

**OPENING STATEMENT
BY
Ms. Dubravka Šimonovic
Chairperson
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against
Women
at the
Forty-third session

19 January 2009**

**Excellencies
Distinguished colleagues
Ladies and Gentleman**

I am very pleased to welcome you once again to the United Nations Office at Geneva, and to the forty-third session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. I am particularly pleased to welcome the new members of the Committee to this session and am sure that we will all greatly benefit from their expertise in the field of women's rights and gender issues. It is also a great pleasure for me to welcome Mr. Bacre Ndiaye, Chief of the Human Rights Council and Treaties Division.

While there remain 185 States parties to the Convention, I am delighted to report that two States accepted the Optional Protocol thereby bringing the number of States parties to this important instrument to

96. Let me congratulate the two new States parties to that treaty, Australia and Mozambique, and encourage other States to follow their example.

Currently, also, there are 53 States which have accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1 of the Convention on the Committee's meeting time.

Distinguished Colleagues,

It is only a few months since the forty-second session of the Committee ended. However, I would like to report on the activities I have undertaken in my capacity as a Chairperson of the CEDAW Committee and other issues that may be of interest of the Committee.

I participated in the third World Congress on Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, which took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 25 to 28 November 2008. The Congress was also attended by Mr Bacre Ndiaye of behalf of the Office of HCHR who presented its work on this topic as well as work of relevant special procedures and treaty bodies that attended this meeting, such as the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child pornography and child prostitution, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery.

I addressed a workshop on trafficking in children and highlighted the gender dimension of trafficking and the work of the CEDAW Committee under article 6 of the Convention. It is important to note that the Rio Outcome document in its Plan of Action calls for the ratification of the CEDAW Convention as an important legal instrument in the fight against sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. This is a good step of linking the CEDAW Convention with other relevant human right treatise in this field but this is not yet sufficient for full inclusion of gender perspective in the outcome document.

From 19 to 20 November 2008, I participated in a Colloquium on the Impact of Violence against Women on the Family, in Doha, Qatar. This meeting was also attended by Ms Yakin E Turk, the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Ms Rachel Mayanja Special Adviser of the Secretary General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, and Ms Jane Connors, Senior Human Rights Officer. The Colloquium addressed the violence against women, international and regional instruments as well as laws and policy reform and the importance of data collection and the use of indicators on violence against women. As a follow-up to the Colloquium, the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and myself co-signed a letter addressed to the First Lady of Qatar inviting her to encourage her Government to ratify CEDAW and its Optional Protocol.

I also attended the eighth Inter-Committee meeting from 1 to 3 December 2008, together with Ms. Zerdani and Mr. Flinterman. Further to the recommendation of the 7th Inter-Committee meeting, this meeting was dedicated exclusively to the issue of harmonization of working methods. As a novelty, the Inter-Committee meeting granted the NGOs the opportunity to speak under each agenda item and thus engage in a dialogue with the members.

The Inter-Committee meeting reiterated the view that it provides a forum for harmonisation of working methods and noted that majority of treaty bodies has adopted revised guidelines. As of 2010, State parties would be urged to use new reporting system as a whole. The ICM also reiterated the need to develop effective cooperation between the treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council and strengthen institutional links among them. It recommended that treaty bodies discuss this issue and other points of agreement and to make proposals that could be discussed at the ninth Inter-Committee meeting in 2009.

From to 15 to 16 December 2008, I attended the first inaugural session of the Forum on Minority Issues which focused on the minorities and the right to education. Independent expert on minority issues Ms Gay McDougal invited among others all treaty bodies to participate in discussion and the elaboration of outcome document. At this meeting, I briefly described CEDAW recommendations on minority women and girls and stressed importance of inclusion of a gender perspective

in the outcome document. This is an area that could be further discussed with the Independent expert on minorities.

As you know, this is the last statement that I will make as Chairperson of CEDAW as, in a few minutes, the Committee will elect its new Chairperson. I feel privileged to have served as Chair of this Committee and would like to recall some of the achievements we have accomplished over the past two years but also to point out some challenges in front of the Committee.

During that period, we have been granted additional meeting time, examined 66 reports and cleared a backlog. We have also achieved a long term solution of three meetings per year starting from 2010 but this should be matched with timely reporting from State Parties that should clear their reporting delays. The most important challenge we were faced with was the move of our Committee to Geneva. Our cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has contributed to a smooth transition to this Office while allowing us to maintain good relations with the Division on the Advancement of Women. In this regard, we have also made clear that we wish to be associated with the new gender architecture once it becomes operational and for that reason to continue to have one session in New York.

We have also adopted a General Recommendation on Women Migrant Workers but we are still lagging behind in our work on a draft general recommendation

on Article 2. We have started work on two new general recommendations, on older women and on economic consequences of divorce.

During this period we have focused our efforts on implementation of the Convention and concluding observations and on non reporting State parties.

In our new reporting guidelines we are requesting information on the implementation of previous concluding observations. We have also changed periodicity between constructive dialoged to at least 4 years and prolonged periodicity but on the other hand we have introduced a new follow-up procedure with respect to implementation of concluding observations on two urgent issues within two years. We have also initiated the first follow-up visit of this Committee in Luxembourg that could be seen as a good practice that should be supported by the Office of the HCHR for developing countries.

Our focus on non reporting states resulted in request to 16 States parties with long overdue initial reports to submit all these reports within a specific timeframe. We have also started to target States whose periodic reports are overdue for more than ten years and invited 4 State parties in such situation to submit their overdue reports.

In spite of this progress we must admit that more needs to be done, more efforts are needed from all stakeholders on implementation of the Convention and concluding observations if we want to see results at the ground and in lives of individual woman. To achieve

further progress the Office of the HCHR should continue and increase its support to the Committee by allocating additional human and financial resources for our work 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.

Let me conclude by thanking you very sincerely, dear colleagues, for your support during these two years and by wishing the new Chairperson a very productive and successful mandate. Thank you.