

OPENING STATEMENT
by
Ms. Silvia Pimentel
Chairperson
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against
Women
at the
Fifty-first session

13 February 2012

Excellencies
Distinguished colleagues
Ladies and gentleman

I am very pleased to welcome you to the United Nations Office in Geneva for the fifty-first session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. This is the Committee's first session in 2012 and so I would like to wish everyone a happy and healthy new year – hopefully one that is filled with advancements in human rights and, in particular, women's rights. 2012 also marks the 30th Anniversary of the Committee's work for the advancement of women.

It has been a little more than three months since our last session ended. I wish to update you on the status of the Convention and Optional Protocol, and also highlight some

of the activities that I have engaged in as Chairperson of the CEDAW Committee and other issues that may be of interest to the Committee.

Turning to the Convention, I would like to report that the number of States parties remains at 187. The amendment to the Convention currently has 65 Contracting States. Ecuador deposited an instrument of acceptance on 22 December 2011. Moreover, there are now 104 States parties to the Optional Protocol. Cape Verde and Cote d'Ivoire deposited instruments of accession on 10 October 2011 and 20 January 2012, respectively.

Following the fiftieth session, I attended the Dublin II meeting of 10 to 11 November 2011 along with the Chairs of six other treaty bodies as well as several treaty body members participating in their personal capacity. The meeting reviewed the results of the consultations to date, synthesized the proposals and presented clear recommendations in its Outcome Document, which is in your binders. We will have an opportunity to discuss the Outcome Document and treaty-body strengthening in general with the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights during this session. I also want to thank those Committee Members who provided input in this regard.

I was invited to be a panelist at the 11th International Human Rights Colloquium on implementing United Nations decisions and recommendations where I spoke about follow-up to concluding observations and views of

the Committee. The Colloquium was organized by Conectas, an international human rights NGO and took place at the Law Faculty Getulio Vargas in Sao Paulo in November.

I also took part in a book launch of the second edition of the publication *Brazilian Warriors of Peace*, which is part of the international project “1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005” which took place in November in Sao Bernardo, Brazil. I also participated in a conference on the advancement of women and the risks of backlash to mark the 5th anniversary of the Brazilian law on domestic and family violence at the Office of the Prosecutor General in the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil.

I additionally had the pleasure of participating in the Third National Conference on Women’s Rights as a panelist along with the Brazilian Ambassador to the United Nations at Geneva, Ms. Maria Nazareth Farani, on the subject “An International Approach to Women’s Human Rights” in December in Brasilia. I also met with Ms. Michelle Bachelet at an intimate dinner during the Third National Conference on Women’s Rights in Rio de Janeiro in January. I further organized a successful CEDAW mock session for the law students of my university, Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo, focusing on the sexual exploitation of girls. I also had the honour to meet with the Brazilian Minister of Justice and Minister of Women’s Affairs to discuss issues related to CEDAW.

I will additionally be addressing the Commission on the Status of Women on 27 February where I will report on the main outcomes of the forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions of the Committee.

Distinguished colleagues

Committee Members have also been involved in CEDAW related activities as well as other panel discussions and seminars relating to women's issues in both their capacity as members of the CEDAW Committee and in their personal capacities.

At the initiative of Ms. Zou, a number of our Members attended the International Forum on Women and Sustainable Development in Beijing held from 9 to 11 November 2011, which was organized by the All-China Women's Federation, including Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani, Mr. Bruun, Ms. Gabr, and Ms. Jahan. Some 300 participants attended from 45 countries, regional organizations, UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations, including many high level government officials. The Forum was a lead-up to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development.

In addition, the Government of Finland recently hosted a meeting in January of the Working Group on the human rights of women in situations of conflict and post-conflict, which was attended by Mr. Bruun, Ms. Patten, Chair of the Working Group, Ms. Popescu and Ms. Rasekh. The meeting was opened by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of

Finland and included segments on experiences from implementing Security Council resolution 1325, the need for and scope of the general recommendation, and a panel discussion on the challenges and ways forward. The Working Group also held substantive discussions on the general recommendation. In the same vein, Ms. Patten in collaboration with OHCHR and UN Women is also organizing regional consultations and we look forward to receiving a brief update during this session on this topic.

Ms. Ameline participated in a conference in January regarding the election of more women to the Irish parliament, which was organized by the Minister of Health of Ireland, Ms. Kathleen Lynch. The Prime Minister of Ireland was also in attendance. Ms. Ameline discussed the role of CEDAW, and the necessity of implementing special temporary measures to increase the number of women in public life to address past discrimination. Shortly after the session, Ms. Ameline will also be meeting with Ms. Catherine Ashton, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs of the European Union to discuss effective mainstreaming and implementation of the CEDAW Convention into the political sphere of the European Union.

Ms. Arocha participated in a seminar on the preparation of reports to the CEDAW Committee and follow up to the concluding observations, which was convened by the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality of Venezuela with the participation of other relevant ministries and civil society representatives in December.

Ms. Awori provided a training on CEDAW for non-governmental organizations in Zimbabwe in December, and also conducted a mock session that was attended by the Minister for Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs and the Ministry of Health, which was very well-received.

Ms. Bailey authored and presented a paper on *The Meaning and Usefulness of Concluding Observations* at a Training Workshop on CEDAW and Gender Dimensions of HIV in the Caribbean, which was sponsored by the Ministry of Sports and Culture, the Bureau of Women's Affairs, UNDP and UN Women Caribbean Office in Jamaica in December 2011, and also authored and presented a paper on *Assessing the Institutional and Cultural Environment for Gender Equality Programming in the Caribbean* at a Regional Advisory Group Meeting on Gender and Development sponsored by the UN Women Caribbean Office and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) at UN House, Barbados in December 2011.

Ms. Gabr also was very active during the past few months. She participated in 11 training activities in Egypt, including one on human trafficking in peace support operations organized by IOM and the Cairo Regional Center for Training on Conflict Resolution as well as a workshop on trafficking for legislators from various Arab States in cooperation with the Arab League, UNODC and Johns Hopkins University. She also participated in a training seminar for prosecutors on the implementation of

laws relating to trafficking organized by IOM, which was also attended by 35 representatives of various non-governmental organizations.

Ms. Gabr additionally participated in other training activities related to, for example, trafficking in human organs, the role of religious leaders in combatting human trafficking, diplomats and human trafficking, and legislation on trafficking in collaboration with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Egyptian National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, and John Hopkins University. Ms. Gabr also provided training to social workers dealing with homeless children and trafficking issues organized by the Ministry of Social Affairs in January as well as participated in a meeting in February with secondary school teachers on trafficking sponsored by the Ministry of Education.

Ms. Jaising participated in a consultation of the ASEAN Commission on the Protection of the Rights of Women and Children in January, which was hosted by the Government of the Philippines in cooperation with UN Women and UNICEF. The meeting was attended by all Member States of the Commission. The meeting was intended to build capacity with respect to international standards on violence against women and children. Ms. Jaising was also invited in her capacity as a CEDAW Committee expert to attend a meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union held in India.

Ms. Neubauer participated as a key note speaker and panelist at the International Conference on Current Trends of Development of National Gender Mechanisms in European Countries, organized jointly by the Council of Europe and the authorities of Ukraine in Kiev in October. Ms. Neubauer addressed the plenary session on "Strengthening the national gender equality mechanism and reinforcing its impact on gender equality," and also presented CEDAW as a legal framework for implementation of international and regional commitments to gender quality and the scope of temporary special measures under CEDAW during the conference.

Ms. Neubauer also participated in the UNDP Regional Forum on Fostering Equal Participation in Decision-making in Istanbul in November. She presented the scope and meaning of temporary special measures and views of the CEDAW Committee on such measures as necessary tools to enhance women's participation in decision-making. Ms. Neubauer also participated in an event organized by a group of Italian NGOs, known as the Platform, at the Italian National Parliament on 17 January 2012, where she spoke on the implementation of the CEDAW Committee recommendations contained in the concluding observations issued upon consideration of the sixth periodic report of Italy.

In October, Ms. Patten participated as a panelist in a consultation on Women and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights organized by the Human Rights Economic and Social Issues Section and the Women's Rights and Gender

Section of OHCHR. Ms. Patten also attended a training seminar for Parliamentarians on CEDAW and its Optional Protocol organized by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie. She additionally undertook a mission to Pakistan in December where she spoke about the accountability of federal and provincial governments under CEDAW in the context of devolution of power.

Ms. Popescu attended the IPU Seminar on Parliaments and CEDAW in October, which was devoted to the topic of equality at work. Her presentation covered the CEDAW Convention and working women. She also made presentations, as a panelist, on the CEDAW Convention and follow-up to CEDAW Committee's recommendations and decisions in Bucharest at a seminar held by the Parliament of Romania on women in politics in November, and a seminar organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Romanian NGOs, on 14 December 2011, to celebrate the International Day of Human Rights.

Ms. Schulz made a presentation on the role of the CEDAW Committee regarding non-discrimination and equal opportunity with respect to women at a conference organised by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland for the personnel of the federal administration, human rights organisations and embassies in Bern in January. She also made a presentation on "CEDAW - a treaty only for women", as part of the Masters programme in gender studies at the University of Geneva in early February. Ms. Schulz additionally participated in a meeting on treaty body strengthening with representatives

of the Directorate of Political Affairs and the Directorate of international law, including the Swiss members of the treaty bodies, Professor Walter Kälin (HRC), and Mr. Jean Zermatten (CRC) in December. The aim of the discussion was to exchange information on the Swiss position and on the experts evaluation and views of the present process, and the structural difficulties faced by the treaty bodies. Lastly, Ms. Schulz took part in a film that will be shown on the Swiss television station (TSR2) on Sunday 26 February, at 21:00, as part of the programme entitled "Histoire vivante". The title of the documentary is : "De la cuisine au parlement."

Ms. Simonovic attended an expert meeting on treaty body strengthening focusing on petitions on 29 October in Geneva. In December, she also attended a NATO and Madrid Club Workshop on Lessons Learnt from implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security at NATO Headquarters in Brussels. She additionally participated in a regional conference in Montenegro on political participation of women as a factor of social development, and gave a presentation on the experience of the CEDAW Committee. Ms. Simonovic also provided capacity-building training on CEDAW implementation and monitoring in the Republic of Tajikistan. Lastly, she attended an expert meeting on the enforcement of domestic violence legislation in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in Kazakhstan in January.

I would kindly ask those Committee members who participated in panel discussions, seminars and in expert

meetings during these past few months to please provide copies of your statements to the Secretariat so that they can be circulated to the Committee during the session.

Distinguished Colleagues,

We have a very full, but interesting agenda during this session. The Committee will consider a total of seven reports. During the first week, the Committee will consider the reports of Brazil, Congo, Grenada, which is an initial report, and Norway. During the second week, the Committee will take-up the reports of Algeria, Jordan and Zimbabwe.

The Committee will also consider cases under the Optional Protocol to the Convention. It is noted that at the Committee's fiftieth session, the Committee adopted one recommendation in relation to the admissibility and merits of a communication, and two recommendations declaring the communications inadmissible due to non-exhaustion of domestic remedies and lack of substantiation. In relation to the recommendation adopted, the Committee was of the view that the State party had violated the victim's rights under articles 5 and 12 of the Convention in that the State party concerned lacked an appropriate legal framework for recognizing abortion on the grounds of sexual abuse and rape, and failed to protect women's reproductive rights.

The Committee will additionally review the draft general recommendation on the economic consequences of marriage and its dissolution with a view toward adopting it by the end of 2012. The Committee will also be briefed on

progress with respect to the several other draft general recommendations, including the CEDAW/CRC joint general recommendation on harmful practices, the general recommendation of the human rights of women in conflict and post-conflict and the general recommendation on access to justice.

The Committee will moreover consider reports and information received under its follow-up procedure to concluding observations and will discuss working methods within the context of the on-going discussions on treaty-body strengthening.

We will furthermore meet with many non-governmental organizations, representatives of national human rights institutions and parts of the UN family and other organizations. I would like to pay particular tribute to these stakeholders who provide such valuable input into our work.

The Committee will also hold meetings with OHCHR on the treaty body strengthening process, and with the Independent Expert on Cultural Rights, Ms. Fareeda Shaheed, among other planned activities.

Colleagues and friends,

I would like to convey that Ms. Jaising informed me that she will not be able to attend this session.

At this juncture, I would also be delighted to hear from Committee members who have represented the Committee at official meetings or undertaken work related to the activities of the Committee.

Thank you very much for your attention.
