

**CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF CEDAW: ACHIEVEMENTS AND
CONTINUING CHALLENGES TOWARDS THE REALISATION OF
WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS**

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Jointly organised by International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP Asia Pacific) and the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL)

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CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF CEDAW: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONTINUING CHALLENGES TOWARDS THE REALISATION OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

A Workshop Report



Sunila Abeysekera

Executive Director of IRAW Asia Pacific

Welcoming Remarks

Sunila Abeysekera welcomed everyone to the workshop and briefly spoke to the importance of marking the 30th Anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Charlotte Bunch

Executive Director of CWGL

The Significance of CEDAW in the Evolution of the Recognition and Protection of Women's Human Rights Within the International Human Rights System and as a Tool for the Women's Movement

At the time CEDAW was created, the women's movement did not realise the significance it would have today. Today, Charlotte said, the movement celebrated 30 years of CEDAW and remembered the women who pushed for the recognition of women's rights through the League of Nations and United Nations. Such as Eleanor Roosevelt, who achieved the inclusion of language recognising 'the rights of people' and 'equality between all people', which paved the way for the greater recognition of women's human rights.



As the movement discussed today the growth and dynamism of the women's rights movement and CEDAW's role in this, they see that the principles of CEDAW have allowed them to keep on interpreting the Convention to address all aspects of women's lives and changes in women's realities. Recently greater recognition has been brought to the need to give equal recognition and protection to economic, social and cultural rights (ESC rights), yet ESC rights were embedded within CEDAW in 1979. CEDAW is one of the most integrated Conventions. So as the 30th anniversary of CEDAW is celebrated, women want to celebrate not only the achievement 30 years ago but also the role CEDAW has played over this last 30 years. CEDAW provides a platform for making demands of governments and is a central part of the on-going movements and struggles for recognition and protection of women's rights.

There is also a very creative and dynamic relationship between CEDAW and the women's movements and it is this relationship which enables CEDAW to constantly evolve and respond to changing contexts and changing realities of women's lives.

The current Gender Equality Architecture Reforms taking place within the United Nations system highlights the need for a strong institutional framework within the United Nations to carry this work forward.



Dubravka Šimonović

Member of the CEDAW Committee and former Chair of the Committee

Highlighting the Achievements of CEDAW

The Convention was adopted on 18 December 1979 and entered into force in 1981. It was the first legally binding international treaty aimed at eradicating gender discrimination. The aim of CEDAW is the recognition and achievement of de jure and de facto equality between men and women through laws, policies and programmes. All

State parties must ensure the practical realisation of the principles of equality between women and men.

In 2008 the CEDAW Committee released a statement to mark the 60th anniversary of Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In this statement, the Committee pointed out that the obligations and principles of equality under CEDAW are emerging as customary international law. Today CEDAW is only a few States short of universal ratification, and year by year more and more States are ratifying the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, of which its 10th anniversary is also celebrated this year.

Dubravka highlighted that the CEDAW Convention is constantly evolving. The CEDAW Committee, since it started its work in 1982, has ensured that the Convention is a living document through its work and interpretations. The Committee has proceeded in a dynamic

way to ensure the full implementation of the Convention including through State reports, interactive dialogue, general recommendations and decisions under the Optional Protocol to CEDAW.

In its General Recommendations (GR) the Committee explains more fully the different articles of the Convention or specific rights under the Convention. Some General Recommendations have been very important in terms of substance, for example GR 19 on violence against women. Adopted in 1992, it explained that violence against women is a form of discrimination that falls under Article 1 of the Convention. The CEDAW Committee also used the due diligence formula to explain that states have particular obligations to ensure protection from violence against women. At present the Committee has adopted 26 General Recommendations (as of 9 March 2009) and hopes to adopt the General Recommendation on Article 2 in the next session. Furthermore, there are two pending General Recommendation: the first on the rights of older women and the second on the economic consequences of divorce.

The Committee also provides recommendations to the State on how it can meet its obligation to implement the Convention. It does so by providing more detailed recommendations, for example referring to specific articles of a discriminatory nature in national laws. Furthermore, in 2008 the Committee also adopted a new follow-up procedure. Through this procedure, the Committee prolongs the reporting period of States to 4-7 years (thereby allowing combined reporting), while for urgent matters it requests the State to provide information on one or two critical issues within a year of the review. In addition, the Committee also carried out follow-up to the implementation of Concluding Observations, for example through a visit to Luxemburg in which the Committee was invited to discuss implementation measures with the government.

The Optional Protocol is another space where the evolution and dynamism of the Convention can also be seen. The Optional Protocol brings new perspectives to the Convention and also helps to shift States' perception of the Convention from a declaration to a legally binding document which States must adhere to.

Other recent developments in the Committee's work include the new reporting guidelines. Each State under review must now report against the common core guidelines for all treaty bodies and the treaty specific guidelines, which the CEDAW Committee has issued specifically for State reporting under CEDAW. In addition, the CEDAW Committee is expanding its engagement with UN agencies and is now receiving reports from national level UN agencies. Dubravka also highlighted the value placed by the Committee on NGO contributions to the reporting process. Shadow reports form a very valuable source of information for the Committee and NGO representatives who attend the sessions provide additional, very important information to the Committee.

Dubravka also highlighted that the Committee has adopted the issuance of a section of Concluding Observations that specifically targets parliaments as one arm of the State. A new recommendation has been added to every Concluding Observation to address their role in fulfilling State obligation under the Convention.

The Committee will meet for an additional session each year from 2010, bringing the number to three sessions per year. This development is very important to enable the Committee to examine state reports in a timely manner. Through additional sessions over the last 3 years, the Committee managed to clear the backlog of State reports through the examination of 90 states parties in that time. The additional sessions also enabled the Committee to focus on non-reporting States, including States that have never reported over the last 25 years. The Committee is now inviting them to provide a report within 2 years and if they do not, the Committee will discuss implementation of the Convention of that country without the State's input. The Committee did this for the first time with Dominica in the last session (January 2009) and through subsequent discussions with the State, they have agreed to produce a report next year.

Another recent change has been the shift of the servicing of the Committee from the Division for the Advancement of Women in New York, which serviced the Committee for over 25 years, to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva. The advantage of this shift is that the CEDAW Committee is now better connected with the other treaty bodies. Dubravka expressed her hope that the new Gender Equality Architecture Reforms would also enable CEDAW to become more connected with other UN bodies.

Some of the remaining challenges for CEDAW include the need for: additional ratification, removal of reservations, and greater focus from some States to CEDAW that switch the State perspective of CEDAW from a declaration to a legally binding instrument.

Lee Waldorf

Human Rights Advisor, UNIFEM

Upcoming Plans to Celebrate the 30th Anniversary of CEDAW

There is a philosophy of gender equality built into CEDAW. The Convention clearly states that it requires action and real change. Furthermore, the Convention is a living and flexible document which enables us to continue to use it to respond to changing women's realities.

The OHCHR and UNIFEM have been discussing ways in which they will mark the 30th Anniversary of CEDAW this year. The activities planned will recognise the significant achievements of CEDAW as well as some continuing obstacles and challenges to its full implementation. For example, through the cumulative work of CEDAW, women's groups and other bodies, decisive shifts and patterns towards the better recognition and protection of women's human rights can be seen, including the fact that CEDAW is far better reflected in national laws and policies today. There has also been a very clear increase in plans to increase implementation of the recommendations. These achievements are brought about through what the different bodies do at different stages in the process, for example, from support to governments in preparing reports, the role of IWRAP Asia Pacific and other NGOs and UN

agencies in bringing information to the CEDAW Committee and the role of the Committee in making the Concluding Observations more actionable.

However the trend is extremely uneven. Protection for women does not necessarily extend to every group of women at the national level and there is a constant lack of funding for implementation at the national level.

It is within this context that UNIFEM and the OHCHR thought it was an important moment to make a very big statement about the CEDAW Convention and its importance, as well as what is still required to make it even more effective. Lee noted that UNIFEM would also like to coordinate with NGOs on these plans and circulated a sign-up sheet so that UNIFEM could stay in touch with all interested NGOs.

Rhonda Copelon

Professor, CUNY School of Law, Co-founder of the International Women's Human Rights Law Clinic

The Evolution of CEDAW

Work around CEDAW has been critical for bring gender perspectives into the UN human rights system. In particular, Rhonda acknowledged the contribution of Ivanka Corti, Committee member from 1987 – 2002.

In the earlier days (in the 1980s), CEDAW was not looked upon as a serious treaty. The Committee did not meet in Geneva with the other treaty bodies. It was confined to one meeting a year of not more than 2 weeks by Article 20 of the Convention. Furthermore, States did not nominate serious people to the CEDAW Committee. Many wives of Ambassadors were appointed. As a result, CEDAW got a reputation as the 'boutique Committee' where women on the Committee just went shopping. While that was not true of all members, this was the perception. Rhonda reflected that when women's groups were getting ready for the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, the mantra of the movement was 'women's rights are human rights'. But then they would remember that there was already CEDAW in existence – this was a sign of how insignificant CEDAW was.

When the Committee is looked at today, it is clear how enormous the changes have been. This change has been brought about by a number of factors including the critical role of the women's movement. The Vienna Conference and other conferences made a huge difference in shifting this marginalisation of women's rights. In addition, the Committee itself has become very strong through the appointment of some very committed feminists, especially the leadership of Ivanka Corti. The evolution of the General Recommendations of the Committee showed the important role the Committee now plays in creating jurisprudence. Ivanka Corti was a huge personality and she made a commitment to CEDAW as a full-time job. She brought the participation of NGOs into the review which at that time was a very difficult task. She fought to

eliminate bureaucratic obstacles and she fought for two meetings a year, and she achieved this. She also fought for the Committee to be moved to Geneva so it would be better recognised. She also oversaw the adoption of the OP-CEDAW. She had a vision, she was very strategic and bold and she overcame all obstacles.

Rhonda noted the importance of not underestimating the General Recommendations to CEDAW and their application by the State parties. Through the General Recommendations, equality has not been reduced to a comparative agenda between men and women. Rather, it has been contextualised and interpreted to reflect realities of women's lives.

Culture and religion are increasingly controversial and posed as obstacles to the realisation of women's human rights and the Committee has taken on these issues in their Concluding Observations. However, while the Committee has recognised the issues of LGBTI people and abortion, they have not yet taken up these issues – there is still a lot of work for CEDAW to do.

CEDAW Concluding Observations and General Recommendations are very important to women's rights work in all other UN arenas and work. For example, they played an important role in the drafting of the International Criminal Court. It took 25 years for CEDAW to emerge as a powerful treaty body and NGOs need to keep it that way and strengthen it even further. Activists need to keep up writing shadow reports, bringing cases under the Optional Protocol and pressing the Committee in the direction they want it to go.



Sindi Medar-Gould

Executive Director of Baobab for Women's Human Rights

The impact of CEDAW on National Movements and National Level Change

Nigeria ratified CEDAW 26 years ago with no reservations. However, it is not implemented. For the last 15 years Baobab for Women's Human Rights has worked towards the implementation of the Convention at the national level. However they face many obstacles, including the Chair

of the Senate who has sworn that as long as she is in that position CEDAW will not be implemented. Another Senator said that the notion that men and women are equal is an abomination.

Two thirds of the states in Nigeria have to ratify a document before it becomes legal in that state. Women's groups have tried at federal level to have the Convention implemented nationally and it has not worked and so now women's groups are trying to work state by state to get it ratified and implemented. Women in Nigeria know the importance of CEDAW. They know that despite the obstacles to implementation it is a legally binding document to which the state is accountable, which makes it a powerful tool for women's groups.

Sindi acknowledged the work of IRAW Asia Pacific in strengthening NGOs capacity to work towards the goal of implementation of CEDAW. She noted that despite the many obstacles she will go home from this event rejuvenated with armour to keep on fighting.



Heisoo Shin

Former Committee member

Responses and Reflections

Heisoo noted that she was on the Committee for two terms, beginning in 2001. The focus of much of her work has been on violence against women and the comfort women issue particularly.

Heisoo noted that there has been a great increase in NGO involvement in the CEDAW Review process. It is now a norm for women's groups to engage in this process. Heisoo stated that this is thanks to IRAW Asia Pacific and UNIFEM through the Global to Local Programme. The Committee now has a series of lunch-time briefings with NGOs during the session which they attend, in addition to the formal NGO de-briefing each Monday of the session. Heisoo questioned whether we should still call NGO reports 'shadow reports', as they are now all put on the OHCHR website and are far from being in the shadows.

Heisoo noted that the CEDAW Committee works in a much more structured way than previously and it much more efficient and structured. However some challenges and tasks remain in order to bring about the full implementation of the Convention. Two of these challenges rest in the fact that the General Recommendations and decisions of the Committee under the Optional Protocol are little-known by governments and NGOs alike. The decisions of the Committee under the Optional Protocol give insight into the situation of women and how the Convention must be implemented, which is relevant in all countries. Four cases of violence against women have been decided by the Committee so far and three of these were on domestic violence. Heisoo suggested that NGOs can learn a lot about implementation of the Convention from the decisions, as well as that NGOs should translate the decisions and give them to governments so

they know their obligations. Further, the General Recommendations also give one a much fuller understanding of the Convention.

Heisoo noted that the composition of the Committee makes a big difference as to how the Convention is interpreted and how individual communications are dealt with. If the members are progressive then so will be their decisions and vice-versa. As such, Heisoo urged NGOs to be involved in the process of nomination and cultivation of Committee members to ensure that the candidates are good and up to scratch.



Highlighting the Continuing Challenges to the Realisation of Women's Human Rights and the Implementation of CEDAW

Rebecca Brown

Programme Officer, ESCR-Net: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Women

CEDAW fully integrates both civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. However, the recognition of ESC rights within CEDAW and beyond is still a challenge. In December 2008, ESCR-Net organised a meeting in Nairobi. Women's groups came together to discuss the continuing challenges to the recognition and protection of women's ESC rights in the current global context of climate change, religious fundamentalism, the "war on terror" and the global financial crisis. The meeting demonstrated that while there is increasing recognition, there is a continuing challenge of creating a durable link between women's ESC rights and women's rights generally.

Because women and their children represent approximately 70 percent of those living under the global poverty line, they disproportionately suffer when economic, social and cultural rights are not fulfilled. Due to structural and gender-based discrimination, women are denied equal access to basic health care, housing, education, and work. As a result of this situation, there is a pressing need to improve understanding, recognition and implementation of women's economic,

social and cultural rights as integral to and indivisible from civil and political rights, as well as the need for their integration in community, national, and international contexts.

Many participants in the Nairobi meeting raised the need to recognise the links between violence against women and ESC rights. However, a number of participants felt that there is a need to raise awareness regarding the economic, social and cultural underpinnings for this violence. In addition to the more obvious connections between violence against women and lack of adequate housing or adequate education, participants highlighted the issue of violence within the conflict situations and pointed out that it is not only the experience of physical violence during the conflict that is disproportionately borne by women. Structural violence (in the form of extreme poverty, homelessness, hunger, unemployment), which has been created by inequality, is also disproportionately born by women as well.

The CEDAW Committee and many Special Rapporteurs have been critical actors in highlighting ESC rights and the right to equality between men and women. The CEDAW Committee could play a leadership role in highlighting the intersection between substantive ESC Rights and the right to equality. The committee should be encouraged to draft a General Recommendations on ESC rights highlighting how women are uniquely affected by different situations and these often impact on their ESC rights in gender-specific ways. The General Comments related to ESC rights, coming out of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are drafted in 'gender neutral' language. There is a need to understand that violations of ESC rights have a gendered character, and that women are in fact disproportionately and uniquely affected. This could also be something for the CEDAW Committee to consider when reviewing states obligations, and commit to a more searching review of the gender specific impacts that relate to ESCR violations.

A list of agreed upon priorities was developed during the meeting which included:

- Supporting the mobilization of women on the implementation of CEDAW.
- Supplying information, interpreting international law and creating tools to help women understand their ESC rights.
- Raising awareness within the CEDAW review process of ESC rights.
- Highlighting violence against women as an important and critical issue and focusing on the interconnections with lack of implementation of ESC rights.
- Creating a campaign which seeks to highlight the indivisibility of women's human rights and ESC rights and demands full implementation of women's ESC rights at the national level

Grace Poore

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC): Recognising Sexuality Rights and the Rights of the Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Transgender people under CEDAW

The terms, lesbian, bisexual women and transgender persons are used mostly in the English language and primarily in the global North. However, alternative language is being developed to be more inclusive and more cognizant of the sexual and gender hierarchies, and to move away from the binaries of male and female, man and woman. In the absence of a concise term to describe women who express their sexual orientation and gender identity differently from prescribed heteronorms, she will be using the term, LBT persons or LBT individuals – the abbreviation for lesbians, bisexual women and transgender people.

Two examples of the kind of discrimination which lesbian, bisexual and transgender women face were shared. Firstly, she told the story of a young Burmese lesbian living and working in a factory in Mae Sot, Thailand, who was gang-raped by 6 men to 'cure' her of being a lesbian. The community stayed silent and did not come to her aid. A second example was of a former corporal in the Nepalese Army who was sentenced to solitary confinement and discharged from the army because she was a lesbian and in a relationship with an army trainee.

LBT individuals face discrimination as women (because of their sex and gender) and as sexual beings (because of their sexual orientation). Many LBT individuals face additional discrimination because of their class, ethnicity, age, race, economic status and disability status. In countries with sodomy laws, LBT women frequently remain closeted and lead double lives. When they experience discrimination or violence, they are less likely to report it or seek redress. In countries where homosexuality is criminalized, even if the law does not explicitly include lesbianism, the fear of state penalties, family rejection or community recrimination silences LBT persons. As a result, discrimination against women on the basis of their (actual or perceived) sexual orientation and/or gender identity is often underreported, if reported at all. Many government and shadow reports make no reference to LBT groups. But the fact is, when conditions are bad for heterosexual women, they are bad if not worse for women who are sexual minorities.

For example, LBT persons experience forced institutionalization in mental rehabilitation clinics, electro shock treatment as aversion therapy, sexual harassment in school and at work, threats of rape to make you straight, school expulsions, eviction by landlords, police kidnapping, family violence, media stigmatization. Lesbians face discrimination in the workplace because of their gender and their sexual orientation. Employment and job promotions are denied if women look too masculine. Male co-workers stalk and sexually harass lesbians who cannot report for fear of backlash and retaliation. Transgender persons are marginalized in their jobs, and are targeted for blackmail, harassment, and sexual violence from the community or people in positions of authority like the police. Activists who defend the rights of LBT individuals experience threats to their safety, in some cases, harassment, attacks, even torture and abuse, with police participating in or doing nothing to stop these violations.

Between 1994 and 2001, CEDAW explicitly referenced sexual orientation in several concluding observations relating to the criminalization of consensual sexual relations among women, anti-discrimination legislative protections, and asylum. But after 2001, CEDAW was silent on this issue and fell behind other treaty bodies in recognizing that non-heteronormative sexual orientation and gender identity were grounds for discrimination and violence. During this silence, other UN treaty bodies and Special Rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteurs on Violence Against Women talked about sexual orientation in relation to the right to work, the right to highest attainable standard of health, adolescent health and development, anti-discrimination legislative protections, repeal of criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual relations, anti-hate crime protections, being targeted for threats and violence, torture, murder, and rape.

Almost seven years after not responding to human rights abuses against LBT persons, CEDAW lifted the veil of silence at its 42nd session in October/November 2008. In Concluding Observations on Ecuador, the Committee addressed discrimination against sexual minorities and asked for an investigation by state authorities. In Concluding Observations on Kyrgyzstan, the Committee expressed concerns about harassment and discrimination against women because of their sexuality, and urged the State to take appropriate measures to ensure that the CEDAW Convention applied to all women without discrimination and to offer protections from harassment and violence by public and private individuals. In January 2009, in Concluding Observations on Guatemala the Committee listed sexuality as one of the reasons women faced multiple forms of discrimination, and urged the State to take steps to address this problem.

While this step forward by the Committee is celebrated, inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity by CEDAW is constantly challenged on the basis of legitimacy, with questions such as: does the Convention apply to LBT individuals since CEDAW only covers discrimination against women? If all gay people face discrimination, is the discrimination faced by LBT persons greater than or different from the discrimination faced by gay men and if not, is CEDAW the place to bring up LBT concerns? Wouldn't it be more appropriate for LBT issues be taken up by other human rights committees instead of CEDAW?

CEDAW recognises the intersecting oppressions women face and the interlocking barriers to women's full enjoyment of their rights because of racism, nationalism, and able bodied elitism. Why are sexual orientation and gender identity an exception? Did women who are marginalized because of nationality, disability, race have to prove that the discrimination and violence they faced was greater than the discrimination faced by men who were marginalized because of their nationality, race, disability? Did marginalized women facing intersectional discrimination have to show that their discrimination was greater and different from the discrimination faced by non-marginalized women?

Another concern raised is that inclusion of sexuality rights will hamper ratification of CEDAW or increase reservations, in part because States object to CEDAW's interference in their social, cultural and religious rights. Some States also perceive references to sexual orientation and gender identity as introduction of new rights. But this is not new terrain for CEDAW. The

Committee has argued in other instances effectively that what they seek to uphold are not new rights but new ways of addressing existing long-term violations, and new interpretations of the Convention's mandate, and new clarifications of violence and discrimination. Even with controversial issues like female genital mutilation, CEDAW members found a way to hold the line that traditional practices resulting in harm, suffering and violence had to be changed or suspended. With the controversial right to abortion, CEDAW found a way to navigate this as reproductive rights and health rights. CEDAW must find a way to navigate the controversy about sexual orientation and gender identity as the right to sexual autonomy, which includes the right to determine your own sexual identity and expression, who you partner with, when, if and with whom to have sexual relations.

Another anxiety about respecting and protecting the rights of lesbians is that this could be perceived as promoting homosexuality. When CEDAW called on States to end the practice of stoning for adultery, was this read as promoting adultery? Even if it was, it did not stop CEDAW members from speaking up about a lethal practice than often targeted women. Likewise, CEDAW has defended women's right not to marry or the right to choose their own partner without facing violent sanctions. LBT individuals have the right to choose their partners and the right not to be forced to marry someone they don't desire.

To address some of the challenges in addressing LBT issues at CEDAW, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission is releasing a Guide that is intended to help NGOs and activists prepare inclusive shadow reports for CEDAW. An inclusive report not only recognizes that women experience multiple intersecting forms of discriminations based on factors like race, class, age, ethnicity, physical ability and national origin, but also incorporates an analysis of the discrimination women face on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

The following recommendations were made:

- In response to shadow reports from LBT groups about rights violations in their countries, the CEDAW Committee must urge member States that come up for review that they have to live up to their commitment to all women not just some women.
- In keeping with the spirit of the CEDAW Convention, which is designed to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, the Committee must adopt the broadest definition of equality. In its recommendations on Article 2 of the Convention, the Committee must make explicit reference to sexual orientation and gender identity as bases for violence and discrimination so that lesbians and transgender persons are not left without the protection of the CEDAW Convention in states that are hostile to the sexual autonomy of women.
- The Committee must consistently address human rights abuses faced by LBT persons even when the State argues these abuses are culturally and socially unavoidable. The Committee must send a clear message to state and non-state violators that denying LBT women their rights because of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression violates the Convention and keeps LBT individuals from enjoying all other rights.

- Women's human rights must not be desexualized. The right to sexual autonomy should not be seen as incidental or an inferior right compared to the other rights because sexual autonomy is integral to women's wholeness, self-determination, dignity and empowerment. The right to sexual autonomy should not be limited to heterosexual, gender conforming women but also apply to LBT persons.
- It is vital that the CEDAW Committee honour the spirit of inclusion and protection for all women so that the CEDAW Convention as a living document moves forward and not backwards, extends more protections not less, and so that there is no hierarchy of discrimination where some vulnerable groups are protected and others are not. Not recognizing sexual orientation and gender identity and expression pose a serious challenge to the aspiration and implementation of CEDAW. The Committee as an international body of independent experts needs to lead by example and confront institutional and non-institutional homophobia in the fight for women's equality.

The presentations were followed by brief questions and discussions with participants of the event:

- A number of participants spoke of the obstacles to convincing their governments to ratify CEDAW (Sudan) or remove reservations.
- A participant from WAVE also spoke to her experience in bringing two cases of domestic violence to the CEDAW Committee under the Optional Protocol and questioned why more cases are not being brought.



Sunila concluded the event by reiterating how CEDAW has evolved and grown as an instrument for the protection and promotion of women's rights and that it is the dynamic relationship between NGOs and the Committee that has enabled CEDAW to be dynamic and responsive to changes in women's lives.