender issues and humanitarian affairs, especially internally displaced persons. Ms. Schulz also participated in a television programme on gender equality issues in Switzerland, which will be aired on channel TSR2. Lastly, she gave an interview at the Swiss Conference of Gender Equality Delegates on knowledge transfer in the field of gender equality. I would also like to congratulate Ms. Schulz on her recent appointment by ECOSOC to the Board of Directors of the United Nations Research and Social Development Institute.

Ms. Popescu was invited by the University of Bristol Law School to participate in a high-level seminar, which was held on 19-20 September, on Implementation of UN

Treaty Body Concluding Observations: The Role of National and Regional Mechanisms in Europe. Ms. Popescu spoke on the role of the treaty bodies, in particular CEDAW, in following up on concluding observations.

Ms. Gabr participated in two workshops – one on mission planning, implementation and management, and – the other on combating human trafficking in peace support operations. Both workshops were organized by the Cairo Centre on Training on Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa in September. With respect to the later, Ms. Gabr delivered a statement on the protection of women and potential trafficking victims in her capacity as chairperson of the National Coordinating Committee on Combating and Preventing Human Trafficking.

In the same capacity, Ms. Gabr also met with NGOs on their role in the protection of women from trafficking, and participated in a national television program on combating trafficking in human beings and the protection of victims of trafficking, especially women. As a CEDAW expert, Ms. Gabr also participated in a national television program on the political participation of women and their role in society.

Ms. Zou was invited by UN Women to the Expert Group Meeting entitled “Enabling rural women’s economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation”, which was held from 20 to 23 September in Accra, Ghana. The outcome of the meeting will be presented at the 56<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which

will consider the topic of empowering rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and other challenges as its priority theme.

Ms. Awori just returned from Zimbabwe where she gave a presentation on the CEDAW Convention and its Optional Protocol, as well as on securing women's human rights during times of change. The training seminar was organized by UN Women, UNDP, the OHCHR and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission.

In this regard, it is noted that the Committee, at the last session, started drafting a statement on rural women. It is hoped that the Committee will finalize the statement at this session so that it can be adopted in time for the upcoming CSW session in February 2012.

I would kindly ask those Committee members who participated in panel discussions, seminars and in expert meetings during these past few months to please provide copies of your statements to the Secretariat so that they can be circulated to the Committee during the session.

### **Distinguished Colleagues,**

We have a very full, but interesting agenda during this session. The Committee will consider eighth periodic reports, several of which are initial reports. During the first week, the Committee will consider the reports of Oman, Paraguay, Montenegro, and Mauritius, and during the

second week, the Committee will take-up the reports of Lesotho, Chad, Kuwait and Cote d'Ivoire.

The Committee will also consider cases under the Optional Protocol to the Convention. It is noted that at the last session, the Committee adopted recommendations in relation to the admissibility and merits of three communications: *Pimentel v. Brazil*, *Komova v. Bulgaria* and *Abramova v. Belarus*.

- In *Pimentel v. Brazil*, the Committee found that the State party had failed to secure the safety during pregnancy and childbirth of the daughter of the author, in contravention of the obligations contained in article 12, in relation to health, in particular pregnancy and childbirth; article 2 (c), in relation to access to justice; and article 2 (e), in relation to the State's obligation to exercise due diligence.
- In *Komova v. Bulgaria*, the Committee found that the State party failed to provide the author with effective protection against domestic violence, in breach of article 2(c), (d), (e) and (f), which embodies the core obligation by States parties to address all aspects of their legal obligations under the Convention to respect, protect and fulfill women's right to non-discrimination and to the enjoyment of equality; in conjunction with article 1, and article 5 (c) in relation to discrimination against women and social and cultural patterns of conduct; in conjunction with article 16(1) in relation to to discrimination in marriage and family relations; and

general recommendation 19 of the Committee on violence against women.

- In *Abramova v. Belarus*, the Committee found that actions by State agents constituted sexual harassment and discrimination within the meanings of articles 1 and 5(a) of the Convention and general recommendation 19 of the Committee on violence against women.

The Committee will additionally discuss the draft general recommendation on the economic consequences of marriage and its dissolution with a view toward adopting it at our next session. The Committee will also discuss the progress of the draft joint CEDAW/CRC general recommendation on harmful practices and the status of the draft general recommendation on the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict and post conflict. I will also present to the Committee a concept paper on access to justice.

The Committee will moreover consider reports and information received under its follow-up procedure to concluding observations and will discuss working methods within the context of the on-going discussions on treaty-body strengthening.

We will furthermore meet with many non-governmental organizations, representatives of national human rights institutions and parts of the UN family and other organizations. I would like to pay particular tribute to



these stakeholders who provide such valuable input into our work.

The Committee will also hold meetings with the Human Rights Committee, and the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women in Law and Practice.

**Colleagues and friends,**

I also would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Jakob Schneider who was recently promoted to Secretary of the Committee on Migrant Workers. Mr. Schneider has been a member of the core Secretariat team working with CEDAW for many years. His expertise has always been very much appreciated not only with respect to the Convention but the Optional Protocol as well. We wish you, Jakob, the best of luck in your new functions.

I also would like to convey that Ms. Jaising informed me that she will not be able to attend this session.

At this juncture, 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.

Thank you very much for your attention.

---