

**THIRTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE
COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

OPENING STATEMENT

BY

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Madame Chairperson, Distinguished experts,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to join Ms. Mayanja in extending a warm welcome to all members of the Committee, especially those members who were newly elected at the fourteenth meeting of States Parties to the Convention in June 2006. I also congratulate the re-elected members of the Committee. Your proven knowledge and experience with the Convention and the Committee, together with the extensive expertise of the new members, will enhance progress in the work of the Committee.

I also join Ms. Mayanja in thanking those experts whose terms of office ended on 31 December 2006 for all their efforts on behalf of women's human rights and wish them well in their future endeavours.

I warmly congratulate you Madame Chairperson and the new members of the Bureau and wish them success in advancing the influence of the Committee and the achievement of goals of the Convention.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank most sincerely the former Chairperson of the Committee, Ms. Rosario Manalo, and the all members of the Bureau, for guiding the Committee during these past two years and bringing about important changes in its working methods. In particular I refer to the consideration of reports of States parties in parallel chambers and the holding of three annual sessions in 2006 and 2007. Following the approval by the General Assembly of the Committee's persuasively argued justification of the necessity of the extension of meeting time, the leadership of Ms Manalo and the Bureau ensured that these changes (which significantly increased your workload) enabled the Committee to undertake an even more effective monitoring of the practical realization of the principle of equality between women and men in States parties.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

The year 2006 ended with many important developments pertaining to the work of the United Nations in the field of gender equality in general and to the work of this Committee in particular. The Secretary-General's decision, conveyed to your outgoing Chairperson on 11 October, to transfer the servicing of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights from the Division for the Advancement of Women - which has had this responsibility as part of the comprehensive approach to the promotion of gender equality since the first session of the Committee in 1982 - constitutes a significant change in the institutional framework for the promotion of gender equality in the United Nations.

You will be meeting later today in a closed meeting with the High Commissioner for Human Rights for a discussion of the transfer of the servicing of this Committee to her Office and the integration of the Committee into the institutional framework for the protection and promotion of human rights. I am sure that this discussion will further clarify the implications of the Secretary-General's decision, including in particular the time line for the transfer, and dates and locations of future sessions.

I wish to assure the Committee that the Division for the Advancement of Women will continue to provide the best possible support to you in the implementation of your important responsibilities, as it has always done, until the transfer of the servicing function is effectively completed.

Distinguished experts,

Since the General Assembly has biennialized its resolution on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, no resolution on the Convention was adopted at the sixty-first session of the Assembly. The Committee's preliminary assessment of the work in parallel chambers, as well as its anticipated need for extended meeting time in 2008 and beyond, as reflected in your decision 36/I of August 2006, was, however, brought to the Assembly's attention by your Chairperson.

The question of violence against women received the priority attention of the General Assembly during its 61st session, based on the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women. In its resolution on this topic, the Assembly took note with appreciation of the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Assembly presented a series of recommendations for action by different stakeholders. As a result of the study, including the intensive consultation process that its preparation involved, and its consideration in the General Assembly, the commitment of Governments, NGOs and the UN system for effectively and comprehensively addressing all forms and manifestations of violence against women has never been stronger. Building on the momentum gained during the preparatory process for the study, we are now moving forward with a range of follow-up activities. I am confident that this Committee will continue to provide leadership and detailed guidance, both within the reporting procedure and under the Optional Protocol, on States

parties' legal obligations under the Convention for the prevention of violence against women, the investigation, prosecution and punishment of offenders, and the provision of effective relief to victims.

Madam Chairperson, distinguished experts,

Preparations for the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women are well underway. The Commission will meet from 26 February to 9 March and will consider as its priority theme the question of the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child. This topic will be the subject of a high-level round table with ministerial participation and two expert panels, one focused on further policy development and the other focused on mainstreaming attention to the girl child. We expect that the Commission will adopt a set of agreed conclusions in support of a focused and explicit approach to the particular needs of the girl child.

In preparation for these discussions, the Division held an expert meeting in cooperation with UNICEF at the Innocenti Centre in Florence. The meeting made it very clear that, while there is significant attention to the needs of children, there is too little specific attention to the extensive, and particular forms of discrimination and violence that girls in all parts of the world continue to experience. As a consequence, legal, policy and programme measures remain insufficiently responsive to the particular needs and priorities of the girl child. The meeting also highlighted the importance of the international human rights framework, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Experts will recall that the Commission had invited the Committee to contribute where appropriate, to its discussion of the priority themes. The Committee suggested that it could contribute an analysis of its consideration of the theme concerned, drawing from the concluding comments of the Committee. The Committee further suggested that its overall experiences and findings could be conveyed to the Commission, and experts could participate in any panel discussion organized in conjunction with the consideration of the theme in the Commission to highlight the views of the Committee. These suggestions have been brought to the attention of the Bureau of the Commission.

In accordance with its new working methods, and the increased focus on implementation at national level, the Commission will review implementation of the agreed conclusions on "The role of men and boys in promoting gender equality", adopted at its 48th session in 2004. There will be an exchange of national-level experiences and good practice through an interactive dialogue. The Commission will also hold an interactive expert panel on the emerging issue theme "Elimination of all forms of violence against women: follow-up to the Secretary-General's in-depth study at national and international levels". We will endeavour to ensure that the Committee's work is fully brought to bear on this discussion.

In accordance with established practice, the Chairperson of the Committee will be invited to address the Commission.

Madame Chairperson and distinguished experts,

Turning to the work of the Division that has a direct bearing on the Convention, I am pleased to report that we have implemented several technical assistance activities to strengthen the capacity of Governments to implement the Convention since the last session of the Committee.

These included a high-level expert dialogue with the Government of Afghanistan in August 2006; a sub-regional workshop on follow-up to the Committee's concluding comments for six countries in the Asia Pacific region, hosted by ESCAP in Bangkok in early November; a workshop in support of the efforts of the Government of Cambodia in follow-up to the Committee's concluding comments; and a further workshop in Sierra Leone to finalize its report under article 18 of the Convention. In all these events, we greatly benefited from the inputs of Committee experts who served as resource persons and facilitators, and I extend our appreciation to Ms Manalo, Ms Popescu, Ms Coker-Appiah, and Ms Dairiam for their contributions.

I am particularly pleased to inform the Committee of our successful work with the Government of Sierra Leone. As a result of several workshops since September 2003, Sierra Leone submitted its combined initial through fifth periodic report in December 2006. As part of our capacity-building efforts, the Division has been able to support the participation, as observers, of two Government officials from Sierra Leone during the second week of this session.

The Division continued its collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union in a one day briefing session for Parliamentarians, in October 2006. I thank Ms. Gaspard for serving as presenter and resource person for the event.

Madam Chairperson and members of the Committee,

Allow me now to turn to some of the issues on this session's agenda. The Committee will consider the reports of fifteen States parties, namely the initial report of Tajikistan; and the periodic reports of Austria, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Greece, India, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Namibia, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Peru, Poland, Suriname, and VietNam. You will continue your important work under the Optional Protocol to the Convention in regard to the petition and inquiry procedures. You will also continue your work on general recommendations on migrant women, and on article 2 of the Convention.

You will meet with representatives of NGOs to hear information about the countries that are reporting at this session. Representatives of the UN system will meet with the Committee later this morning, and again on 22 January.

The session of the Committee will be followed by the pre-session working group to prepare the list of issues and questions for the fifteen States parties that have been invited to present their reports at the thirty-ninth session, in July/August. The Working Group on Communications under the Optional Protocol will meet from 5 to 7 February, and you will be appointing its members during this session.

I wish you every success in the work of this session. I pledge the full support and commitment of the Division for the Advancement of Women in facilitating your task in every way possible. I look forward to meeting with you all again during the coming three-week period.

Thank you.