



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

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 46th MEETING

Held at the Vienna International Centre, Vienna,
on Monday, 21 January 1985, at 2.30 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BERNARD

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

SOLEMN DECLARATION BY THE NEW MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE (continued)

1. Ms. VELIZ DE VILLALVILLA made a solemn declaration as provided for by rule 10 of the rules of procedure.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

2. Ms. CREYDT (Secretary of the Committee) informed the Committee of the resources available to it at its current session. It was proposed that morning meetings should begin at 10 a.m. and afternoon meetings at 2.30 p.m. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 38/32, she drew the Committee's attention to the need to make the most effective possible use of conference resources and invited members to make suggestions in that regard.

SESSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE IN 1986 AND 1987

3. The CHAIRPERSON recalled that, at the previous meeting, the Assistant Secretary-General for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs had suggested that consideration should be given to holding all future sessions of the Committee in Vienna. She had been advised that the term "United Nations Headquarters" could be interpreted to include the United Nations Office at Vienna; however, in rule 3 of the rules of procedure (A/38/45, annex III) the sense seemed to require the term to mean United Nations Headquarters in New York. In that case, a decision to hold all future meetings of the Committee in Vienna would make it necessary to amend rule 3.

4. Ms. GONZALEZ said that in her opinion the term "Headquarters" referred only to the New York Headquarters. Her own preference was for both the 1986 and the 1987 sessions to be held in New York.

5. Ms. SINEGIORGIS agreed that the term "Headquarters" meant the New York Headquarters. She saw no reason for reversing a decision made by the States parties to the Convention.

6. In view of the Committee's need to draw the widest possible public attention to its activities, it might be desirable to hold sessions in places other than New York and Vienna also.

7. Ms. SELLAMI-MESLEM (Director, Advancement of Women Branch) said that the suggestion that all future sessions should be held in Vienna had been prompted by budgetary constraints in relation to the transport of Secretariat staff and documentation between Vienna and New York.

8. Ms. CARON said the Committee could decide to hold future meetings in Vienna without amending rule 3 of the rules of procedure. One of the reasons for the original decision to alternate sessions between Vienna and New York had been the increased publicity to be achieved by that arrangement. It was her feeling, however, that the Committee did not in fact attract very much attention in New York, whereas the atmosphere in Vienna was altogether more hospitable. For that reason, and in view of the financial constraints just mentioned, she saw no objection to making Vienna the permanent site of the Committee's sessions.

9. Ms. IDER said that the rules of procedure had been adopted after extensive discussion of the subject of the venue for the Committee's sessions. It had been decided as a compromise to hold sessions alternately in New York and Vienna, although New York was probably preferable from the point of view of regularity of press coverage and access to representatives of Governments of United Nations Member States. She felt that it would be unwise to amend the rules of procedure in the way suggested.

10. Ms. BIRYUKOVA said that the opportunities for publicity were indeed greater in New York than in Vienna. In 1983, for example, a special press conference had been organized for the Committee and press releases on its activities had been issued every day. In her opinion, the Committee should abide by its decision to meet alternately in New York and Vienna.

11. Ms. OESER (Rapporteur) said that rule 3 of the rules of procedure and article 20 of the Convention left the Committee free to decide ad hoc on any venue it deemed suitable.

12. Ms. ILIĆ drew the Committee's attention to paragraph 35 of the report of the first session (A/38/45), where it was indicated that the costs of sessions held in New York or Vienna would be covered by the United Nations. Moreover, General Assembly resolutions relating to bodies similar to the Committee, such as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee on Human Rights, generally included a paragraph requesting the Secretary-General to provide the resources necessary for the proper functioning of those bodies. In her view, the absence of such a provision for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women could only be an oversight. The Committee should therefore request the General Assembly to remedy that omission, in which case there would be no obstacle to the holding of sessions in New York and Vienna alternately and no need to amend the rules of procedure.

13. The CHAIRPERSON said that article 17, paragraph 9, of the Convention required the Secretary-General to provide the necessary staff and facilities for the effective performance of the functions of the Committee. She therefore felt that the Committee need not accept the constraints which the Secretariat wished to impose on it, but should insist forcefully on its statutory right to the provision of adequate resources. The financial implications of meeting at alternating venues had been well known at the time of adoption of the rules of procedure.

14. Ms. VELIZ DE VILLALVILLA agreed that the decision to meet alternately in New York and Vienna should be upheld and that the 1986 session should be convened in New York.

15. Ms. LAIOU-ANTONIOU said that no new issues had arisen which would cause the Committee to change its earlier decision. Financial considerations were constantly cited in many countries to hamper action to prevent discrimination against women and it was unacceptable that they should also be evoked to prevent the Committee from holding a session in New York, where it could obtain useful publicity and make useful contacts.

16. Ms. EVATT said she would be reluctant to see the Committee's decision changed. Under article 21 of the Convention, the Committee had to report annually to the General Assembly on its activities through the Economic and Social Council

(Ms. Evatt)

and make suggestions and recommendations. If such suggestions were to be effective, it should make its presence felt in those bodies and should therefore be seen in New York at regular intervals. On the other hand, the Committee should be sensitive to the needs and problems of the Secretariat and should do everything possible to ensure that the Secretary-General provided the necessary staff and facilities as stipulated in article 17, paragraph 9, of the Convention.

17. Ms. MUKAYIRANGA said that rule 3 of the rules of procedure made it clear that the sessions of the Committee could be held in either New York or Vienna and the Committee should take full advantage of the rule.

18. The CHAIRPERSON said she understood that the Assistant Secretary-General had been urging the Committee to hold all its sessions in Vienna because that was the headquarters of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, which dealt with women's issues.

19. Ms. SMITH said that, as no new, decisive factors had arisen to make the Committee change its earlier decision and that on the contrary various very good reasons had been put forward for holding alternate sessions in New York, the Committee should maintain its decision to hold its next session in New York.

20. Ms. GONZALEZ said that the Committee's decision to hold its 1986 session in New York had been endorsed by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. A decision on the venue of the 1987 session could be made in 1986. However, in view of the lack of a paragraph in the General Assembly resolution on the matter (A/RES/39/130) asking the Secretary-General to provide secretarial support and facilities when the Committee met in New York, she suggested that a paragraph should be included in the report on the current session stating that it had confirmed its decision to hold its next session in New York and expressing the hope that the Secretary-General would provide the necessary staff and financial resources.

21. Ms. MUKAYIRANGA agreed that the decision should be maintained, since there had been no change in the reasons upon which it had originally been based.

22. The CHAIRPERSON said there appeared to be consensus that the next session at least should be held in New York. The Committee might, however, reserve the right to vary the venues of future sessions as it thought fit. She supported the suggestion that strong representations should be made to the Secretary-General to provide the necessary support services when sessions were held in New York. She took it that the Committee wished to confirm its decision to hold its next session in New York and the following session in Vienna.

23. It was so decided.

24. Ms. ILIĆ asked when the next session would be convened.

25. Ms. CREYDT (Secretary of the Committee) replied that it would be held just before the meeting of the States parties, towards the end of March 1986.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued)

Submission of reports by States parties

26. Ms. CARON asked whether enough pressure was being brought to bear on States parties to ensure that they submitted their reports when they were due so that their consideration could be spread out over several sessions.
27. Ms. CREYDT (Secretary of the Committee) replied that every opportunity was taken to remind permanent missions when their countries' reports were due and to ask them to put pressure on their Governments.
28. Seven reports had already been received for consideration at the next session and that of Greece was expected in June 1985. It might be possible for the Committee to consider eight reports at the next session if less discussion of organizational matters was necessary. The possibility of extending the length of sessions might be raised if the number of reports to be considered became too great.
29. Ms. BIRYUKOVA reminded the Committee that it had been decided at a previous meeting that a maximum of six reports should be considered at each session to permit full discussion and still allow time for consideration and adoption of the report on the session.
30. Ms. MONTENEGRO DE FLETCHER asked whether the Committee had devised any course of action to ensure not only the submission of overdue reports but also the implementation of the Convention by States parties.
31. The CHAIRPERSON said that the time had come for the Committee to take some definite action such as writing to States parties directly.
32. Ms. GONZALEZ asked which States parties' reports were overdue and suggested that the paragraph in the Committee's annual report to the General Assembly should give their names.
33. Ms. CREYDT (Secretary of the Committee) drew attention to the list of States which had signed, ratified or acceded to the Convention and the chart on reports due and received which had been distributed to members.
34. Ms. MACEDO DE SHEPPARD said that a problem might also arise if all States parties did submit their reports on time, since the Committee might not be able to discuss them all in one session.
35. Ms. EVATT said that, since over 60 States had already ratified the Convention, the Committee must work out some method of dealing with all the reports.
36. Ms. JAYASINGHE said that it might consider requesting longer sessions. In any case it was important that strong reminders should be sent to States parties whose reports were overdue.
37. Ms. CORTES said that more States might ratify the Convention and that article 18 required States parties to submit regular reports subsequent to the initial one. Those, however, might be shorter, since they would need to contain less background information.

38. The CHAIRPERSON said that she thought the reference to a maximum of six reports to be discussed at a session had applied only to the particular session at which the matter had been raised. The time needed for discussing the reports might be reduced if questions were not repeated and were made very specific.
39. Ms. VELIZ DE VILLALVILLA said that the pertinence of questions would be increased if the reports were distributed well in advance to allow time to study them fully. Increased pressure must be applied to ensure prompt submission of reports but extensions of sessions could not be requested until the number of reports to be discussed warranted it.
40. Ms. LAIOU-ANTONIOU said that her country, whose overdue report was ready, had had great difficulty in deciding on its presentation. It would be useful if there could be clearer guidelines on the submission of reports; perhaps a model report could be provided.
41. The CHAIRPERSON drew attention to the general guidelines regarding the form and contents of reports (CEDAW/C/7). She thought it would be invidious to recommend any report received from a particular State party as a model.
42. Ms. ILIĆ said that, in addition to the guidelines just mentioned, reporting States could also be guided by the Convention itself; they need only follow the articles, as well as, of course, adding any further information they saw fit.
43. While agreeing that States parties should be encouraged and reminded to submit reports, in particular through General Assembly discussions or resolutions, she said that it would be out of place to put pressure on States in that connection. She would be unable to subscribe to any proposal along such lines.
44. She saw no solid grounds for amending article 20 of the Convention, which provided that the Committee should normally meet for a period of not more than two weeks annually. On the other hand, some reorganization of the Committee's work was certainly called for. The Chairperson could play a most useful role in that connection, *inter alia* by consulting the other officers and other Committee members, if necessary by letter, in advance of sessions. The members themselves could also save time by refraining from asking questions which had already been addressed to the reporting State. Grouping of questions and other organizational methods might also be considered, and there again the Chairperson's role was important. The Committee should, in her view, consider expedients such as night meetings or informal meetings before it contemplated amending article 20.
45. Ms. OESER (Rapporteur) associated herself with all the points just made by Ms. Ilić, adding that the possibility of considering seven or even eight reports per session might have to be envisaged.
46. Ms. LAIOU-ANTONIOU said that she, for one, had not been previously aware of the existence of the guidelines. She continued to feel that by issuing a model the Committee would greatly facilitate the preparation of reports.
47. Ms. CARON inquired whether an answer would be provided at the present session to the question of the precise nature of the suggestions and general recommendations referred to in article 21 of the Convention.

48. Ms. CREYDT (Secretary of the Committee) drew attention to paragraphs 12, 348 and 360 of the Committee's report on the work of its third session (A/39/45, volume II). On the basis of the suggestion contained in paragraph 360 to the effect that an item concerning the interpretation of article 21 might be included in the agenda of a future session of the Committee, the Secretariat had contacted the Centre for Human Rights to inquire how the matter was handled by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and had also approached the Office of Legal Affairs in New York. Replies containing valuable information had been received from both those quarters in November 1984 but had unfortunately not yet been translated, owing to pressure of work. It was therefore proposed to defer discussion of the matter until the following session.
49. Ms. CARON suggested that the letters might be read out at a meeting during the current session so that members might acquaint themselves with their contents pending the preparation of an official translation. It would be regrettable if the matter had to be shelved for yet another year.
50. Ms. GONZALEZ supported that suggestion.
51. Ms. BIRYUKOVA said that, according to paragraph 348 of the report on the third session, it had been suggested that the Secretary should not only verify how the matter was handled by similar groups of experts but also consult with government representatives. She wondered whether that had in fact been done.
52. With regard to the Committee's future activities, she agreed with Ms. Ilić that there seemed to be no danger at present of the Committee's receiving more reports than it could handle. So far as outstanding first reports were concerned, the Secretary should write to the countries concerned reminding them of their obligation to submit reports in accordance with the relevant articles of the Convention. Priority should be given to first reports, consideration of second reports being deferred until all first reports had been disposed of.
53. Ms. CREYDT (Secretary of the Committee) said that government representatives had not yet been consulted. As for the replies received from the Office of Legal Affairs and the Centre for Human Rights, she would endeavour to obtain translations in time for the Committee to be apprised of their contents before the end of the session.
54. Ms. GONZALEZ drew attention to a discrepancy between the Spanish and English texts of paragraph 360 of the report of the third session. The former expressly referred to the next session, whereas the latter spoke of "a future session".
55. Ms. BIRYUKOVA said that no decision had been taken to include an item concerning the interpretation of article 21, whether at the present or at a future session. The Committee had merely discussed the possibility of taking such action.
56. The CHAIRPERSON suggested that the matter should be given some consideration at the present session as soon as the translations of the letters referred to by the Secretary became available, and that an item concerning the interpretation of article 21 of the Convention should be included in the provisional agenda for the Committee's 1986 session.
57. It was so agreed.