



**Convention on the Elimination
of all Forms of Discrimination
Against Women**

Distr.
GENERAL

CEDAW/C/SR.129
7 March 1988

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

MAR 21 1988

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 129th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 3 March 1988, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BERNARD

CONTENTS

Ways and means of implementing article 21 of the Convention (continued)

Other matters

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, Department of Conference Services, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

WAYS AND MEANS OF IMPLEMENTING ARTICLE 21 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

1. The CHAIRPERSON invited the Committee to continue its consideration of the text of the draft recommendation on traditional practices, as revised by Working Group II.
2. Ms. CORTI said that she preferred the Working Group's proposal to Ms. Evatt's original draft, because the recommendation would be more effective if it were not so strongly worded. It was unfortunate, however, that the Working Group had not mentioned the condemnation of the practice by the Commission on Human Rights. In fact, the Committee was not competent to issue the kind of order implicit in the original proposal. Its request for studies on the status of women under Islamic laws and customs had already stirred controversy in other United Nations bodies. It would not be politic to take any more risks. In any case, the practice of female circumcision in Africa would ultimately be eliminated not through legislation, but through educational programmes.
3. Ms. PILATAXI de ARENAS said that under article 5 (a) of the Convention, the Committee was empowered to issue forceful recommendations. However, she agreed with Ms. Corti and with Ms. Soumare, the Malian expert, who had expressed her views earlier.
4. Ms. SINEGIORGIS said that the Committee should obtain studies done by other United Nations bodies, such as the Commission on Human Rights and the World Health Organization (WHO), and by non-governmental organizations. She doubted that the Working Group's proposal would be very effective. She knew for a fact that legislation passed in certain countries had either gone unimplemented, or forced circumcision underground. An information campaign would be a far more practical measure. For example, her country, Ethiopia, was working with the Economic Commission for Africa on regional educational programmes. However, in the belief that the Committee should not remain silent on such an important question, she would support the draft proposed by the Working Group. A paragraph should be added, however, supporting the work of other United Nations bodies on the matter.
5. Ms. GUAN Mingqian said that the original proposal was too strong and the Working Group's draft too vague. It was not clear in the second text that "traditional practices" referred to female circumcision. As worded, it could just as well be referring to traditional practices everywhere, and, if misconstrued, could discourage countries from acceding to the Convention. On the other hand, if the Committee specified female circumcision, it might have to name other traditional practices which discriminated against women. For all those reasons, the Committee should defer its consideration of such a delicate subject.
6. Ms. FORDE said that she agreed in principle with the recommendation, but opposed singling out one continent. If the Committee issued any recommendation at all, it should be in the form of the more generally worded Working Group's proposal. Furthermore, the matter should be submitted to a vote and each expert's vote should be reflected in the Committee's report.

/...

7. Ms. EVATT, supported by Ms. Montenegro de Fletcher, said that if the Working Group's proposal was adopted, the words "such as female circumcision" should be added to the preamble. Her original proposal should be taken up again at a future session, once experts had seen the studies mentioned by Ms. Sinegiorgis.
8. Ms. NOVIKOVA agreed with Ms. Corti and Ms. Sinegiorgis. The Committee should not take a hasty decision without more information, and should be guided by its experience with decision 4 on Islamic law.
9. Ms. AKAMATSU agreed with Ms. Sinegiorgis, stressing that out of solidarity with African women, the Committee could begin by expressing its concern.
10. The CHAIRPERSON asked Committee members if they preferred to accept the Working Group's proposal as it was, adopt it with Ms. Evatt's amendment, or defer its consideration.
11. Ms. OESER, supported by Ms. Gonzalez Martinez and Ms. Veliz de Villalvilla, said that she favoured deferring consideration of the Working Group's proposal, and did not approve of the amendment. She also agreed that the Committee should seek more information.
12. The CHAIRPERSON asked Ms. Soumare whether the Committee should defer consideration of the text in order to seek more information.
13. Ms. SOUMARE said that the issue had become sensitive in Nairobi because of the way it had been handled, not because it had been raised. Her own country, Mali, was actively dealing with the problem. She did not oppose deferral. However, the Working Group's draft would be suitable, even if amended to specify "female excision". The original proposal would have been offensive to Africans.
14. Ms. LAIOU-ANTONIOU said that there was no reason to defer action. The dangers of excision were already clear and the Committee needed no further information. The Commission on Human Rights and other international forums had already condemned the practice. The Committee would be remiss if it did not.
15. The CHAIRPERSON said that in keeping with the majority view, consideration of the Working Group's proposal would be deferred until more information could be obtained. At Ms. Evatt's request, her original proposal would also be deferred for consideration at a future session.
16. It was so decided.
17. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether the Committee could accept the wording of the draft recommendation on resources.
18. Ms. EVATT said that the purpose of the draft recommendation was to strengthen the relationship between the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs and the Centre for Human Rights; it was therefore proposed that the Committee should meet from time to time in Geneva, as well as New York and Vienna.

19. Ms. CREYDT (Secretary of the Committee) reminded the Committee that there could be financial implications if the Committee met in Geneva.

20. Ms. NOVIKOVA expressed concern about the financial implications of meeting in New York and Geneva in addition to Vienna.

21. Ms. GONZALEZ MARTINEZ noted that if there were problems of co-ordination between the offices in New York and Vienna, there would be even greater problems if a third location were added.

22. After a brief discussion, the CHAIRPERSON said that if she heard no objection, she would take it that the Committee accepted the following wording of the draft recommendation on resources:

"The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

"Noting General Assembly resolutions 40/39, 41/108 and in particular 42/60, paragraph 14, which invites the Committee and the States parties to consider the question of holding further sessions of the Committee at Vienna,

"Bearing in mind General Assembly resolution 42/121 and in particular paragraph 11, which requests the Secretary-General to strengthen co-ordination between the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat in relation to the implementation of human rights treaties and the servicing of treaty bodies,

"Recommends:

"1. That they continue to support proposals for strengthening the co-ordination between the Centre for Human Rights in Geneva and the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs in Vienna in relation to the servicing of the Committee;

"2. That they support proposals that the Committee meet alternately in New York and Vienna;

"3. That they take all necessary and appropriate steps to ensure that adequate resources and services are available to the Committee to assist it in its functions under the Convention and in particular that full-time staff are available to help the Committee to prepare for its sessions and during its sessions;

"4. That they ensure that supplementary reports and material are submitted to the Secretariat in due time to be translated into the official languages of the United Nations in time for distribution and consideration by the Committee."

23. It was so decided.

24. The CHAIRPERSON said that if she heard no objection, she would take it that the Committee accepted the following wording of the draft recommendation on publicity:

"The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

"Noting General Assembly resolution 42/60 adopted on 30 November 1987,

"Recommends:

"(a) That States parties take appropriate steps to ensure the dissemination of:

- The Convention;
- The reports of States parties under article 18;
- The reports of the Committee in the language of the States concerned;

"(b) That the States parties seek the assistance of the Secretary-General and the Department of Public Information in providing translations of the Convention and the reports of the Committee;

"(c) That the States parties include in their initial and periodic reports the action taken in respect of this recommendation."

25. It was so decided.

26. The CHAIRPERSON said that if she heard no objection, she would take it that the Committee accepted the following wording of the draft recommendation on the implementation of article 8 of the Convention:

"The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

"Having considered the reports of States parties submitted in accordance with article 18 of the Convention,

"Recommends to States parties that they take further direct measures in accordance with article 4 of the Convention to ensure the full implementation of article 8 of the Convention and to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations."

27. It was so decided.

28. The CHAIRPERSON said that, if she heard no objection, she would take it that the Committee accepted the following wording of the draft recommendation on the specialized agencies:

(The Chairperson)

"The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

"Recalling the provisions of article 22 of the Convention and its previous decision relating to the assistance provided by specialized agencies in its work,

"Considering the important role of the specialized agencies in the implementation of the Convention,

"Welcoming the contribution of UNESCO, FAO and ILO,

"Invites the specialized agencies:

"1. To continue providing information within the framework of the Committee's agenda;

"2. To provide information on specific activities undertaken in areas falling within the scope of their activities in order to ensure broader dissemination of the Convention;

"3. To undertake activities to ensure broader implementation within their spheres of competence;

"And also invites specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations to follow the work of the Committee."

29. It was so decided.

OTHER MATTERS

30. Ms. SINEGIORGIS said that it would be useful for the Chairperson to attend the informal meeting of the States parties to the Convention, to be held the following morning, to explain the Committee's need for adequate servicing.

31. Ms. TALLAWY agreed that the Chairperson should consult the States parties in an endeavour to improve the level of services provided.

32. Ms. GONZALEZ MARTINEZ noted that the Committee would be hard-pressed to complete its work on time since several parts of its report had not yet been issued. The fault lay with the Secretariat, which had failed to provide adequate secretarial, translation and legal services.

33. Ms. LAIOU-ANTONIOU agreed that the level of servicing had been inadequate.

34. The CHAIRPERSON said that she would convey the sentiments expressed by the Committee to the States parties.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.