



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
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Summary record of the 1096th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 18 October 2012, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Pimentel

Contents

Commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women

*High-level panel discussion on promoting and protecting women's rights in conflict
and post-conflict situations: the case of Francophone Africa*

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

High-level panel discussion on promoting and protecting women's rights in conflict and post-conflict situations: the case of Francophone Africa

1. **The Chairperson** welcomed participants in the high-level panel discussion organized to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. She said that the international community had been scaling up its efforts to integrate women's rights into the system for the protection of human rights in periods of armed conflict and to ensure the participation of women in peace processes. The Committee, as the body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, deplored the devastating effect that conflicts and militarization had on women's rights and had stepped up its efforts to address the issue fully, notably by establishing a working group devoted to the subject. A current priority of the Committee was to draft a general recommendation on women in conflict and post-conflict situations, reflecting the high profile it intended to give to the matter and reminding States parties of their obligations during and after armed conflicts.
2. In many of its concluding observations, the Committee had highlighted the inadequacy of the measures taken by States parties in post-conflict situations. Women should be able to play an active role in peacekeeping operations in their community and become key stakeholders in conflict resolution. They must therefore be better represented in institutions and peacebuilding mechanisms so as to have a real influence in decision-making and the development and implementation of policy.
3. **Ms. Kang** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that since convening its first session 30 years ago to the day, the Committee had been working hard to advance women's rights and gender equality, placing women's rights high on the international agenda and empowering women to claim them.
4. Despite a particularly challenging year due to declining resources and a growing workload, the Committee had not shied away from dealing with the most complex and controversial issues affecting women, including sexual violence, harmful traditional or modern practices and obstructed access to justice. The Committee's work in clarifying State obligations and making specific recommendations for action was crucial in ensuring that women, particularly those suffering from the most heinous violations, could exercise their human rights. While protection and prosecution were the first steps in addressing violence against women, reparations were also essential. She had heard at first hand from the survivors of brutal sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo about the impact of those crimes on their lives. They had expressed their determination to rebuild their lives and support their children, but emphasized the need for the equal and genuine participation of women in all aspects of peacebuilding. The Committee would reflect on those sentiments as it crafted its general recommendation on women in conflict and post-conflict situations.
5. She welcomed Mr. Ridha Bouabid, Permanent Representative of the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF) to the United Nations Office in Geneva. She thanked OIF for its help in organizing the anniversary event and its close working relationship with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). She also welcomed Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, the recently-appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and other panellists.

6. **Mr. Bouabid** (OIF) said that there were still major obstacles to the effective implementation of the international instruments protecting and promoting women's rights and that the progress made in some countries over the past 30 years could not mask the setbacks seen in others. Rape and mutilation were used as a most cowardly and shameful weapon of war in many conflict situations. Such acts must be strongly condemned and repressed; women should not be victims of war, but agents of peace.

7. Crisis management and peacebuilding were a major concern of OIF, which sought to make alliances with countries and other international players to help diffuse crises before they occurred by implementing an early warning system for assessing actual or potential conflict situations.

8. Protecting women and children from sexual violence and preventing impunity were also a major concern of OIF. Despite the considerable progress made, impunity for acts of violence was still widespread. The situation was compounded by the marginalization of women in post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. However, more positive signs had been emerging from the African continent which, although often presented as conflict-prone, was also the continent where women played a key role in conflict prevention and resolution. Through the efforts of a number of African women's organizations, women were becoming involved in developing capacity-building programmes, participating in negotiations and follow-up on peace agreements, overseeing elections and pushing for ceasefires. African women, including those in francophone Africa, had thus proved that they should be regarded not as victims, but as real players with the skills, strength and potential that were often lacking in peacebuilding efforts.

9. **Ms. Bangura** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict) said that as the Committee marked its thirtieth anniversary, it was important to remember that sexual violence was one of the worst and most evil forms of discrimination against women and girls. The consequences of rape and other forms of sexual violence often lingered long after the conflict had ended, with physical and mental illness, depression, anxiety disorders and fear commonly suffered. Women were the backbone of society, the fabric holding families and communities together. An attack on women and children during or after a conflict was an attack on families, communities and the rule of law and an assault on the belief in governments as protectors. In short, it was an attack on dignity and humanity.

10. Her predecessor had developed a five-point agenda to eradicate sexual violence in conflict: ending impunity for perpetrators and ensuring justice for victims; protection and empowerment as the twin pillars of the solution; political leaders working to strengthen the implementation of the Security Council resolutions; more consistency and coordination in the response from the international community to sexual violence; and recognizing rape as a tactic of war. She had added a sixth point to the agenda: emphasis on national ownership, leadership and responsibility. There must be a change in the attitudes of political leaders, activists, journalists and citizens; every sector of society must understand the devastating impact of sexual violence and be determined to end it.

11. She would strengthen her engagement with government officials, NGOs and rebel groups, calling upon them to ensure that the amazing potential of women and girls was not destroyed by that atrocious crime. While she would increase her outreach to African States, her mandate was worldwide; recently she had been focusing on cases in Syria. Conflict-related sexual violence was a global problem and, sadly, no part of the world was immune.

12. Putting an end to the scourge of sexual violence in conflict was not an impossible dream. She had had personal experience of the vulnerability entailed by being a woman. She knew at first hand what it was like to be threatened by rebels vowing to rape and kill her, to look her child in the eye and tell him to run for his life, to have her home looted and

destroyed and to flee her country in the hope of making it to safety and asylum in a foreign land.

13. The road ahead would not be easy, but nothing worth fighting for was easy to attain. Sexual violence was not simply “collateral damage”, but a crime that could be stamped out through education, empowerment, equality, justice and security. She urged everyone to help break “history’s greatest silence” by speaking out against the crime, supporting women working to build peace and security and promoting women’s rights. Every effort must be made to ensure that girls had the same access to education as boys, that they were valued as much as their male counterparts, that de facto and de jure gender discrimination was eliminated, that equal opportunity in the workplace existed and that women fully participated in politics. Having more women in leadership positions was an important part of the solution, but efforts should not stop there. With continued support, all forms of discrimination against women, including sexual violence in conflict, could become a thing of the past, but of prime importance was women’s collective strength as leaders.

14. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Director, Human Rights Council Special Procedures Division, OHCHR), speaking in his capacity as Moderator for the first segment of the high-level discussion, said that it would review experiences in Francophone Africa. He then introduced the first panellist, Ms. Pramila Patten, member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Chairperson of its Working Group on the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict and post-conflict and of the Working Group on Communications under the Optional Protocol.

15. **Ms. Patten** said that in sub-Saharan Africa, new developments in armed conflict affected entire communities, but particularly women and girls. Legal instruments for protecting women and children were ineffective in the face of such new developments.

16. As a member of the international commission of inquiry mandated to establish the facts and circumstances of events of September 2009 in Guinea, she provided some graphic details of the Commission’s findings on sexual violence against women, which had triggered unanimous international condemnation. In late September 2009, the Government had banned a peaceful rally at a stadium in Conakry. The rally had gone ahead on 28 September despite the ban. At midday, all gates had been closed. The military, security forces, police and militia had entered the stadium, fired on the crowd and massacred, beat and abducted protesters. They had subjected at least 109 women to acts of unimaginable sexual violence, including brutal sexual mutilations. A number of women had subsequently died of their injuries following particularly cruel sexual attacks.

17. The Commission had concluded that Guinea had violated several provisions of the international human rights conventions it had ratified, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. A major part of the commission’s report highlighted the scale of the violence suffered by women. The commission had concluded that the acts perpetrated on 28 September 2009 were sufficiently serious to justify their qualification as crimes against humanity.

18. Three years later, the victims’ dignity had not been restored, their right to truth, justice and reparation not exercised, and none of those responsible for the stadium massacre had been brought to justice. She acknowledged the important role played by the International Criminal Court in keeping the pressure on the Guinean authorities to combat impunity. The international community had called for the main perpetrators of the crimes to be prosecuted by the Guinean authorities or the Court. She urged the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Prosecutor of the Court, African regional bodies and the international community to remain seized of the situation in Guinea in order to respond to the victims’ desire for justice.

19. **Mr. Ndiaye**, the Moderator, thanked Ms. Patten for her statement and gave the floor to Mr. Mukwege, Medical Director of Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, South Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

20. **Mr. Mukwege** said that it was essential to focus on the ways in which women's rights were defended in all circumstances. A sense of common values and of belonging to the same human community should guide the development of strategies for the protection of women's rights and mutual respect in peacetime and even more so during armed conflict. However, a study led in South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with organizations including International Alert had revealed ongoing traditional practices contributing to the subjugation, infantilization and objectification of women. Despite efforts by the international community to establish mechanisms for the protection of women's rights, the situation for many women remained unchanged.

21. Several legal instruments had nevertheless been adopted at regional, national and international levels to promote women's rights and guarantee gender equality. The most relevant were Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and resolution 1820 (2000) on women, peace and security. The former focused on the specific needs of women during and after armed conflict; the latter provided for protection and military disciplinary measures against all sexual and gender-based violence. Although the Democratic Republic of the Congo had signed those instruments, it had failed to ensure their proper application, as was the case in other countries in conflict. International bodies could not always guarantee the protection of women's rights during conflict, their member States often prioritized economic and other interests and interpreted resolutions in their own fashion.

22. The case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had highlighted the weakness of international justice. International courts were compromised by their dependence on States which did not collaborate towards the arrest of criminals. Those courts needed to be strengthened and made independent so that war criminals were identified and punished. The violation of labour laws further threatened peace and sustainable development, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where women comprised most of the workforce.

23. The concept of transitional justice had been established in many countries to move from a divided past to a shared future, according to the definition of the International Centre for Transitional Justice. Transitional justice was applicable in five areas: legal proceedings, truth, reconciliation, reparation and institutional reform. Although several institutions had been established to promote democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had not come into operation until completion of the transition process owing to the fact that all facilitators of the transition had been involved in human rights violations during and after the peace agreements. The failure of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had had negative consequences for Congolese women in particular, for several reasons. Truth cover-ups meant that violations had not been identified and victims not recognized. Not only had offenders remained unpunished and institutions remained unreformed, but those criminals had often been promoted to higher ranks or incorporated into the national army. When offenders had been sentenced, dilapidated prisons in the country had facilitated the escape of the detainees, who had therefore reoffended. That had led to the complete failure of the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation process and of vetting procedures for public officials. Lastly, even when war criminals had been tried and sentenced, no victims had received reparations.

24. Women's rights should be promoted and protected through public education and awareness-raising. International organizations, including the International Organization of La Francophonie, could promote activities in that area. Such education should be consolidated by strict measures to prevent, punish and provide reparation for all human

rights violations, and sexual violence should be recognized as a form of terrorism and punished accordingly.

25. **Mr. Ndiaye**, the Moderator, thanked Mr. Mukwege and gave the floor to Ms. Touré, the president of Coordination des Associations et Organisations Non-Gouvernementales Féminines du Mali, an umbrella organization that brought together over 2,000 women's associations in Mali.

26. **Ms. Touré** said that although nearly all Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) members had legislation for the promotion and protection of women's rights, it was not properly implemented by governments and relevant officials. A conference, organized jointly by the United Nations and the Government of Senegal in 2010 to discuss Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) had revealed that ECOWAS countries did not have a plan of action for the incorporation of that resolution into domestic legislation, 10 years after its adoption. Women's awareness of the resolution was further hampered by illiteracy, poverty and customary traditions. While the adoption of a gender equality law in Senegal indicated some progress, there was, once again, little evidence of the application of that legislation.

27. Since 22 March 2012, Mali had been divided in two, the rule of law was no longer upheld, Islamist activity was pervasive in the north and the army had occupied the south. The conflict was escalating, with increasing human rights violations to which not enough attention was paid. Crimes were being committed by Islamist groups with impunity. For example, up to 30 men might provide a dowry to marry a young girl. Those men would then rape the girl throughout the same night of the marriage, apparently legitimized by their positions as husbands of the girl. There was also a female prison in Tombouctou where women were sent to be systematically raped. Poor and illiterate women in particular were being recruited by Islamists for indoctrination.

28. In addition to sexual violence, clothing restrictions were imposed, forcing women to wear heavy garments covering their bodies entirely. If women went out in public dressed otherwise, they faced punishments including flagellation and lapidation. Women who ran their own small businesses were prevented from performing essential functions and, since men rarely worked in northern Mali, economic activity had more or less come to a standstill. In Tombouctou and Kidal, women had protested against such treatment. Other forms of unprecedented violence included assaulting women giving birth or undergoing surgery in hospitals. There were no longer any professional health-care services or facilities available and although local health assistants supported women, maternal and child mortality had increased in Mali.

29. The impunity of the army in northern Mali was disregarded in southern Mali. Three days previously, the rape by three gendarmes of a 17-year-old girl who had been travelling from the north to the south to take an exam had been covered up owing people's fear of the military junta and of the repercussions of speaking out, including arrest or abduction.

30. NGO's working to defend women's rights did not have the necessary human or material resources to establish the relevant institutions. In ECOWAS countries even where ministries for women had been established, they sometimes did not represent the interests of women.

31. The transition process in Mali had not taken due account of legislation on women's rights or the involvement of women. Only four women were members of the Mali Government and the Family Code had been established with compromises enforced by the Islamist movement. Public protest was met with suspicion that women were attempting to usurp the place of Malian men in positions of authority.

32. It was important to recognize that the lack of governance and widespread violation of human rights were also shaping the political and social climate of many other regions.

33. **Mr. Kayitayire** (Rwanda) said that Rwanda was a State party to the Convention. Rwanda's initial report had been presented in 2009 and the following report was in preparation, women had played an important role in the process. The provisions of the Convention had been taken into account in the reconstruction of the country after the genocide in 1994. Currently, women were well represented in parliament, and parliamentary discussions included women's access to property and education.

34. **Mr. Pellet** (France) said that it was vital to continue efforts to end violence against women in armed conflict. He thanked the panellists for sparing the details of the violent acts, which were sometimes unbearable. Much progress had been made to raise awareness in the international arena of violations of women's rights, including through the work of the Security Council. It would hold a meeting on 29 October 2012 to discuss the role of women's organizations, and the outcome of the Francophonie summit meeting in Kinshasa. However, much work remained to be done to change the reality for women, especially in countries such as Mali and Syria, where, although much went unreported, it was evident that women were facing excessive violence.

35. He wondered how coordination and cooperation could be ensured among all parties involved in the protection of women's rights, including the Security Council, OHCHR, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the Committee and all NGOs in the field of women's rights.

36. **Ms. Dawkins** (Australia) said that women and girls were more vulnerable to post-conflict violence than men, owing to the breakdown of specialized services for women and to inherent gender inequalities. However, women were also key to rebuilding the three pillars of society after conflict: economic recovery, social cohesion and political legitimacy. Australia was working with several governments around the world, including Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia, to assist in the reconstruction of society.

37. In Indonesia and Nepal, Australia had worked to support women advisers to implement strategies for improving women's participation in peace processes. That work had involved the network of peace advocates of the United Nations Development Programme and had documented best practices. Grass-roots projects in other countries, including work with Femlink Pacific, in the Asia-Pacific region, also enabled women to voice their needs.

38. She asked whether the panellists had benefited from sharing of experiences at the regional level, particularly regarding violence against women in post-conflict situations.

39. **Ms. McPhedran** (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that one of the greatest achievements of the Convention was that it had ensured the delivery of sexual and reproductive health care in many places of conflict. The Fund was working to change the paradigm that allowed for the resolution of conflict through violence. To mark the twelfth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), UNFPA was co-hosting a round-table discussion on access to relevant health-care services for victims of sexual and gender-based violence in communities affected by conflict in Burundi and Nepal, with the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders. It supported monitoring activities of United Nations resolutions to ensure their application and to solicit the accountability of member States.

40. **Ms. Diop** (Femmes Africa Solidarité) (FAS) welcomed the cooperation activities undertaken to protect women's rights and thanked the panel for including FAS in the debate. She asked how FAS could work more closely with the Committee and OHCHR and how human rights mechanisms could be better employed to protect women's rights and to

ensure that preventive measures were implemented. Her organization commended the work of Ms. Bangura and was committed to working with her to ensure that her mandate was a success. Through its Solidarity Mission, FAS was represented in Guinea, where urgent action was required to oversee the adoption by the Guinean Government of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). She would like to know how the Government would act on the resolution. Despite the adoption of a national action plan in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the resolution had not yet been implemented. In Mali, intervention was also critical in order to put the proposed action plans into practice, prevent further conflict and attend to those who had suffered distress.

41. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** said that she was greatly moved by the testimonies she had heard at the current meeting. As an Algerian national, she had fought for her country which had been under French colonization from 1830 to 1960. After being arrested in July 1956 by the French colonial forces led by Colonel Bigeard, and subsequently being held in the Foreign Legion camp in Zeralda, she had endured unspeakable treatment and had been terrorized in every way possible. After almost one month she had been brought before the court, where she had been sentenced to imprisonment, which paradoxically had saved her from experiencing further atrocities in the camp. She emphasized that she held no hatred towards the French.

42. Her experience was a reminder that women's rights had been violated throughout history. Despite the passing of time, at least she, as a citizen of a country that had managed to free itself and as an expert member of the Committee, could ask for her rights to be observed and for an apology for what had happened under occupation, and thereby finally allow her voice to be heard. As a woman who had suffered violence similar to that described at the current meeting, she asked what could be done to speak out for those women who could not do so and to ensure that rape was not used as a weapon during conflict. It was thanks to the United Nations that her voice was being heard today and her wish was that it would continue to serve as a channel for other women's stories.

43. **Ms. Rasekh** said that the situation of women in Mali was very regrettable. Atrocities like those committed in Mali could occur in any place where religious fundamentalism, not only Islamic fundamentalism, existed. It was essential to move beyond dialogue and support women victims of violence in practice. In countries where extremist groups had been involved in dialogue and where governments had forgiven and forgotten their past actions, there was a danger that those groups might return and rule. Such a risk presented itself in Afghanistan, for example, where, during research conducted in 1998, she had witnessed executions and floggings by the Taliban. The rights of women should never be compromised, not even in peacetime, but the return of those groups to the political and social arenas would threaten respect for those rights.

44. **Ms. Touré** said that many civil society organizations in Mali had been established and were funded by the Government. As a result, they more closely resembled public institutions, and their activities were subject to government approval. While the office of UN-Women Mali was making good progress, relations with it were also subject to those constraints. The Committee's thirtieth anniversary represented a step forward for women's rights; however, much remained to be done, and more emphasis should be placed on action and less on theories.

45. **Mr. Mukwege** said that the greatest obstacle to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was the fact that some of the country's leaders were known to have been implicated in the very human rights violations that the resolution sought to address. Thus, the State could not ensure the increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict, as urged by the resolution, until it prosecuted those leaders. Unfortunately, the latter did everything they could to remain in power, including by

destroying evidence of their involvement in abuses. The problem was not being given serious enough attention, which only served to perpetuate impunity.

46. **Ms. Patten**, responding to a question posed by the representative of FAS, said that the Committee had requested a special report from Guinea, which the latter still had not provided. A day of discussion would be organized by OHCHR on the impact of the international commission of inquiry mandated to establish the facts and circumstances of the events of 28 September 2009 in Guinea.

47. Responding to a question from the representative of France, she said that action was being taken on many different fronts to address problems faced by women in conflict and post-conflict situations. The Committee was addressing the lack of coordination of such action through its decision to draft a general recommendation on the topic.

48. Responding to the point raised by the representative of Australia, she said that, for the first time, the Committee had held regional consultations as part of the process of drafting its general recommendation. Furthermore, its ordinary working methods involved cooperation with the Human Rights Council, other treaty bodies and a number of special procedures mandate holders.

49. **Mr. Ndiaye**, the Moderator, said that the panel discussion had united participants in their resolve to combat sexual violence in situations of armed conflicts. The fact that many organizations had been set up to combat such violence was a positive development, but their efforts would be effective only if they drew on the synergy created by cooperation.

The meeting was suspended at 5.15 p.m. and resumed at 5.20 p.m.

50. **Ms. Connors** (Chief of the Special Procedures Branch, OHCHR) said that the second segment of the panel discussion would focus on ways in which the promotion and protection of women's rights could reinforce peace. She welcomed the three panellists: Ms. Ameline, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee and member of the French parliament; Mr. Forst, Independent Expert appointed by the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights in Haiti and Chair of the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council; and Mr. Beyani, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons.

51. **Ms. Ameline** said that, by virtue of its mission and statutes, OIF was a dynamic force for the promotion of values and rights, and she commended the efforts of its Secretary-General, Mr. Abdou Diouf. She welcomed the initiative of France to hold a meeting of French-speaking women in the coming year, which would offer an excellent opportunity to highlight women's rights. She recalled that States were the key players in democratic change and were primarily responsible for ensuring respect for women's rights, which represented an investment in peace.

52. The Committee's decision to draft a general recommendation on women in conflict and post-conflict situations reflected the magnitude of the phenomenon, which was often underpinned by pre-existing structural inequalities, negative stereotypes and discrimination against women. The general recommendation would take full stock of the situation of women and the scope of the violence perpetrated against them. It would also emphasize women's vulnerability in times of conflict, owing to the breakdown in State institutions, basic services and essential protection mechanisms.

53. Article 2 of the Convention conferred three types of obligations on States parties: first, the obligation to combat all forms of discrimination; second, the obligation to protect the rights of women, which called for the adoption of concrete measures, not merely the condemnation of violence; and third, the obligation to take steps to ensure that women enjoyed all of their rights. Those obligations were particularly relevant during post-conflict and transitional periods.

54. The principles and provisions of the Convention must underlie all actions and policies at the national and international levels to promote and protect women's rights in times of conflict. Some recommendations for achieving those goals included: first, that cooperation should be carried out with OIF, because it could serve as a channel of communication with French-speaking countries affected by conflict; second, that the mandate of the United Nations peacekeeping forces should be strengthened; and third, that a gender perspective should systematically be incorporated in the decisions of the Security Council.

55. **Mr. Forst** said that he wished to emphasize a positive image of Africa, as a continent that was strong and committed to resolving the problems it faced. There were a number of African countries whose efforts to enhance the role of women and realize women's equality served as models for other countries.

56. After describing the general nature of national human rights institutions, he stressed that the latter were not Government-sponsored bodies. When they became politicized, such institutions lost their independence, thus signalling a breakdown in the Government concerned. As an interface between the Government and civil society, national human rights institutions acted as a check on executive power with regard to respect for human and fundamental rights. Some human rights institutions were invested with quasi-judicial powers and could receive and investigate complaints; others were designated as national torture prevention mechanisms. Many such institutions had been confronted with conflict or post-conflict situations and had developed innovative working methods, which they were currently attempting to share with others through regional exchanges. Several institutions had been tasked by the international community or by their own State with establishing transitional justice or reconciliation mechanisms. Such work should be analysed in order to draw lessons from it – a task that could be assigned to the Association Francophone des Commissions Nationales des Droits de l'Homme.

57. Several national human rights institutions had deplored the limited participation of women in conflict-resolution mechanisms in Africa, despite the provisions of international and African legal instruments calling for women's equal participation. They had formulated recommendations and proposals for addressing those discrepancies, which should be compiled in a database so that they could be consulted by other national human rights institutions faced with the same situation.

58. In conclusion, he wished to draw attention to the conduct of certain United Nations peacekeepers, whose actions in several African countries had seriously undermined the image and objectives of the United Nations system in the continent. Far too many peacekeepers who had committed violations against women had simply been relieved of their duties without being prosecuted in their countries of origin. He recommended that the task of documenting complaints for referral to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, as well as ensuring that such offences were followed up in their own States, could be entrusted to the national human rights institutions.

59. **Mr. Beyani** said that, since assuming his mandate at the end of 2010, the situation of internally displaced women had been one of his chief priorities. An expert workshop had been organized in Geneva the previous month to review achievements relating to women and displacement over the past 20 years, and his next report to the Human Rights Council would be devoted to that issue. Cooperating closely with the Committee on the drafting of its general recommendation had provided an excellent opportunity for mainstreaming the human rights of internally displaced women within the United Nations human rights system.

60. Internally displaced women were one of the groups most gravely affected by armed conflict and its aftermath. Too often, they were relegated to the category of vulnerable

persons or victims. It was imperative to recognize and actively build on the resources that such women brought to bear and to facilitate their participation at all levels of decision-making, including in the context of the peace, reconciliation and reconstruction processes.

61. On a country visit to Côte d'Ivoire, he had noted that internally displaced women continued to live in very difficult conditions: they lacked housing, basic services, livelihood opportunities and personal security. In many of the communities he had visited, there was a high percentage of early pregnancies and very young mothers. Incidents of sexual and gender-based violence had been reported both during the crisis itself, as well as in the recent context of ongoing insecurity, poverty and sporadic attacks on villages. In most cases, survivors either received no assistance, or only essential medical treatment, and there was a need for more psychosocial support. The mental health sphere in affected communities, and in the country as a whole, was very underdeveloped, with nearly all psychologists being located only in Abidjan.

62. During his visit he had stressed the importance of implementing security and justice system reforms, of ensuring that the national disarmament, demobilization and reinsertion strategy included displaced persons, and that vetting mechanisms for prospective soldiers in the new army took full account of their prior human rights record.

63. Female illiteracy rates had risen significantly both during and after the conflict, as had the gap in access to education between girls and boys. Internally displaced women were particularly affected by the lack of identity cards, rendering them even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in receiving communities, and they often had limited access to key rights, such as the right to education, to vote and to access to justice.

64. The Secretary-General of the United Nations had issued a decision on a framework on ending displacement in the aftermath of conflict. Together with Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan, Côte d'Ivoire was one of the three pilot countries selected for the implementation of the framework.

65. He recommended that a systematic gender analysis should be undertaken in Côte d'Ivoire in order to ensure that internally displaced women participated in and benefited from durable solutions and relevant recovery and reconstruction processes. He also recommended the development of a national action plan for implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) that included internally displaced women. He would continue to promote the ratification by Côte d'Ivoire, and other countries in Africa that had not yet done so, of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons In Africa. He would also promote the protection of the rights of internally displaced women and girls in all domestic implementing legislation.

66. **Ms. Petion** (Haiti) said that the establishment of a women's ministry had led to considerable progress in giving effect to women's rights in Haiti, in particular in the area of legislative reform. Under criminal law, the penalty for rape had been increased and adultery had been decriminalized. Two acts, one on domestic workers and another on paternity, had been adopted in 2008 and 2012, respectively. The ministry was currently drafting a framework law on the prevention, punishment and elimination of all forms of violence against women. In the field of education, compulsory education had been declared free of charge, and textbooks had been revised in order to eliminate gender stereotypes.

67. Despite those achievements, the situation had not improved substantially for women. The earthquake of January 2010 had increased the vulnerability of women and girls to gender-based violence, and poverty was a major obstacle. Despite the willingness of the Government and civil society to improve the situation of women, the necessary resources to do so were lacking.

68. **Ms. Zuegher** (Austria) said that Austria had established a national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). One of its most important objectives was to support women's local peace initiatives in Africa and other countries.

69. **Ms. Connors**, the Moderator, thanked the panellists and participants for their thought-provoking and pertinent statements, which should be distributed widely in order to disseminate the valuable recommendations they contained.

70. **The Chairperson** gave the floor to Ms. Elveren, a specialist for the "Equality between men and women" programme of the International Organization of La Francophonie.

71. **Ms. Elveren**, after providing a survey of the main points made by each panellist, said that armed conflicts had the effect of undermining the democratic order, impairing human rights and harming women more than men. Although many initiatives had been taken in order to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), examples of good practices were few and far between, and there was strong sociocultural resistance to women's participation in the peace process as mediators and negotiators. UN-Women had taken an initiative to train some 300 negotiators in Africa and Asia. It was essential for women to participate on an equal footing with men in major strategic and budgetary decision-making during periods of post-conflict reconstruction and transition. The International Organization of La Francophonie had signed a framework agreement of cooperation with UN-Women in May 2012 in order to work towards that goal.

72. Further reflection was needed on mechanisms to protect women's rights, particularly with regard to preventing violence, and to promote their rights from the very beginning of the transition period. Greater attention should be given to the key issues and means for enhancing the political participation of women in the management and aftermath of crises, and in the maintenance and consolidation of peace.

73. **The Chairperson** thanked the panellists and participants for their contributions to the discussion to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Committee. The two topics discussed required urgent attention by those present at the meeting, in their capacity as international actors. The panellists had recalled the serious consequences of armed conflicts on women's lives when atrocities were committed against their dignity and integrity, and when such atrocities went unpunished. The voices of women victims must be an inherent aspect of any peace negotiation process currently under way.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.