

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Thirty-fourth session
16 January to 3 February 2006

AGENDA ITEM 3: REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON ON ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BETWEEN THE THIRTY-THIRD AND THIRTY-FOURTH SESSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women,
Ms. Carolyn Hannan, Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and gentlemen.

It is indeed a great pleasure to see you once again and to extend a warm welcome to all of you here at United Nations Headquarters to start the thirty-fourth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. I hope that all members are well and I look forward to working with you during another productive session. May I take this opportunity to wish you – belatedly – a happy and prosperous New Year.

I thank Ms. Mayanja and Ms. Hannan for their opening statements, and in particular the work undertaken since the last session by the Secretariat in support of the implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocol.

Dear colleagues,

I am very pleased to report to you on my activities undertaken between the thirty-third and the thirty-fourth sessions. The Committee will be asked to discuss, and take follow-up measures in regard to some of these activities, as well on some of the issues raised by Ms Mayanja and Ms Hannan. We will have the opportunity to focus on these matters further in the course of our three-week session.

In accordance with established practice and based on the Committee's decision at its 33rd session, I attended the sixtieth session of the General Assembly and addressed its Third Committee on 11 October 2005. This session of the Assembly was especially critical for the Committee as we had re-submitted our request for extension of meeting time on which the Assembly had not taken action at its fifty-ninth session. Consequently, this request was the focus of my statement.

I explained once again the rationale for the Committee's request, and laid out the facts that underpinned our decision to call for three annual sessions as a long-term solution, as well as for the possibility to meet in parallel working groups for parts of the 2006 and 2007 sessions. Just prior to the session, I had the opportunity to meet and discuss the Committee's decision with senior officials from the Permanent Mission of

Norway to the United Nations, the main sponsor of the resolution on the Convention. I wish to place on record my deep appreciation to the delegation of Norway for its commitment and diplomatic skill in steering the resolution, especially the Committee's request for extension of its meeting time, to such a successful conclusion. I also thank Ms Mayanja, Ms Hannan and the Women's Rights Section of the Division for their support and hard work on this issue.

The action taken by the Assembly, as elaborated by Ms Mayanja and Ms Hannan, highlights the willingness of the Member States to support the Committee in a significant manner in the discharge of all its duties, and in a timely manner. I look forward to working with all of you in the implementation of this decision in the most effective and constructive manner.

I also briefed the General Assembly about the work accomplished by the Committee in the course of 2005, including consideration of reports of 16 States parties, the Committee's views on *AT v. Hungary* – the first decision on the merits of a case under the Optional Protocol – and the completion and publication of the results of the Committee's first inquiry under article 8 of the Optional Protocol, in regard to Mexico. I drew attention to the Committee's statements on the occasion of the 10- year review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and the Tsunami disaster that occurred in Southeast Asia in December 2004. I underlined that the Committee continues to monitor the situation of women in Iraq.

Furthermore, I briefed the Assembly about our continuing attention to improving our working methods as well as our interest in and contribution to the process of improving the working methods of all the human rights treaty bodies.

Dear colleagues,

During this inter-sessional period, I maintained contact with several experts on a regular basis on a number of matters pertaining to the work of the Committee. One of the issues we have worked on is a future general recommendation on women migrant workers. I had the honour of hosting a workshop in the Philippines in October, in which several experts, as well as representatives of NGOs participated. I will brief the Committee later during the session on the progress achieved.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

We have, once again, a very busy session ahead of us. Eight States will present their reports. We will meet with representatives of the United Nations system, as well as with non-governmental organizations who will provide country-specific information. I wish to take this opportunity to thank IWRAW Asia Pacific for its continuing excellent encouragement and support to national non-governmental organizations towards the preparation of shadow reports, and for channeling this information so effectively to Committee experts. I encourage all donors – UN entities, private organizations and Governments alike – to recognize the additional demands that will be put on IWRAW

Asia Pacific and national NGOs as the number of States considered on an annual basis will increase from 16 in 2005, to 31 in 2006, to 38 in 2007. This Committee has always greatly benefited from the inputs of national NGOs, and I venture to suggest that this process of mobilization of the NGO community has also had a great beneficial impact on the implementation of the Convention domestically. I trust that the needed – and critical – support will be forthcoming to ensure that such shadow reports will be prepared in most if not all of the States that will be reporting at the upcoming sessions.

We look forward to hearing the report of our Working Group on Communications under the Optional Protocol in closed meeting later in the session. We will continue our work on general recommendations and on a number of other items concerning our working methods. We will have to give thought to the organizational aspects for the meetings in parallel working groups in August and undertake other preparations so that States will be in a position to prepare in a timely manner their responses to the lists of issues and questions for that session. I am also very pleased that the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Louise Arbour, will address the Committee on 27 January 2006.

May I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all members of the Committee, as well as to Ms. Mayanja and Ms. Hannan and the entire staff of the Division for the Advancement of Women, especially the Women's Rights Section, for their continued support of the work of the Committee.

Thank you very much.