

Celebration: Twenty-five Years of the Work of the CEDAW Committee
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The twenty-fifth Anniversary of the CEDAW Committee's work is a cause for celebration. I feel deeply honored to be given the opportunity to speak today as the currently most senior member of the Committee. Although I have not been on the Committee for twenty-five years, I have been a member since 1989 and have thus seen many positive

restricted meeting might have been acceptable. The idea of a monitoring CEDAW Committee consisting of twenty-three independent experts was promoted and accepted in the very last stage of the intergovernmental negotiations. Unfortunately, due to an oversight, the restricted meeting time was not eliminated. Because of the non-tiring efforts of Committee members, Committee Chairs and of friendly States Parties' support, the Committee's meeting time has been extended over the years. Even an amendment to the Convention was adopted in 1995, which, unfortunately, still awaits the necessary number of acceptances. I would like to express my wish that by the Committee's thirtieth anniversary of its work, this amendment to Article 20 (1) will have been accepted "by a two-thirds majority of States parties" and thus, will finally have become legal.

years that these general recommendations have contributed to a deeper understanding of international law in general and of the CEDAW Convention in particular among all stakeholders. Thus, it was the CEDAW Committee that first highlighted genital mutilation of girls and women as a human rights violation in General Recommendation No. 14, even though the formulation it adopted in 1990 only uses the terminology of “female circumcision” due to the then sensitive political discussion of the violation. And in 1992, the Committee again was first in clearly stating in the by now famous General Recommendation No. 19 that violence against women is a form of discrimination and thus not permitted under the Convention. Other important general recommendations preceded and followed those, e.g., on the equal rights of women to participation in the political and public spheres; in marriage and family; in access to health care and on the nature and necessity to apply temporary special measures, if the achievement of de facto equality of women with men is to be accelerated.

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I have always found it difficult to measure the precise impact of the Committee's work with respect to the improvement of women's exercise and enjoyment of their human rights since the Committee has been only one player among many. However, it has been a great satisfaction for Committee members when the impact as shown in legislative reform, court verdicts, programs and other endeavors could be directly traced to the Committee's constructive dialogue, its concluding comments or, most recently, to its views and decisions under the Optional Protocol. Formulating concluding comments rather than a general report on the constructive dialogue, which the Committee started doing in the second half of the 1990s, proved to be a new and rather difficult task, the improvement of which occupies the Committee on an ongoing basis. The Committee sometimes spent hours in plenary on the formulations of a specific paragraph, while today this work squarely falls into members' time before, after or between Committee meetings, adding another burden to the already rather full working schedule of members during a session. Yet, the Committee's concluding comments instigate further improvement of women's enjoyment of their human rights, and thus, are of greatest importance. I envision making these concluding comments even more concrete and precise to increase their relevance to States Parties and the Committee's impact.

Beginning in 2008, the Committee will be located in Geneva for two of its hopefully three annual sessions and will be serviced by the OHCHR. While this is a development that the Committee had already requested in 1994, parting from the DAW is not without regret and sadness, and certainly with deep gratitude to all its staff, since the servicing provided has become excellent after the Division and the Committee moved to New York. The links to the efforts of the Commission on the Status of Women and with the overall United Nations system is of great value to the Committee's work. Thus, the Committee must maintain links with whatever new gender-structure will be emerging in the United Nations. At the same time, being located in Geneva and serviced – together with all other human rights treaty bodies – by the OHCHR will offer a great opportunity for harmonizing and integrating the human rights treaty bodies into a system, which will be recognized as one and will act in a harmonious manner without being unified into a single body, or a reduced number of treaty bodies or being confronted with a single unified report.

In the many years I had the honor to serve on the CEDAW Committee, I, unfortunately, had to recognize the world-wide persistence of discrimination against women. While women undoubtedly are making progress in the exercise and enjoyment of their human rights, such progress, nevertheless, is slow and new challenges emerge, which threaten the gains that have been achieved. It is, therefore, necessary, that the work of this Committee, which has proven to be so successful over the past twenty-five years, will continue with the same or even greater support by the secretariat; UN specialized agencies, programs and funds; States Parties; NGOs and – a recently emerged phenomenon – national human rights institutions.

I hope to be speaking for the Committee when expressing the following wishes to be realized in the near future, such as universal ratification of the Convention and the Optional Protocol; review and withdrawal of reservations; regular reporting by States Parties and increased follow-up by the Committee on its concluding comments, views and decisions; additional support activities by UN entities, NGOs and NHRIs; and an increase in cooperation with other human rights treaty bodies in the framework of moving towards a harmonized and integrated system. The past twenty-five years have proven and underlined the need for the Convention and its Committee. Thus, any treaty body reform must preserve and uphold the specificity of this Committee's work, a specificity, which is directly related to the

specific nature of discrimination against women. Women comprise half of humanity, and I look forward to the day when they will be able to exercise and enjoy their human rights on an equal basis with men. The Committee's endeavors undoubtedly will continue to contribute to this goal!

Thank you!