

23 July 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
on the 25th Anniversary of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination Against Women**

I am pleased to be with you on this special anniversary of the commencement of the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Over the last twenty-five years, the Committee has played a vital role in the quest for the elimination of discrimination against women and the achievement of gender equality. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women constitutes a landmark in setting out the global normative standards of equality between women and men. 185 States are now party to the Convention.

It is the Committee that ensures these standards of equality are implemented at the national level. Indeed, this Committee's effective monitoring work and guidance has significantly enhanced the accountability of States for women's enjoyment of their human rights and shaped the progress of women worldwide.

The Committee has contributed to our understanding of content and scope of human rights, including the duty of States parties to promote gender equality and take action against private as well as public acts of discrimination. It has made us aware of the need to examine laws that appear to be gender neutral but which, in fact, have adverse effects on women. It has constantly voiced its concern about reservations that States have entered to the Convention. It has raised awareness of the impact of major global trends on women, including globalization, human trafficking and HIV/AIDS. It has played a fundamental role in making the work of the United Nations more gender-sensitive and in promoting the universal human rights of women.

The Committee was an early advocate for creating an opportunity for individual women to submit complaints of violations of the provisions of the Convention and it contributed significantly to the drafting of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. Now 88 States are party to the Optional Protocol. Since its entry into force in 2000, the Committee has adopted seven decisions concerning complaints submitted to it and conducted one inquiry under article 8 of the Protocol. Its work in this regard is shaping a body of jurisprudence on protecting and ensuring women's human rights in concrete individual cases.

This work also further contributes to States' accountability for the manner in which they comply with their obligations to protect and promote women's human rights.

The General Assembly continues to support and encourage the efforts of this Committee in many ways. It has recognized its enormous work load, and the importance of adequate meeting time for maintaining and strengthening the impact and effectiveness of its mandate. The Assembly authorized an extension of its meeting time for the current two year period. By the end of this session, a total of 69 States parties will have held constructive dialogues with the Committee.

I urge all Member States to give effective follow up to the Committee's concluding comments so as to ensure compliance with the Convention.

Much has been achieved under the Committee's supervision, but we still have a long way to go in achieving full compliance with all the Convention's terms. We remain discouraged by the reservations that Member States hold on particular articles on the basis of religious interpretations, national law, tradition, or culture. The most apparent is a reservation on Article (2) which undermines the Convention.

This anniversary will provide an incentive to ensure that the next twenty-five years mark greater progress and the achievement of equality for women. With near universal ratification of the Convention, the emphasis now more than ever is on implementation.

This remains the Committee's main responsibility, and I hope that it will continue its efforts to achieve true equality for Women.

As World leaders declared in the Outcome Document at the 2005 World Summit that "progress for women is progress for all".

Thank you.