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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Fortieth session
14 January to 1 February 2008

**AGENDA ITEM 3: REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON ON ACTIVITIES
UNDERTAKEN BETWEEN THE THIRTY-NINTH AND FORTIETH
SESSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE**

Statement delivered on 14 January 2008 by the Chairperson of the
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women,
Ms. Dubravka Šimonovi

Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This fortieth session of the Committee is a historic one: after 25 years of work, the servicing of the Committee has been transferred from the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and most of the Committee's future sessions will now take place in Geneva.

Let me at the outset pay tribute to the Division for the Advancement of Women for the excellent support provided during these years. I thank the Division also for its farewell present to the Committee in the form of a CD ROM covering 25 years of work of the Committee.

This consolidation of the servicing of the treaty bodies within the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is surely an important step in the continuing harmonization of the human rights treaty bodies system, as proposed by this Committee. I trust that this will also be an incentive for all treaty bodies, as well as for the Human Rights Council and all other human rights mechanisms generally, to strengthen attention to gender perspectives in their work.

It should also be mentioned that the ongoing year-long commemoration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a great opportunity to emphasize the equality of women and men and prohibition of discrimination against women in the recognition and enjoyment of all human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration.

Dear colleagues,

Let me now start to report on my activities since the thirty-ninth session which we adjourned in August last year by extending to all of you my very best wishes for a healthy and productive year 2008.

I will first report about those activities that I undertook in my capacity as Chairperson, and will then briefly mention some others that might be of interest to the Committee.

At the invitation of the General Assembly in resolution 60/230, I represented the Committee at the sixty-second session of the Assembly, where I addressed the Third Committee on 15 October 2007. My statement has been circulated to experts. I briefed the Assembly about the Committee's twenty-fifth anniversary, and emphasized the Committee's tremendous achievements since its inaugural session held at the United Nations Offices at Vienna in October 1982.

The focus of my intervention was, however, on the Committee's request for an extension of its meeting time. I highlighted the excellent use of the approved meeting time by the Assembly in 2005 by drawing attention to the fact that in 2006 and 2007, the Committee considered the reports of a total of 69 States parties, and that there had been a significant reduction in the number of States parties whose reports continued to await consideration. I presented the Committee's rationale for its further request for an extension of meeting time, where I emphasized the need for both, a short-term extension in 2008/09 through the use of parallel chambers to eliminate the remaining backlog of reports awaiting consideration, as well as the imperative for creating a sustainable basis for the Committee's work in the long term through three annual sessions per a year.

I am extremely pleased that the General Assembly has positively responded to our request. As you are all aware, the Assembly authorized the

Committee, from 2010 onwards to meet three times a year for three weeks each, with each session preceded by a one-week working group. While the Assembly granted this extension “for an interim period effective from January 2010, pending the entry into force of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention”, this increase in the number of sessions will enable the Committee to deal effectively, and in a timely manner, with all its responsibilities under the Convention and the Optional Protocol, without having to submit a new request to the Assembly every other year.

The Assembly also approved with some modification our request for extended meeting time and chambers for 2008/09. In particular, it authorized the Committee to hold a total of five sessions, on an exceptional and temporary basis, three of these in parallel chambers. While we had requested a total of six sessions with two in chambers for the biennium, the decision of the Assembly will allow us to consider almost the same number of States parties (61 as compared to 62 in our request). Importantly, however, the decision of the Assembly gives us the flexibility to undertake our own planning for the biennium. We will therefore need to review our workload for 2008 and undertake careful planning for 2009 so that we can take maximum advantage of this decision.

Lastly, the Assembly authorized the Working Group on Communications under the Optional Protocol to meet three times a year, for a total of ten working days. This will allow the Working Group to adhere to a more systematic schedule in its work.

Let me make two more comments: I understand that there was significant disagreement among Member States about the location of the Committee’s sessions. In the end, the Assembly agreed that the Committee should hold two of its five sessions of 2008 and 2009 in New York. I would also like to mention that there was no unanimity among the Member States: the resolution was adopted by a recorded vote, with 154 States voting in favour and one against the resolution. In separate votes on the resolution’s paragraphs pertaining to the extension of meeting time, a number of States abstained.

I believe that this decision, which carried significant financial implications, is a clear reflection of the commitment of States parties to ensuring compliance with treaty obligations, including regular scrutiny of

such compliance by this Committee. I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to all Member States that supported this decision.

Dear colleagues,

The Committee's informal meeting held at the invitation of the Government of Switzerland from 23 to 26 October 2007 here in Geneva was attended by 15 committee members. Let me extend once again our appreciation to the Swiss authorities for this generous invitation, which allowed us to make important progress on a number of issues. Let me also express my appreciation to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the very useful briefings and discussions during these four days which will be contributing to the smooth transfer of the servicing from DAW to OHCHR. The agreements reached at that meeting are reflected in one of the documents before us at this session, and the meeting's report is also available. We will review these agreements in the course of the session with a view to taking action thereon. This will include in particular discussion and action on treaty-specific guidelines on reporting. We should also reflect further on our interaction with national human rights institutions (NHRIs), and continue our efforts, together with other human rights treaty bodies, on a harmonized approach with respect to such institutions.

Other items we discussed at our informal meeting included the follow-up to concluding comments, in the light of the practice of other treaty bodies; a general recommendation on article 2 of the Convention; and relations with the Human Rights Council, especially concerning its discussion on mainstreaming the gender perspective into its work.

Dear experts and friends,

Let me now briefly inform you about other relevant activities and developments since the 39th session, which I attended.

From 24 to 26 September 2007, I participated in a "Regional conference: Reporting under the CEDAW Convention", held in St. Stefan, Montenegro, along with another CEDAW Committee member, Ms. Violeta Neubauer. The Conference was organized by the Office for Gender Equality of the Government of Montenegro and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Montenegro to support the process of drafting the initial report of the Republic of Montenegro under article 18 of the

Convention. Participating delegations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, and the hosting Montenegrin Government had an opportunity to increase understanding of the Convention's understanding of gender equality and resulting States parties' obligations, and exchange experiences related to implementation and in particular, the reporting procedure. The importance of shadow reports prepared by civil society was also emphasized. I am confident that we should soon be receiving Montenegro's initial report.

I continued my involvement in the Council of Europe's Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence. Specifically, I attended a regional seminar on support and protection for victims of domestic violence: services needed, in Espoo, Finland, from 8 to 9 October 2007, where I delivered an introductory statement on the obligations of States to combat violence against women. I used this opportunity to focus on our Convention and its scope with respect to the obligation of States parties to combat violence against women, especially as reflected in the findings of the Committee in its recent cases under the Optional Protocol.

Together with another Committee member, Ms Heisoo Shin, and former expert Mr Goran Melander, I attended the Conference on women's participation in governance, held in Beijing, China, from 21 to 22 October 2007. The Conference was organized by the Research Center for Human Rights, of Beijing University Law School, UNDP China and the China International Center for Economic & Technical Exchanges, Ministry of Commerce. While I focused generally on the reporting process under the Convention and the work of the Committee, my colleagues provided more detailed information on the Committee's concluding comments on China and follow-up thereto.

I was very pleased to be participating at an "International Conference on 10 years of Austrian Anti-Violence Legislation," from 5 to 7 November 2007, in Vienna, Austria. The Austrian Federal Minister for Women, the Media and the Civil Service addressed the Conference as well as many international and national experts. Since the Committee had recently adopted its views on two cases against Austria under its Optional Protocol, I elaborated on the findings of the Committee. I wish to note that many other participants from the Government and NGOs referred to the findings of the

Committee as well as additional measures needed to prevent such cases in the future.

From 19 to 21 November 2007, I participated in a CEDAW Implementation Workshop in Porta Vila, Vanuatu. The Workshop was jointly organized by the OHCHR regional office for the Pacific, the UNDP Pacific Center, UNIFEM and UNICEF and targeted 4 Pacific Islands countries – Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu. I was pleased that a representative of DAW also participated in the event. I called on governments and NGOs to work together to address discrimination against women, and participants adopted a number of recommendations to strengthen compliance with the Convention and follow up to the Committee's concluding comments.

On 9 and 10 December 2007, I attended a regional conference for Asia on "Women and Children: The Human Rights Relationship" organized by UNICEF in Bangkok. It was attended by several current Committee members Ms Chutikul, Ms Dairiam, Ms Shin and Ms Begum and two former Committee members Ms Javate de Dios and Ms Goonesekere. Together with the Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Ms. Yanghee Lee, I participated in a panel which addressed the relationship between the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It is my understanding that conference documents and conclusions will be distributed to the members of both Committees.

Dear colleagues,

As we begin this 40th session in our new home, we have much work ahead of us, and I am confident that we will take full advantage of the new opportunities to forge strong links with the human rights machinery and other partners here in Geneva. We appreciate very much the efforts of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure a smooth transfer of the servicing of this Committee, and look forward to the expert support which the Office will be providing to us in all aspects of our work.

We likewise look forward to safeguarding and reinforcing strong institutional linkages between the Committee and the Division for the Advancement of Women, as well as any future United Nations gender

equality architecture, as we emphasized in our statement adopted at the last session.

I thank you very much for your attention.