

1982 – 2007: 25 years of work of the

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Article 17 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women establishes the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to consider the progress made by States parties in the implementation of the Convention. It primarily carries out this monitoring function by considering reports submitted by States parties (article 18 of the Convention). In its 25 years of existence, the Committee has examined 384 reports, submitted by 154 States parties. The Optional Protocol to the Convention – which entered into force on 22 December 2000 – has added a quasi-judicial function for the Committee through the individual complaints procedure under which the Committee has registered 15 communications, decided three on the merits and declared four inadmissible. The other procedure introduced by the Optional Protocol is the inquiry procedure. So far, the Committee has carried out one such inquiry.

The Committee is made up of 23 experts nominated by States parties and elected by secret ballot for four-year terms; experts can be re-nominated and re-elected. Committee members serve in their personal capacity as independent experts. Since the first election was held on 16 April 1982, 107 women and 3 men (two from Sweden and one from the Netherlands) have been members of this body. Experts have been nationals of 110 countries: 23 have come from the Latin American and Caribbean Group of States; 24 have come from the Western European and Others Group of States; 12 have come from the Eastern European Group of States; 23 have come from the African Group of States; and 27 have come from the Asian Group of States. China, Ecuador, Indonesia, Japan and the Philippines have each had four of their nationals serve as members of the Committee.

Article 21 of the Convention gives the Committee the authority to make suggestions and general recommendations based on the examination of reports and information received from States parties. To date, the Committee has developed 25 general recommendations. It is currently working on two further general recommendations.

Article 20 of the Convention provides that the Committee shall normally meet for a period of not more than two weeks annually. An amendment to the Convention extending the meeting time will enter into force after it has been accepted by a two-thirds majority of States parties. So far, 49 States parties have accepted the amendment. In the meantime, the General Assembly has repeatedly approved additional meeting time for the Committee. Until its fourteenth session in 1996, the Committee met once a year

annually. From 1997 until 2005, the Committee held two annual sessions (sixteenth to thirty-third sessions), with the exception of 2002, when it held a third – exceptional – annual session. Since 2006 (thirty-fourth to thirty-eighth sessions), the Committee has held three annual sessions, of which two have taken place in parallel chambers, enabling the Committee to double the number of States parties examined per session.

The Committee has held five informal meetings, in Madrid (Spain, 1995), Berlin (Germany, 2000), Lund (Sweden, 2002), Utrecht (The Netherlands, 2004), and again in Berlin (Germany, 2006), with the financial support of the respective Governments.

Until 1993, when its Secretariat was relocated from Vienna to New York, the Committee met alternately once a year in Vienna and New York. From then on, it has met only in New York. The Secretary-General decided in October 2006 to transfer responsibility for servicing the Committee from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Division for the Advancement of Women at United Nations Headquarters in New York to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. This transfer will occur as of January 2008. It is anticipated that, starting from 2008, the Committee will continue to hold one of its annual sessions in New York while its other sessions will take place in Geneva.

(NB: The information in this note is current as of the closing of the Committee's thirty-eighth session, i.e. 1 June 2007. Source: United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women/Department of Economic and Social Affairs.)