



United Nations
Division for the Advancement of Women

Judicial colloquium on the
application of international human
rights law at the domestic level

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On behalf of the Division for the Advancement of Women, the substantive office within the United Nations charged with the development of policy advice for the promotion of women's rights and also the office entrusted with the substantive and technical servicing of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, I am pleased to welcome you to the United Nations Offices in Vienna and to this judicial colloquium.

The Division is extremely honoured that this event has attracted such a large number of senior judges and magistrates from around the world. It is conscious of the effort that many of you have made to be with us and join in discussions relating to the domestic application of international human rights norms in order to advance the interests of women and girls. We are confident that the commitment that you have shown to the subject of this colloquium will ensure that it will be considered as a watershed event for the United Nations.

Honourable Judges and Magistrates.

This year has been an exciting one for the Division for the Advancement of Women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the key international human rights treaty which addresses equality between women and men, celebrates the twentieth year of its adoption and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which elaborates the rights of girls and boys has been adopted for ten years. This colloquium celebrates both these anniversaries and seeks to carve out further arenas in which these instruments can be used so that their fundamental objectives can be achieved. In addition, this colloquium is taking place just a few weeks after the adoption of an optional complaints mechanism for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and, as such, will be a celebration of this important event.

In its work to promote the human rights of women and girls, the Division for the Advancement of Women is guided by the conclusions of the series of United Nations world conferences which took place during this decade and in particular those of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights which took place here in Vienna and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and its Beijing Platform for Action. Those conferences declared the human rights of women and the girl-child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights and emphasized that the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women and girls is a priority for Governments and the United Nations and is essential for their advancement. Those conferences also stressed the importance of international human rights treaties, including those Conventions we celebrate during these three days, as tools for the advancement of women and girls.

Powerful tools these treaties may be, but they remain paper promises if their principles are not applied, and particularly at the domestic level. The work of the Division for the Advancement of Women, and especially its current work in preparation for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Beijing + 5 which will take place in June next year, has revealed the progress that has been made at national level towards the advancement of women and girls. But much more remains to be done, and several groups have pivotal roles in this regard. Judges and magistrates are tasked with the application of the law. This application can be narrow, or it can be expansive and truly provide justice for women.

As Director of the Division it is my hope that these three days will show ways that the promises that human rights treaties offer to women and girls can be translated from paper commitments into reality. We are fortunate indeed to have six excellent resource persons from different cultures and legal traditions who can lead us in our discussions. Professor Christine Chinkin and Judge Emna Aouij, also a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, will lead us in our discussions of nationality, and of marriage and family relations; President Navi Pillay of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and Dean Grossman will show us the way in regard to violence against women; and Professor Krisztina Morvai and Judge Marc Bossuyt will assist us in our deliberations in regard to work and work-related rights. But I am confident that all of you will have much to contribute to this meeting and on behalf of the Division, I wish you well.