

**Ms. Salma Khan, Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women 1997-1998**

**Statement at the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention
on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
by the General Assembly of the United Nations**

13 October 2004, United Nations New York

The Secretary General of the United Nations

The President of the General Assembly

The current Chairperson and former Chairpersons of the CEDAW Committee

Distinguished Representatives of the States Parties

Ladies and Gentleman,

It is indeed a great honor for me to be able to participate in this commemorative event to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the adoption of our Convention. This is a great moment for the women of the world and for me in particular as I have always prided myself of being one of those who have had the unique opportunity to steer the CEDAW Committee comprising of very distinguished experts and women's human rights defenders from around the world. To be elected as the Chair of the Committee was a big achievement for me but was also a very big challenge.

I was elected a member of the CEDAW Committee in 1993 for the first time and then re-elected again in 1997 for my second term and was elected the Chair of the Committee the same year for 1997 and 1998.

At the beginning of my chairpersonship during the sixteenth session of the Committee, one of the most significant developments took place in terms of addressing the limitation of the meeting time contained in the Convention itself. For effective functioning of the Committee, its meeting time was increased to two sessions a year of three weeks duration on a temporary basis pending amendment to article 20.1 of the Convention. This measure not only had a great impact to reduce the building up of undesirable backlog in consideration of reports of States parties, but also provided a broadening and transformative experience to all Committee members. Increased amount of time and lessening the inter-sessional gaps allowed them a closer scrutiny and monitoring of the situation of women. Two annual sessions also increased the Committee's visibility and allowed opportunities for clear elaboration of the States' obligations under the Convention.

In order to address the backlog of reports awaiting consideration and to encourage States parties to report in a timely fashion, as a temporary measure, the Committee invited States parties to combine two reports required under article 18 of the Convention.

The sixteenth session of the Committee in January 1997 came at an important time of the life of the United Nations, just after the appointment of a new Secretary General and at the fiftieth anniversary of the Commission on the Status of Women. It also came after an important cycle of United Nations Conferences that had solidified links among all parts

elaboration of concluding comments with a view to streamlining the comments while retaining flexibility. In considering periodic reports, the Committee undertook a more analytical comparative approach between the previous and current report, thereby helping the States parties to establish measurable indicators of advancement of women. The Committee improved its method of reviewing States parties reports and revised the formulation of concluding comments to provide reporting States a clear indication of their strength in implementing the Convention and areas where further efforts were required.

The Committee considered the report of Zaire on an exceptional basis as many women and children had fallen victim to violence, including murder and rape due to a rebellion in the country. An oral report was presented by the representative of Zaire. The Committee urged the State party to take effective and immediate measures to protect the physical and moral integrity of displaced women and children.

The general trend of implementation of the C

As part of its contribution, the Committee also prepared a joint statement with the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the indivisibility of civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights and the centrality of gender awareness to the enjoyment of these rights. The principle of the equal rights of women and men is reflected in the Charter of UN and UDHR, which is elaborated in CEDAW.

During the period the Committee's relationship with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the human rights mechanism, including the treaty bodies and thematic rapporteurs was also deepened.

The Committee also faced number of challenges. One of the major challenges faced by the Committee during my tenure was that the Convention was still subjected to a large number reservations and even though the laws and policies to implement the Convention had been introduced, de facto implementation was still impeded by entrenched attitudes that were in contradiction to the principles of the Convention. By the end of my term of chair at the end of nineteenth session in 1998, 162 State Parties had ratified the Convention out of which 54 States had entered reservations to one or more articles in the Convention, including permissible reservations to article 29. The Committee consistently urged the States parties to withdraw their reservations, particularly from article 2 which is central to the object and purpose of the Convention and article 16 which elaborates women's equal rights in family relations and marriage. The Committee on a routine basis expressed its concern to reservations to the core provisions of the Convention.

The Committee was also concerned about the enforceability of the Convention in domestic legal systems and took initiative to prepare a study on the subject so that the Convention could be made more effective at the domestic level.

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