



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

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Eighth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 133rd MEETING

Held at the Vienna International Centre, Vienna,  
on Tuesday, 21 February 1989, at 9 30 a m

Chairperson    Ms    EVATT

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The meeting was called to order at 10 05 a m

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK (continued)

1 The CHAIRPERSON said that, since the expert from Equatorial Guinea had not yet arrived, the Committee could not now take up agenda item 5. She suggested that the time be used to continue discussion of organizational matters.

2 Nicaragua had requested that its report should be dealt with during the first week of the session, and she suggested that it might be considered on the morning of Thursday, 23 February.

3 It was so decided

4 Ms ILIC suggested that, in deciding the order in which reports were to be presented, the Committee should try to achieve a better balance, or mix, between countries in different regions. For example, it might have been desirable for the report of Belgium to be scheduled to follow that of Equatorial Guinea.

5 She further suggested that the dates for the Committee's sessions might be changed either to the last two weeks in January or to the second half of March, in order to avoid a clash with the Human Rights Committee. That would help to solve the difficulties experienced by members such as herself, who were required to attend meetings of both bodies. It would be preferable for meetings of all human rights treaty bodies to be held in the same city, so that members of one would have the opportunity of observing the proceedings of the others.

6 Lastly, she noted that two publications had recently been issued which could have a considerable impact on the Committee's work. The first was entitled Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments (ST/HR/1/Rev 3), and the second Human Rights: Status of International Instruments (ST/HR/5). The latter was particularly useful, in that it gave information on all reservations made by States parties to international instruments, thus facilitating comparisons. She urged that the Secretariat request the Centre for Human Rights in Geneva to provide members of the Committee with a copy of each of the publications.

7 Ms GONZALEZ MARTINEZ agreed that in its consideration of reports the Committee should aim for a better balance, not only between countries in different geographical regions, but also between countries at different levels of development and with different economic and social systems. On the matter of dates for sessions, the last two weeks in January or the last week in January and the first week in February would be preferable, because they would allow the Secretariat time to prepare for the session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and would also make it possible for the Meeting of States Parties to follow immediately after CEDAW. She also agreed that it would be helpful if ways could be found of ensuring that the various human rights treaty bodies could meet in parallel in the same venue, that would facilitate co-ordination between them.

8 After a brief discussion concerning the scheduling of consideration of Nicaragua's report, the CHAIRPERSON explained that the Nicaraguan delegation was unable to prolong its stay in Vienna until Monday, 27 February.

9 Ms SINEGIORGIS said that the difficulties that had arisen in scheduling the consideration of reports were unfortunate, and served to highlight the importance of reconsidering the order in which reports were presented.

(Ms Sinegiorgis)

10 She agreed that it was important to schedule CEDAW sessions so that they did not clash with sessions of related United Nations bodies which members might have to attend. Dates for the forthcoming session should be decided before the end of the current session, as was the practice with other United Nations committees.

11 Ms BERNARD urged that a fixed date be set for the Committee's sessions, to avoid the need for juggling with dates every year.

12 Ms EL-TALLAWY agreed that the Committee should schedule its sessions in close co-ordination with other United Nations bodies, in particular, it should time them so as to permit the submission of a report to the Commission on the Status of Women.

13 She suggested that the Committee might also discuss how best to use the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Convention to promote implementation of the Convention in the various countries, and thus to further the cause of the advancement of women. One approach might be to use the knowledge acquired in studying the various reports that had been submitted over the past ten years as a basis for a kind of combined report, or compendium, on the subject of women's development. Such a compendium could be of great assistance to women's groups and associations in States which were parties to the Convention in their efforts to improve the status of women.

14 The CHAIRPERSON invited Ms Sellami-Meslem to respond to points raised concerning the timing of the Committee's sessions.

15 Ms SELLAMI-MESLEM (Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that, because of the large number of meetings held in Vienna in the first quarter of the year, there were limitations on the interpretation teams and meeting rooms available, and the Committee secretariat had to adapt to the situation. For the year 1990, the dates 22 January - 3 February had been provisionally proposed. Those dates took into account the fact that later in the spring the Division would be busy with preparations for the Commission on the Status of Women, which was normally held either in March or April, as well as with preparations for seminars and expert groups. The earlier date would avoid clashing with the Geneva session of the Commission on Human Rights, and would also allow time for preparation of the Committee's report to the Commission on the Status of Women. The Secretariat had had to prepare for a number of meetings already that year, including the Interregional Seminar in Greece in January, and she appealed for understanding of the constraints under which it was working.

16 In response to the request made by Ms Ilić, the Secretariat would do its best to obtain copies of the two publications mentioned for members of the Committee before the end of the session. If that was not possible, it would send them by post. If financial resources permitted, French, Spanish and Arabic versions of the "Compendium of international conventions concerning the status of women" would be prepared.

17 Regarding the scheduling of the consideration of reports, she said that normally representatives of Governments preferred the Secretariat to give specific dates for the consideration of reports, since they had other responsibilities which meant that their stay could not be extended indefinitely.

18 Ms ILIC said she was well aware of the economic constraints experienced by Governments. Her proposal had been for a better mix in the order in which reports were considered, so that, if for any reason a State party's representative should fail to appear to present his or her report, that representative's place could be taken by the representative of another State party which was permanently represented in Vienna and therefore had no difficulties in attending meetings.

19 Time that was made available because of the non-appearance of representatives could be used either for discussing improvements in the organization of the Committee's work, or for further exploring members' interpretations of specific articles of the Convention (as was the practice, for example, in the Human Rights Committee).

20 Ms GONZALEZ MARTINEZ supported the suggestion that the Committee should decide on the date of its next session before the end of the current session.

21 The point made in regard to participation of representatives of States parties at meetings only confirmed the view expressed by members on a number of previous occasions that it was easier for sessions to be held in New York, because almost all States parties had permanent missions there.

22 Ms LAIOU-ANTONIOU, referring to the Interregional Seminar held in Greece in January, suggested that the Committee should begin considering which countries might host future seminars.

23 The CHAIRPERSON said that a seminar was already arranged for 1989 in Guatemala, and the USSR had offered to host one in 1990, suggestions for subsequent years would be welcome.

24 Ms FORDE, referring to the question of the dates of sessions, asked whether March would be a convenient time for the annual session.

25 Ms SELLAMI-MESLEM (Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that the Commission on the Status of Women held its annual session in March, so the Committee could not meet then.

26 Ms SINEGIORGIS said that if the Committee did not meet at a fixed time every year, it should at least decide on the date of its next session before adjourning.

27 Ms CORTI said that the Committee seemed to be at the mercy of outside events. For the sake of its own prestige, it must operate according to a fixed timetable and avoid yielding to pressure from other bodies.

28 Ms BERNARD agreed. Other events, such as seminars, could be scheduled to fit in with the dates of the Committee's sessions. She asked whether the meeting of States parties would follow the Committee session in early 1990.

29 Ms CREYDT (Secretary of the Committee) said that intergovernmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, tended to meet according to a fixed timetable. The Committee on Conferences met in September. The request for a fixed date for the Committee's sessions would be put to the Department of Conference Services.

30 Ms PILATAXI DE ARENAS expressed gratitude to the Government of Greece and to the Division for the Advancement of Women for the efficient organization of the recent Interregional Seminar. Unfortunately, not all the developing countries had

(Ms Pilataxi de Arenas)

been able to send representatives, owing to financial constraints. Her own Government, for example, had recently embarked on an austerity programme. She wondered if resources could be made available to finance the attendance of Committee members at such seminars.

31 Ms LAIOU-ANTONIOU, referring to the timing of the Committee's sessions, expressed her preference for late January. She too felt it would be best to have a fixed date. With regard to the Seminar in Greece, it had been necessary to restrict invitations to participants from third world countries and from those seeking assistance in the preparation of periodic reports. However, it was always useful for experts to attend such seminars.

32 Ms SOUMARE said that the seminars were extremely valuable to States parties in preparing their reports, but that there were language problems involved for a number of African countries.

33 Ms SINEGIORGIS, referring to rule 2 of the Committee's rules of procedure, said that, in her experience with regard to past sessions, the membership had not been consulted on the timing of sessions. She proposed that, before the adjournment of the present session, a formal decision should be made on the dates of the next session.

34 The CHAIRPERSON suggested that the Secretariat be asked to provide a timetable of meetings and conferences for the relevant period during 1990, to enable the Committee to make that decision.

35 Ms GUAN Minqian expressed a preference for fixed dates for the Committee's sessions. As for the language problems with the seminars, she suggested that they could be organized on an alternating basis for English and French speakers.

36 Ms NOVIKOVA agreed that a fixed timetable for the Committee's sessions would facilitate matters for everyone and improve the standing of the Committee. It was also important to know exactly when reports of States parties would be considered.

37 The CHAIRPERSON asked the secretariat what the implications would be of having a fixed date for the Committee's sessions.

38 Ms SELLAMI-MESLEM (Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that late January or early February would be ideal for the Committee's sessions. A decision for 1990 could be made immediately if the Committee met in Vienna. If it was to meet in New York, the date could not be confirmed until later. The Commission on the Status of Women could not meet in January or February because the documentation for its session was prepared during those months.

39 The CHAIRPERSON said that the Secretariat must take account of the Committee's wish to alternate its sessions between Vienna and New York. As for attendance at seminars, the Secretariat should do its utmost to ensure that every Committee member had the opportunity to attend one or more seminars during her term of office.

40 Ms BERNARD pointed out that the next seminar, in Guatemala, would be for Spanish speakers. Many Caribbean countries had ratified the Convention and, to avoid language problems for them, she suggested that a seminar should be held in due course for English-speaking Caribbean countries.

41. Ms SELLAMI-MESLEM (Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that the idea was to hold seminars using the different working languages on a rotating basis

42 The CHAIRPERSON asked Committee members for suggestions on the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Convention

43 Ms GONZALEZ MARTINEZ said that there were several dates involved, since the Convention had been opened for signature in 1979, but had not entered into force until 1980, whereas the Committee had started work in 1982 She supported the suggestion for an updated compendium on the implementation of the Convention It should not be forgotten, however, how much work went into preparing such a compendium The expenditure of time and effort should be borne in mind when the Committee considered its programme of work

44 The CHAIRPERSON suggested that the question of an updated compendium should be referred to Working Group II The existing compendium could be updated on a continuing basis, taking one or more articles each year

45 Ms FORDE suggested that a television documentary should be produced to commemorate the Convention's first ten years Documentary films by the United Nations were often excellent, and very successful in disseminating information on a world-wide basis A good television film could give a high profile to the Convention and to the work of the Committee

46 Ms LAIOU-ANTONIOU said that, on the tenth anniversary of the Convention, those States which had not ratified the Convention should be sent a telex urging them to do so

47 Ms ILIC said that it was not the Committee's place to call upon States to ratify the Convention, such matters should go through the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council However, it was already too late for those bodies to do anything in commemoration of the tenth anniversary In any case, she felt that the task of the Committee was to raise the level of awareness of the Convention, a task which was best effected at national level, and she urged those present to seek to ensure that knowledge and awareness of the rights of women were spread in their own countries

48 Ms SAYOGYO supported Ms Forde's suggestion concerning the making of a film, and wondered whether the Secretariat should not study whether it was financially possible to make a publicity film concerning the aims and results of the United Nations Decade for Women She had been distressed to note at a recent conference on motherhood and the child that most participants had been unaware of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and agreed that there was a need to raise awareness of it, particularly in countries which had not ratified it

49 Ms CORTI thought there was a need to increase the prestige of the Committee, and agreed with the view that pressure should be exerted at the national level There was indeed a lack of awareness of the Convention world-wide, and although some countries were already making preparations to commemorate the Convention, any national moves must be reinforced by international action A television film would be an excellent mechanism for achieving that aim, although there was a need to consider exactly what the message of such a film should be In her view, the film should stress the successes of the Convention in terms of national legislation enacted with a view to removing obstacles that faced women

50 Ms BERNARD agreed that national action must have priority, as it was individual States that must ratify the Convention. Her view was that the Committee should concentrate on celebrating its own tenth anniversary in 1992, not least for financial reasons.

51 Ms UKEJE said that the Committee must do something to disseminate information on the Convention, and thought that a United Nations publicity film was a suitable way of achieving that end.

52 Ms SAYOGYO said that an important message to be communicated was that social and cultural factors, independent of legislation, might adversely affect women's place in the decision-making process in societies and at national and international levels.

53 Ms GUAN Mingqian said that the main purpose of celebrating the anniversary of the Convention was to encourage States to ratify it. She supported the suggestion for a television documentary, and wondered if the United Nations might not be asked to produce posters, postage stamps and postcards to publicize the Convention.

54 Ms LAIOU-ANTONIOU said that, within the United Nations system, interaction between the Committee and bodies such as UNESCO and ILO was rather poor. The Committee received reports from such organizations and they sent observers to the meetings of the Committee, but the Committee had no direct access to their experience and expertise and she suggested that the observers might be asked to deliver oral presentations to the Committee.

The meeting rose at 11 45 a.m.