

Check against delivery

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Thirty-third session
5 to 22 July 2005**

**Closing comments by
Ms. Rosario Manalo, Chairperson of the Committee**

Dear colleagues,

We have thus completed the work of the thirty-third session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

I would like to start by thanking the experts and especially my colleagues in the Bureau for the support extended to the Chair during this session, and for the consistent spirit of cooperation, desire to move the work of this Committee forward and make a significant contribution to the promotion of the rights of women.

As Ms. Mayanja has said, we held constructive dialogues with eight States that are party to the Convention and examined the progress in their implementation of the Convention. Three of these countries, DPRK, Gambia and Lebanon, reported to the Committee for the first time, while the other five States - Burkina Faso, Guyana, Ireland, Israel and Lebanon, submitted periodic reports. I extend my sincere appreciation to these States for their reports, the responses to our lists of issues and questions, and for their willingness to hold a constructive dialogue with this Committee about the status of implementation of and compliance with the provisions of the Convention.

Some States very closely adhered to the schedule for submission of reports, such as DPRK, while others took some time and submitted combined reports covering long overdue reporting obligations. I very much hope that all eight States have found the process of preparation and presentation of reports an important aspect of their ongoing efforts to realize equality for women. I strongly encourage all of them to use the concluding comments which we have adopted and which will be sent to the States within the next few days as the basis for concrete and comprehensive follow up. I invite these reporting States to publicize the Committee's concluding comments widely to the public at large, and to ensure that Government officials, parliamentarians and other officials in the country are made well aware of them and encouraged to take follow-up measures within their areas of responsibility.

In all cases, Committee experts also received information from non-governmental organizations who presented their perspective and highlighted issues which in their view require sustained attention by the State party to enhance compliance with the provisions of the Convention. The Committee extends its appreciation to all non-governmental organizations for their efforts, and to Governments and donors who made it possible that a significant number of them were able to travel to New York and participate in the

proceedings of our Committee. I am sure that all of them returned to their home country with an even stronger commitment to advocate for women's de facto equality.

For the first time, the Committee also received information from a national human rights institution, and we look forward to welcoming representatives from such institutions in the future. While the Committee also received information from entities of the UN system, it would welcome a stronger and more consistent involvement and contribution by a larger number of such entities in the future. Many of the entities implement important work on equality issues. The Committee would therefore welcome a more active engagement of UN entities in support of the implementation of the Convention at national level, and a more visible and tangible contribution to the reporting process.

I thank Ms. Mayanja for highlighting some of the trends and common challenges which the Committee has identified in the course of the session. Let me add that in the spirit of a constructive dialogue which aims to enhance implementation, the Committee always identifies positive aspects, followed by principal areas of concern. Each of these concerns is accompanied by recommendations to the State party that are intended to accelerate implementation of the Convention and achieve compliance.

One concern the Committee raises whenever this issue comes up are reservations that States may have entered to the Convention. In the present instance, this is the case with DPRK, Ireland, Israel, and Lebanon. Together, these States maintain reservations in regard to article 2, the general obligations under the Convention, article 7, participation in public life, 9, women's nationality and capacity to confer nationality upon their children on an equal footing with men; article 11, in relation to work, and article 16, in regard to marriage and family relations, (including marriage, divorce, inheritance). The Committee considers certain of these reservations to be incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention. It urges States parties to keep them under review, narrow them and set timetables for their withdrawal.

We also found discriminatory stereotypical attitudes, as well as persistent customs, practices and traditions that cast women in positions of inferiority in all the countries we examined. Such stereotypical attitudes can be obstacles to women's equal access to health, education and employment, and to participation in decision-making. They are also reflected in the types of work, or levels of education or decision-making that women can achieve. Much still needs to be done to overcome such attitudes and practices through awareness-raising, sensitization of public officials and society at large, and improvements in the educational system to foster an understanding of gender equality that is in line with the letter and spirit of the Convention.

The Committee has once again found that certain groups of women encounter multiple forms of discrimination, placing a particular responsibility on Governments to counteract and eradicate such patterns and violations of women's rights. Migrant and refugee women, women belonging to ethnic, racial or religious minorities, and especially rural women which in some countries make up well over 50 per cent of the population,

consistently have lower levels of education, employment, health and participation in decision-making than their sisters in urban areas or who belong to predominant groups. The Committee is very much concerned with this reality and impresses on States parties the need for targeted action as the Convention must be implemented for the benefit of all women.

Dear colleagues,

I wish to note some of the other outcomes of this session. Above all, I wish to highlight the Committee's decision to request the General Assembly to grant an extension of the Committee's meeting time. Our workload is such that it simply cannot be accommodated within the time available to us. We take up the reports of 16 States per year, but a significantly larger number of States submit their reports annually, as is only to be expected with 180 States parties to the Convention. We look to the support of all Member States for the Committee's request for three annual sessions as of 2006. In addition, and as a temporary measure for 2 years, the Committee proposes to meet in parallel working groups for parts of its sessions so as to eliminate the backlog of reports awaiting consideration.

I am also very pleased with the very positive experience the Committee has had in the use of country task forces, where a group of experts takes the lead in the constructive dialogue with the State party. This approach has in particular contributed to a more focused dialogue where no important issue is omitted from consideration, but which also ensures better coordination among the experts and therefore better complementarity in the analysis and issues raised with the delegations. I look forward to a successful continuation of the use of this method of work.

The Committee was concerned about recent developments in regard to women's equality in drafting process of the Constitution in Iraq, and has issued a statement to reiterate the State party's obligations under the Convention.

Dear colleagues,

With these few highlights, may I once again express my sincere appreciation to all of you for the hard work of this three-week session.

Thank you all very much.