

Statement of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the fifteen-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

45th session

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women welcomes the fifteen-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on Beijing+5 which will be conducted by the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2010. The Committee notes that the review takes place just after the thirtieth anniversary of the General Assembly's adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 18 December 1979.

The Committee commends the significant steps which have been taken by States to implement the commitments made at Beijing and during its five-year review. It welcomes the fact that since Beijing, 42 States have ratified the Convention, and that the ratification of only eight more States is required before the goal of universal ratification established in the Platform is achieved. It encourages those States to become party to the Convention as soon as possible. The Committee is gratified that the Convention's Optional Protocol, adopted a little over 10 years ago in 1999, has been adhered to by 99 States parties thereby providing millions of women from all regions of the world with the right to petition the Committee in regard to alleged violations of the rights set out in the Convention and enabling the Committee itself to inquire into grave or systematic violations of its terms. It is pleased that women are increasingly turning to this tool to ensure enjoyment of their rights, and that States parties have responded positively to the Committee's views and recommendations on individual complaints by removing discriminatory laws, policies and programmes, introducing proactive measures to comply with the Convention and providing individual petitioners with compensation. The Committee is also pleased that there has been steady progress in respect of reservations, with many States withdrawing or modifying those that they lodged on ratification. It encourages those States which maintain reservations to work towards their withdrawal, including by drawing on the experience of other States which have done so.

Through its review of States parties' reports, the Committee has seen the progress States have made in realizing the human rights of women since the adoption of the Convention, and particularly since the Fourth World Conference on Women. States have paid increasing attention 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 equality between women and men. They have also put in place policies and programmes aimed at the practical realization of women's rights, as well as measures to challenge gender stereotypes that underpin discrimination against women in our societies, communities and families. This is a cause for celebration. At the same time, the Committee regrets that equality for women in law and practice has not been achieved in any country in the world. It is disturbed that women continue to suffer profound and pervasive human rights violations, including gender-based violence in the public and private spheres, including that most private of private spheres, the family. It is also concerned that discrimination against women often has multiple aspects, such as age or disability, and that particular groups of women, such as migrants or indigenous, are especially vulnerable.

The fifteen-year review provides the international community with an opportunity to send a strong message of renewed commitment to the promotion and protection of women's human rights. Throughout its work the Committee has emphasized the strong linkages among the Convention, the Platform for Action and the Beijing+5 outcomes. In line with its paragraph 322, it has taken the Platform into account Committee when considering

the reports of States parties, and in its concluding observations it has called on States parties to implement both the Platform and the Beijing+5 outcome document. In essence, the Committee considers that these consensus policy documents provide guidance for States on the steps they must take to realize their legal obligations set out in the Convention so that women enjoy their rights both in law and fact.

The fifteen-year review is based on the sharing of experiences and good practices with a view to overcoming remaining obstacles and new challenges, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals. We are now more than halfway to the 2015 deadline for achievement of these goals, and there have been significant advances, and important setbacks, in particular as a result of the financial crisis. While each of the eight goals is key to the achievement of the obligations in the Convention and the implementation of the Platform for Action, goal 5 on improving maternal health is especially important. It is of great concern to the Committee that maternal mortality remains unacceptably high across much of the developing world.

The full implementation of the Platform, the Beijing+5 outcomes, the Millennium Development Goals and the Convention is required to make human rights a reality for individual women. This requires political will, especially at the national level. States must do more to guarantee women's access to justice, including by ensuring that judicial systems and law enforcement facilitate women's capacity to claim their rights. They must make sure that all discriminatory laws are repealed and that they exercise due diligence in pursuing violations perpetrated by private actors. At the international level, more efforts must be made to support women's use of the international human rights machinery, so it effectively promotes national level implementation of these instruments.

At this fifteen-year mark, the Committee calls for increased political will directed to the achievement of women's full equality with men. It also calls for the recognition of the contribution of the women's human rights movement to the quest for full enjoyment of all human rights through which has created a broadened and inclusive interpretation of human rights emphasizing indivisibility and universality and their linkage with development.