



# Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Twenty-first session

7–25 June 1999

### Draft report

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## II. Organizational and other matters

### A. States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

1. On 25 June 1999, the closing date of the twenty-first session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, there were 163 States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979 and opened for signature, ratification and accession in New York in March 1980. In accordance with article 27, the Convention entered into force on 3 September 1981.

2. A list of States parties to the Convention is contained in annex I to the present report.

### B. Opening of the session

3. The Committee held its twenty-first session at United Nations Headquarters from 7 to 25 June 1999. The Committee held 20 plenary meetings (425th to 444th) and its two working groups held ... meetings.

4. The session was opened by the Chairperson of the Committee, Ms. Aida González Martínez (Mexico).

5. Before taking up the regular work of the session, the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention was commemorated. The commemoration consisted of two parts: a solemn commemoration of the adoption of the Convention, with the presence of a number of past and present members of the Committee, and a round table on the impact of the Convention at the domestic level.

6. Statements by the current and first Chairpersons of the Committee, Ms. Aida González Martínez and Ms. Luvsandanzangyn Ider, respectively, were made at the solemn commemoration. Statements were also made by the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms. Louise Fréchette, the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Nitin Desai, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Ms. Angela E.V. King, and the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, Ms. Yakin Ertürk. A message from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was read by Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaye, Director of the High Commissioner's New York Office.

7. Statements emphasized the catalytic role of the Convention and its critical contribution to the quest for equality between women and men. It was noted that the roots of the Convention can be traced through the whole history of

the United Nations and its efforts to proclaim and codify human rights. International codes, such as the Convention, were not self-implementing and true equality for women required work on many fronts, including building political will, the creation of an enabling environment, awareness raising and advocacy. Programmes and projects to level the playing field for women in their access to resources, their opportunities in public life, including in politics and the economy, the arts and sciences and the workplace, were required, as were programmes to ensure equality in communities and the home.

8. Speakers emphasized that much progress had been made towards the achievement of women's equality, particularly in regard to equal franchise and political participation. Nonetheless, much more remained to be done as women's human rights were disregarded and violated in many ways in all countries of the world. Statements emphasized the important contribution of the past and present members of the Committee and, particularly, its Chairpersons in ensuring the implementation of the Convention. In this regard, the Committee's role as an agent for change for women collectively and individually was highlighted. It was also stressed that gender equality was not simply the concern of the Committee and the Commission on the Status of Women, but was also important to other bodies of the United Nations, as well as of all Member States, communities and individuals.

9. Participants in the round table on the impact of the Convention included past and present members of the Committee. Representatives of United Nations entities, including the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization also participated. Other special guests, Cecilia Medina-Quiroga, Chairperson, Human Rights Committee (Chile); the Founder of International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP), Arvonne Fraser; and Shanti Dairiam, Director, International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia-Pacific, made statements.

10. A list of speakers who addressed the commemoration and the round table is contained in annex III to the present report.

### **C. Attendance**

11. Twenty-one members of the Committee attended the session ...

12. A list of the members of the Committee, together with an indication of the duration of their term of office, is contained in annex II to the present report.

### **D. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work**

13. The Committee considered the provisional agenda and organization of work (CEDAW/C/1999/II/1) at its 426th meeting on 8 June 1999. The agenda as adopted was as follows:

1. Opening of the session.  
Commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
3. Report of the Chairperson on activities undertaken between the twentieth and twenty-first sessions of the Committee.
4. Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
5. Implementation of article 21 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
6. Ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee.
7. Provisional agenda for the twenty-second session.
8. Adoption of the report of the Committee on its twenty-first session.

### **E. Report of the pre-session working group**

14. The Committee had decided, at its ninth session,<sup>1</sup> to convene a pre-session working group for five days before each session to prepare lists of questions relating to second and subsequent periodic reports that would be considered by the Committee at the session.

15. At its nineteenth session, the Committee decided that, from its twentieth session, in 1999, the pre-session working group would be convened at the end of the session prior to which the reports to be considered by the pre-session working group would be considered. In order to make a smooth transition to this pattern of work, the Committee decided that the pre-session working group for the twenty-first session would meet as a third working group during the twentieth session and for a period of up to three days in order to finalize the lists of issues and questions with regard to the periodic reports to be considered by the Committee at its twenty-first session.

16. The following four members, representing different regional groups, participated in the working group: Charlotte Abaka (Africa), Aida González Martínez (Latin America and the Caribbean), Yung-Chung Kim (Asia) and Hanna Beate Schöpp-Schilling (Europe).

17. The Working Group prepared lists of issues and questions relating to the periodic reports of four States parties, namely, Chile, Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

18. At its 433rd meeting, on 14 June 1999, the Chairperson of the pre-session working group introduced the report of the group (CEDAW/C/1999/II/CRP.1 and Add.1–4). She informed the Committee that the pre-session working group had before it draft lists of issues and questions prepared by the Secretariat in accordance with decision 19/III of the Committee, based on an analytical comparison of current reports of States parties with previous reports, the Committee's discussion thereon and other relevant information, including concluding observations of other treaty bodies. Other reference materials included the concluding comments of other treaty bodies with regard to the States parties under consideration. The pre-session working group also received country-specific information on those States parties whose reports were before the working group from a representative of one entity of the United Nations, as well as from a representative of one non-governmental organization.

19. The Chairperson of the pre-session working group noted that the reports reviewed followed the reporting guidelines of the Committee, included information on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and described the major social, economic and political changes that had occurred since the State party last reported to the Committee. States parties had made significant efforts to implement the Convention through the passage of legislation and other measures, and *de jure* equality between women and men had largely been achieved in those States parties. However, it noted that women in each State party had yet to

achieve *de facto* equality with men and that stereotypical attitudes persisted.

20. The Committee took note of the report of the pre-session working group and urged the Secretariat to take all possible steps to make entities of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations aware of its changed pattern of work so as to encourage these bodies to provide inputs in the future.

### **III. Report of the Chairperson on activities undertaken between the twentieth and twenty-first sessions of the Committee**

21. Reporting on her activities since the last session of the Committee, the Chairperson indicated that she had attended the forty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women, including the open-ended working group on the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention, which was held in parallel to the Commission. She had also attended the meeting of the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century".

22. She reported that, in her statement to the Commission, she had highlighted the fact that December 1999 marked the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention and that, although significant progress had been made in the implementation of the Convention, more remained to be done. She noted that she had urged those Member States which had not ratified the Convention to do so and to accept the amendment to article 20.1 of the Convention relating to its meeting time. She indicated that she had drawn the Commission's attention to the adoption by the Committee of general recommendation 24 on article 12, women and health and had highlighted the Committee's suggestion that the Department of Public Information should convey information on the Committee's work to its information centres worldwide.

23. Ms. Gonzalez informed the Committee that the Commission had adopted the draft optional protocol to the Convention by consensus and indicated that she looked forward to its adoption by the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly late in 1999. She expressed satisfaction that the Commission had completed its consideration of the remaining critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action — women and health and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. Acting as preparatory committee

for the special session of the General Assembly the Commission had considered, *inter alia*, the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on progress in the implementation of the Platform for Action based on the review of the reports of States parties (E/CN.6/1999/PC/4). The preparatory committee had adopted a draft resolution for submission to the General Assembly dealing, *inter alia*, with the preparatory process, documentation and participation of non-governmental organizations, which also addressed the Committee's role in this process. The Chairperson also reported on her meetings with the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, Nafis Sadik, and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, Carol Bellamy, where strengthened relationships between these entities and the Committee were discussed.

24. Ms. González indicated that, from 26 to 28 May 1999, she had participated in a very valuable workshop on gender integration into the United Nations human rights system, which had been jointly organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women. The workshop aimed to develop tools for human rights mechanisms, including special rapporteurs, working groups and treaty bodies, which would strengthen their ability to take gender issues more fully into account.

25. She also noted that she had attended the meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies which was held from 31 May to 4 June 1999 in Geneva.

26. Hanna Beate Schöpp-Schilling, Vice Chairperson of the Committee, reported on the Commission on Human Rights which she had attended on behalf of the Chairperson. She noted that, for the first time, the Commission had devoted a specific agenda item to the human rights of women. In her statement to the Commission under this item, she had urged universal ratification, the removal of reservations and acceptance of the amendment to article 20.1 of the Convention relating to meeting time. She had also drawn attention to the Committee's statement on reservations adopted at its nineteenth session in July 1998 and its recently concluded general recommendation 24 on article 12 — women and health. She had also highlighted developments in the Committee's working methods, its increasing openness to non-governmental organizations and the adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention by the Commission on the Status of Women.

27. Ms. Schöpp-Schilling concluded her report by describing the round table to commemorate the twentieth

anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, held during the Commission on the Status of Women, chaired by Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, with the participation of Anne Anderson, Chairperson of the Commission of Human Rights, Patricia Flor, Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, Angela E. V. King, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and Ms. Schöpp-Schilling.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 38 and corrigendum (A/45/38 and Corr.1)*, paras. 28–31.