

**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fifth session**

**Statement by Ms. Silvia Pimentel
Chair**

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

22 February 2011

**Chairperson,
Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women,
Ms. Michelle Bachelet,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues and Friends,**

I have the honour to present to the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women the main outcomes of the forty-sixth, forty-seventh and forty-eighth sessions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Pursuant to its mandate under article 20 of the Convention, the Committee considered the reports of 20 States parties and adopted concluding observations in this regard. Many areas of concern raised by the Committee in these observations relate to, *inter alia*, trafficking and exploitation of prostitution; gender stereotyping; participation in political and public life; access to education and health; including sexual and reproductive health; wage disparities and employment issues; access to justice; violence against women, including sexual violence; harmful practices; and specific issues concerning disadvantaged groups of women, including refugees, stateless women and migrants; as well as older women and rural women.

Representatives of United Nations entities, specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and national human rights institutions attended the sessions and participated in informal meetings with the Committee. Information was also received from such entities prior to each session for the consideration by the Committee.

Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

The Committee has also been active in the elaboration of general recommendations on provisions of the Convention and important thematic issues with a view to providing guidance to States parties on the reporting obligations and the implementation of the Convention.

I am delighted to inform you that during its forty-seventh session, the Committee adopted two general recommendations. The General Recommendation on the Core Obligations of States Parties under Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women seeks to clarify the scope and meaning of article 2 of the Convention, which contains a broad obligation to eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms, and is crucial to the full implementation of the Convention. The General Recommendation on Older Women and the Protection of their Human Rights draws attention to the plight of older women and the multiple forms of discrimination they face and aims at addressing specific concerns, such as, income security, housing, access to health care, and many other critical issues.

The Committee is continuing its work on the draft general recommendation on the economic consequences of marriage and its dissolution and is hoping to adopt this recommendation by the end of 2011. The Committee has recently started to elaborate, with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, a joint general recommendation regarding harmful practices with a view towards their elimination. Such harmful practices include female genital mutilation, force marriage and child marriage, for example.

Work also began, at this past session, on the general recommendation on women in armed conflict and post conflict situations. This general recommendation will underscore the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women, especially given that conflicts are often accompanied by gender based violence. It will also highlight the absolute need for the full participation of women as active agents in peace, security and reconstruction.

Moreover, the Committee decided to draft a general recommendation on access to justice. This decision underscores the fact that women in many countries continue to face difficulties in protecting their rights through competent national tribunals and other public institutions. It is the view of the Committee that access to suitable and effective legal remedies is the first line of defense with respect to discriminatory acts against women.

Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

The Committee's interaction with the human rights machinery is extremely important for its overall activity and the Committee benefits greatly from the cooperation of the relevant stakeholders in order to effectively discharge its mandate. The Committee has been working closely with various United Nations entities and specialized agencies concerning its work, including the provision of relevant country-specific information for purposes of the constructive dialogues with the States parties, and input with respect to general recommendations being elaborated by the Committee, for example.

I would like to note that the Committee is currently collaborating with UN Women on two of its draft general recommendations. The Committee is very keen on developing and maintaining close relations with UN Women, and I have taken the opportunity of being in New York to meet with Ms. Bachelet to further discuss future cooperation on operational activities, strategic issues, technical assistance and other matters of common concern.

During these past sessions, the Committee also met with various special mandate holders, including the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, the Independent Expert in the field of cultural rights, and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons. These exchanges are of the utmost importance in our quest to strengthen the existing linkages between the Committee and these entities.

The Committee and its members have additionally participated in the Inter-Chairpersons Meetings and its working groups with a view to strengthening the treaty body framework and enhancing implementation between international and regional human rights mechanisms and institutions. In addition, the Committee set-up a task force to further improve the quality of its working methods with a view to further harmonization with the other treaty bodies.

Furthermore, Committee members have been active in participating in panel discussions and seminars relating to women's issues, including seminars and conferences organized by the United Nations and related bodies, other international organizations, regional bodies, national governments, universities and other entities.

Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

Through the constructive dialogue with the States parties and its follow-up initiative whereby the Committee identifies priority issues in the concluding observations for the States parties to implement within one to two years, the Committee can attest to the progress achieved in realizing the human rights of women, such as the withdrawal of reservations to the Convention; the increased attention paid by States parties to creating a legal framework that promotes and protects women's rights, including through the introduction of temporary special measures to accelerate the achievement of *de facto* equality between women and men, and the establishment of national machinery for the advancement of women; improvements in education and health; and well as greater participation in the political and economic spheres.

Although much progress has been made with respect to women's rights, a great deal of work remains to be done to achieve gender equality. Full equality for women in law and practice has not been achieved in any country in the world. Women continue to suffer profound and pervasive human rights violations, such as gender-based violence in the public and private spheres. The Committee is also increasingly concerned with the intersectionality of the definition of discrimination

against women, as contained in article 2 of the Convention, which encompasses not only discrimination based on sex and gender, but also relates to and is inextricably linked with other factors that affect women, such as race, ethnicity, religion or belief, health, status, age, caste and sexual orientation and gender identity. Intersectionality is a fundamental concept for understanding the scope of the general obligations of the State parties contained in article 2. Likewise, the Committee is also increasingly concerned with the particular vulnerability of women at risk, such as women in armed conflict and post conflict situations, migrant and refugee women, and indigenous women.

Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

Allow me to reiterate the Committee's readiness to continue its cooperation with the Commission in pursuing our common goals of the elimination of discrimination against women, gender equality and empowerment of women. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Commission for the continued support to our work.

I wish you well in your important deliberations.

Thank you.
