

# **OPENING STATEMENT**

**BY**

**Ms. Dubravka Šimonovic  
Chairperson**

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against  
Women  
at the  
Forty-second session**

**From 20 October to 7 November 2008**

**Excellencies  
Distinguished colleagues  
Ladies and Gentleman**

**I am very pleased to welcome you once again to the United Nations Office at Geneva, and to the forty-second session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. I am also very pleased to welcome Mr. Ibrahim Salama, Chief of the Human Rights Treaties Branch.**

**Ms. Navi Pillay, the new High Commissioner had wanted to be with us, but was required to travel to New York as the discussions in the Third Committee on the human rights item are about to begin. I am very pleased to inform members, however, that she will be with us on the morning of 7 November to discuss issues of mutual interest.**

**While there remain 185 States parties to the Convention, I am delighted to report that two States accepted the Optional Protocol during the recent treaty ratification event organized by the Office of Legal Affairs in New York, thereby bringing the number of States parties to this important instrument to 92. Let me congratulate the two new States parties to that treaty, Switzerland and Tunisia, and encourage other States to follow their example.**

**Currently, also, there are 53 States which have accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1 of the Convention on the Committee's meeting time.**

**Distinguished Colleagues,**

**It is only a few months since the forty-first session of the Committee ended. However, I would like to report on the activities I have undertaken in my capacity as a Chairperson of CEDAW Committee and other issues that may be of interest of the Committee.**

**On August 28 and 29 2008, I participated in an international conference, organized in Vienna by the Austrian Government, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights and the European Training and Research Center for Human Rights and Democracy, to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights. The conference took stock of the many achievements**

**in the human rights field over those fifteen years, and also highlighted the areas that needed continuing attention.**

**Throughout my participation, I underscored the important impetus Vienna provided for women's human rights and the work of the Committee, in particular in encouraging the development of the Optional Protocol, but also drew attention to the work that needs to be done to achieve de facto equality for women.**

**In terms of the human rights mechanism, I also emphasized that the treaty body system has been significant in the quest for realization for human rights, but it has yet to reach its full potential, including as a result resource constraints.**

**Colleagues,**

**I am pleased to report that at the invitation of the Government of Luxembourg, a delegation of the Committee conducted its first-ever follow-up visit to a State party to discuss its concluding observations. The delegation, which consisted of Ms. Françoise Gaspard, Ms. Tavares da Silva, myself and several members of the secretariat held discussions with various parts of Government, in particular the Ministry of Equal Opportunities, the Parliament, the judiciary, the bar and civil society. The delegation also met with the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess who showed significant interest in the work of the Committee. The missions provided an excellent opportunity to raise the visibility of the Convention, its Optional Protocol and the**

**Committee's specific recommendations on States parties. I encourage other States parties to follow this good practice and also encourage the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to consider allocating resources for follow-up activities. As members will know, de facto implementation of human rights treaties and the recommendations of expert bodies remains a challenge for all States. A sustained focus on follow-up is therefore crucial in ensuring that the promise of human rights becomes a reality on the ground.**

**As members will be aware, last week I participated in the Third Committee of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, addressing the Committee under agenda item 56 (a) and (b) on the Advancement of Women. In my statement, which has been provided to members, I highlighted the major outcomes of the past two sessions of the Committee, drawing attention to the enhancement of the Committee's working methods.**

**I expressed the Committee's gratitude to the Assembly for granting it an extension of its meeting during 2008 and 2009 and providing the long-term solution by approving three sessions annually from 2010. I drew attention to the CEDAW-specific reporting guidelines, complementing the guidelines for the common core document, which are to be used by all States parties reporting to the Committee, and the steps the Committee has taken to harmonize its working methods with other treaty bodies, as well as strengthening its procedures. In this context, I noted the inclusion of subject headings in the concluding observations, and our new follow-up procedure. I provided information on the Committee's efforts to**

**encourage States to report, indicating that it extends a special invitation to States parties with long overdue initial and periodic reports to submit these by specific future date, failing which it will take up implementation in the State party concerned in advance of its report.**

**Colleagues and friends,**

**2008 marks the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. The Universal Declaration established the framework for the elaboration of binding human rights norms, while by declaring the human rights of women and the girl child to be ‘an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights,’ the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action provided a new impetus for the integration of women’s rights into what had come to be described as ‘mainstream’ human rights.**

**Vienna provided very specific impetus for the ratification of the Convention, the elaboration of its Optional Protocol and the work of the Committee. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women drew inspiration from the Committee’s General Recommendation no 19 on violence against women which identified such violence as discrimination against women and human rights violation, rather than a family or private matter.**

**Those anniversaries remind us that much more need to be done to make the promise of universal, indivisible human rights a reality for all women and men. No country of the world can claim it has eliminated discrimination against women. Thus, our fight for women's rights is a fight for full implementation of the Convention and elimination of all remaining forms of discrimination against women that persist at the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.**

**Colleagues and friends,**

**As you are aware, we have a very full, but interesting agenda during this session. The Committee will consider 12 periodic reports and one initial. Chamber A, will consider the periodic reports of Belgium, Canada, Uruguay, Slovenia, El Salvador and Myanmar and Chamber B, will consider the periodic reports of Cameroon, Ecuador, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Madagascar and Portugal. The initial report of Bahrain will be considered in the Plenary. The Committee will also consider cases under Optional Protocol to the Convention and discuss various issues, such as draft general recommendations on article 2 and on women migrants, and other topics for general recommendations which will be tabled by the members of the Committee. We will also meet with many non-governmental organizations, representatives of national human rights institutions and parts of the UN family. I would like to pay particular tribute to these stakeholders who provide such valuable input into our work.**

**Colleagues and friends,**

**As we begin our very busy, but interesting session, I am happy to take any questions you may have before we meet in closed session to organize our work.**

**Thank you very much for your attention.**