

# INTERNATIONAL MACHINERY ON HUMAN RIGHTS\*

By

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## 1. Introduction

Human rights have long been a subject of international concern. This is constantly reaffirmed by our leaders in their pronouncements on regimes notorious for their denial of rights, such as South Africa.

Human rights was high on the agenda at the recent summit between President Reagan and Mr Gorbachev.

From the inception of the United Nations there has been continuous activity in drafting human rights declarations and conventions, encouraging their adoption, signature and ratification, and in overseeing their implementation. This year sees the fortieth anniversary of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights.

What I propose to do is to outline the U.N. human rights machinery, then address some of the constraints upon it, and suggest some ways to make it more effective.

## 2. Background

The human rights machinery of the U.N. operates at a number of levels:

- There is the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, which reports to it. They are political bodies, made up of member States of the U.N. and they have overall responsibility in this area;
- There are the Human Rights Commission and the Commission on the Status of Women, each consisting of a number of member States elected for that purpose. They have more specific programmes and responsibilities including the drafting of Conventions;
- There are the various international declarations and Conventions on Human Rights. These are adopted by the General Assembly and opened for signature by member States. They come into force when they are ratified by a certain number of States.
- Then there are the supervisory bodies which oversee the implementation of the various Conventions. They mainly consist of independent experts, elected for that purpose by the States who have ratified the particular Convention.
- Finally, there is the permanent United Nations Administration which is responsible for providing services to all bodies mentioned and also for carrying out programmes relating to human rights. The Centre for Human Rights in Geneva is responsible for most of the human rights conventions and the Branch for the Advancement of Women at Vienna looks after the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

### (a) The Conventions

To complete the background, I mention some of the principal conventions and covenants, which operate in a similar pattern.

- U.N. Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 (in force 23 March 1976);<sup>1</sup>
- U.N. Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights, 1966 (in force 3 January 1976);<sup>2</sup>

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1. 87 member States and 39 parties to Optional Protocol, 1987.

2. 91 member States by 1987.

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1966 (in force 4 January 1969);<sup>3</sup>
- International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid 1973 (in force 18 July 1976);<sup>4</sup>
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979 (in force 3 September 1981);<sup>5</sup>

Australia is a signatory to these Conventions and has ratified most of them (as at 1 June 1985, Australia had not ratified the Apartheid Convention). By 1988 there were 94 parties to the CEDAW Convention.

There is, in addition, a Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 1984 (Res. 39/46)). It has now come into force and a Committee on Torture has been established.<sup>6</sup>

### (b) The Supervisory Bodies

The supervisory machinery of United Nations human rights conventions usually includes these elements:

- A Committee of Experts, which has the supervisory role.
- An obligation on State parties to report in writing to the Committee, concerning the steps taken to implement the Convention.
- Reports and Recommendations made by the Committee of Experts to the U.N. General Assembly.

In some cases<sup>7</sup> individuals may complain to the supervisory body, but this is not available under all Conventions. It generally requires a separate declaration by the State party. Neither the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, nor CEDAW have such a provision.

In some cases<sup>8</sup> the Convention provides a procedure under which a State party which considers that another State party is not giving effect to the Convention can call for an explanation and in default refer the matter to the supervisory body for further consideration. That body is charged with bringing about a "friendly" or "amicable" solution; in default it can report to the State parties.

Under the Torture Convention<sup>9</sup> the Committee can investigate allegations that systematic torture is being practised in the territory of a State. This investigation can include confidential inquiries, and a visit to the territory of the State party concerned. I believe that Convention is unique in this regard.

There are no such procedures in the CEDAW Convention or in the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Those Conventions depend solely upon the reporting system.

### (c) Membership

Each of the Conventions on which this paper focusses has provision for a supervisory body or Committee. They are constituted in various ways:

3. 124 member States, 1987.

4. 85 member States, 1987.

5. 94 member States, 1988.

6. 27 State parties, 1987.

7. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Art 14, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Optional Protocol; Torture Convention, Article 22 (optional).

8. International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, Articles 11 and 12; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 41.

9. Article 20.

- (i) The Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>10</sup> established a *Human Rights Committee* of 18 members elected by the State parties to serve in their personal capacity.
- (ii) The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination establishes a Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, usually called *CERD*.<sup>11</sup> The Committee consists of 18 members elected by the State parties to serve in their personal capacity.
- (iii) The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women<sup>12</sup> establishes a Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, usually called *CEDAW*. The Committee, originally 18 members, rose to 23 after the thirty-fifth ratification. Its members, like the others, are elected by the State parties to serve in their personal capacity.
- (iv) The odd one out in this group is the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which provides<sup>13</sup> for the Economic and Social Council of the U.N. to have the supervisory role, a role to be exercised in conjunction with the specialised agencies and the Commission on Human Rights. For some time EcoSoc carried out its functions through a working group which met at its sessions. However, in 1985, EscoSoc decided to establish a new Committee of 18 experts elected by the Economic & Social Council to serve in their personal capacities and on the basis of an equitable geographic distribution.<sup>14</sup>
- (v) The Committee Against Torture consists of 10 independent experts, elected to serve in their personal capacity for a four year term.<sup>15</sup>

In the result, all Committees just mentioned are similarly constituted.<sup>16</sup> Their members are nominated as individuals by the States who have ratified the Convention and elected by those States. They are experts of high moral standing and membership is personal, not governmental. An absent member cannot be substituted by another national of the same State. Replacement can occur only if the elected member dies or resigns.

More importantly, it means that members are intended to be free of the political control of their States. Their expenses are paid by the U.N. not by their own State.<sup>17</sup> The theory is that their statements and actions in the Committee are not directed or controlled by their State Government, and they are not answerable to their State. This distinguishes a Committee of experts from U.N. agencies, such as the Commission on Human Rights, or the Commission on the Status of Women, where the State is the member, rather than the individual who represents the State. To emphasise the personal membership of the Committee, the seating in CEDAW is organised in alphabetical order by name of the member. The names of the States do not appear in the Conference room. This theoretical independence is not always matched in practice. Some States choose to nominate persons who hold diplomatic or other official government positions which may appear to be thought to be inconsistent

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10. Article 28.

11. Article 8.

12. Article 17.

13. Articles 16, 17.

14. For an account of the history and tradition, see Philip Alston and Bruno Simma, 'First Session of the U.N.' Amer. J. Int'l L. 747; P. Alston 'Out of the Abyss: The Challenges Confronting the New U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' (1987) 9 Human Rights Q. 332.

15. Article 17.

16. The Apartheid Committee consists of three members appointed each year by the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights from among the members of the Commission.

17. In the case of the Committee on Torture, the State parties are to be responsible for the expenses of the members and for reimbursing expenses incurred by the U.N., Articles 17.7, 18.5.

with an independent status. Some States, particularly in the Eastern Bloc have been notorious in directing the statements and voting of a theoretically independent member, sometimes, it seems in a desperate attempt to prevent anything significant happening.

**(d) Examining the State Parties Reports**

Each of the human rights treaty bodies has developed a procedure for examining the reports of State parties. In the case of CEDAW the procedure adopted by the Committee is that a State's written report is presented orally by the representatives of that State. The report itself is translated into the official United Nations languages and distributed to members of the Committee some weeks or months before the Session. The oral presentation of about 20 minutes is followed by comments and questions from individual members of the Committee. This process is allocated three hours. Two to three days later the State representative returns to provide answers and further material in response to the members' questions.

Similar procedures are followed by the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee.

The effectiveness of the question and answer session depends upon a number of factors. These include the amount of real information in the report of a particular State, and the amount of other information available to members of the committee.

There are problems in both areas. CEDAW has had to ask some State parties to provide additional information (Report of 6th Session) and has had to consider whether or not to actually receive the report of a State (Report of 6th Session, Report of 7th Session).

After the question and answer sessions, the Committee has an opportunity to consider the issues raised in particular reports, or in a range of reports and to draft suggestions and/or general recommendations, which the Secretary General transmits first to EcoSoc and then to the General Assembly.

**3. Effectiveness of the Convention**

How effective is the machinery? There are many constraints which hamper the work of the Committees, and I will mention some of these. There are also some positive things to be said about how to improve the work and effectiveness of the Committees. Most of what I say is directed to the work of CEDAW, but it is paralleled in the other Committees. The constraints operate at a number of levels. First, there is the question of resources.

**(a) (i) Resource Constraints**

Put simply, the exercise is far too big for the time and resources allocated to the Committees. In the case of CEDAW, there are 94 State parties each reporting on a four year cycle. All the work of the Committee has to be done in a two or three week session once a year. And with very little back-up support.

Most of the human rights supervisory bodies have their administrative headquarters at the Centre for Human Rights, Geneva, headquarters of the Commission on Human Rights. The Commission and the Treaty bodies are serviced by an experienced legal and administrative staff, specialised in dealing with human rights matters. The Secretariat of the Commission also deals with and reports on individual complaints, and makes representations direct to governments.

By contrast, CEDAW is serviced by the Branch for the Advancement of Women, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs at the Vienna Centre of the United Nations. This is an important distinction. It has meant that CEDAW is isolated from the expertise and other services available to the other human rights treaty bodies.

The Vienna Centre also provides an infrastructure for the Commission on the Status of

Women.<sup>18</sup> This could be an advantage if the Centre were able to provide information to CEDAW about the status of women in the States which are being considered at particular meetings. Regrettably, it has not been able to provide such information, not even basic statistics.

Faced with both a lack of adequate time and a lack of resources to provide it with appropriate services in preparation for and during its sessions, CEDAW has had to ask the Economic and Social Council for extra time for its meetings in 1987<sup>19</sup> and again in 1988.<sup>20</sup> An extra week was allocated in 1988 for the 7th Session, but this extra time served mainly to show how difficult the Committee's task is without adequate servicing. The report was not prepared in time to be settled during the session. It is impossible to think that such poor service would be provided to the other human rights treaty bodies.

The CEDAW Committee has now put in a plea for more adequate resources and also for a closer relationship with the Centre for Human Rights at Geneva. This plea was supported by the Commission for the Status of Women at its meeting in April 1988.

The Economic and Social Council has since noted its "deep concern" at their problems and requested the Secretary-General to provide the necessary staff to enable CEDAW to carry out its mandate as efficiently as other treaty bodies (EcoSoc, E/1988/L.28 24 May 1988). This is as far as the matter has gone. Superficially, there is support for CEDAW. Behind the scenes, however, there appears to be a lack of enthusiasm for a committee which is trying to make some impact in regard to women's issues.

#### (ii) Resources: Summary

There are many problems which beset U.N. bodies as it is, trying to work in the framework of international politics. It is important to ensure that their limited time is used to deal with their real work, and not in complaining about the frustrations caused by lack of servicing and resources.

#### (b) (i) Reporting Obligations: Outline

Turning now to the work methods of the human rights treaty bodies, the five human right conventions mentioned earlier all provide for State parties to submit regular reports about the steps they have taken towards implementation. These reports have to be submitted in regular cycles. The periods are different in each case for the first report and for subsequent periodic reports:<sup>21</sup>

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 6 years, 9 years.
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1 year, 5 years.
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1 year, 2 years.
- International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, 2 years, 2 years.
- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1 year, 4 years.
- Convention Against Torture, 1 year, 4 years.

18. Which consists of 32 elected governmental representatives.

19. Report of 6th Session, 1987, (A/42/38) p. 79).

20. Report of 7th Session.

21. A/40/600, 26 September 1985, International Covenants on Human Rights: Reporting Obligations.

**(ii) Constraints Relating to the Reporting system**

Another constraint on the supervisory committees arises from the fact that they depend largely upon the reports of the State parties for information about the implementation of a particular Convention in the State concerned.

With so many Conventions and reporting obligations it can be an onerous burden for States to comply with the requirements of each Convention they have ratified. The more Conventions a State ratifies, the more reports it has to prepare. The reporting requirements vary, and some States have few enough resources to decipher the sometimes imprecise and vague guidelines laid down for reports. This has adverse effects upon the quality of the reports and has contributed to delay in submitting reports. This in turn can hamper the work of the supervisory body. There is concern within the U.N. system, because the work of supervision cannot be effective unless adequate information is placed before the relevant body. There are two problems: delay and content.

The U.N. system as a whole continues to encourage state parties to produce their reports, though it must be acknowledged that the Committees would be quite unable to cope if every State complied. Attempts are also being made to co-ordinate the requirements of each of the Committees as to the timing and content of the reports, in order to help State parties to comply.

As part of the same exercise, proposals are coming from within the U.N. system to provide some form of assistance to State parties with limited technical and administrative resources in order to help them in fulfilling their reporting obligations. This is a sensitive issue, too, as it cannot be supposed, in the U.N. system, that a member State lacks competence.

Following recommendations by the Chairmen of some of the supervisory bodies about these matters<sup>22</sup> the Commission on Human Rights recommended in 1985 that consideration be given to the organisation of information and/or training courses for appropriate government personnel in countries which had *requested* technical assistance in the human rights field.<sup>23</sup> It also requested the Secretary-General to consider ways and means, within existing resources, of assisting States, including the awarding of fellowships to Government officials engaged in the preparation of such reports, regional training courses, etc.<sup>24</sup>

The General Assembly supported this request concerning practical assistance,<sup>25</sup> and also requested the Secretary-General to ask the overdue States if they wanted technical advice and assistance, and to submit a report dealing with the financial implications of this. The General Assembly also decided to put the question of another meeting of Chairpersons on its agenda for the following year (1988). This time, it thought to include CEDAW and also the Committee Against Torture, recently established.<sup>26</sup> The meeting was due to take place in October 1988.

If the meeting of Chairpersons makes progress and develops a few positive strategies, it could give impetus to the various Committees in improving their procedures. There are already a number of ideas which have been suggested by members of the ESCR Committee and CEDAW. These include:

- improving and simplifying guidelines for State parties in presenting their reports;
- identifying (article by article) the issues relevant to each article of the Convention and the information needed by the Committee;

22. A/39/484, paras 30-32.

23. Res. 1985/26, 11 March 1985.

24. Res. 1985/45, 14 March 1985.

25. Res 40/116, 13 Dec 1985.

26. For some reason CEDAW had been previously omitted, even though it first met in 1983.

· preparing a summary of conclusions about the report of each State, in preparation for the consideration of their second and later reports.

Both CEDAW<sup>27</sup> and ESCR<sup>28</sup> have given their support to the provision of technical assistance to States in preparing reports. However, the role of the Committees themselves could be enhanced in this area.

### (c) Absence of Standards

The next area of constraint arises from the nature of the rights protected by the Conventions and Covenants. Some of those rights are framed in very general terms, more as goals or programmes for action than as definite and clear-cut legal principles. States are called upon to take steps progressively to implement the Convention. This is particularly true of the ECSR and CEDAW Conventions. For this reason it cannot be clearly stated or even suggested that a State is in breach of its obligations under the Convention.

Even if it were felt in regard to CEDAW that a State had not taken sufficient steps towards the goals of equality, the Committee is limited in what it can do. It can make a suggestion or general recommendation through EscoSoc to the General Assembly. The type of recommendation so far adopted by CEDAW is along the lines of this example:

urging State parties to adopt education and public information programs which will help eliminate prejudices and current practices that hinder the full operation of the principle of the social equality of women. (1987, 6th Session, (A/42/38 paragraph 578).

Even where Conventions allow for the right of individual complaint, in the final result little more can be done than reporting to the General Assembly. The sovereignty of States precludes direct action, and the politics of the U.N. is a restraint even on criticism in many cases.

### (d) Conflicting Cultural Values

Another constraint upon the work of international human rights bodies is that of conflicting values. We may feel that there is a reasonable level of unanimity in regard to certain human rights. For example, not many are heard to support genocide, torture or slavery.

There is not necessarily the same level of agreement about issues such as freedom of thought, equality and civil rights. Not only are they hard to define with precision. There are in some societies cultural and religious values which appear inconsistent with the rights protected by Convention, particularly in regard to the equality and rights of women.

These conflicting values can intrude into the attempt to deal with human rights at the international level.

An example is the issue of *female circumcision*, a custom prevalent in some African countries, particularly Islamic countries, though it is not a practice required by the Koran. The reaction of Western people to this practice is generally of shock and outrage.

This issue has been a subject of international concern for many years. Colonial legislation banning the practice of female circumcision *drove it underground* with consequential infection, haemorrhage and death without medical help. At the 1980 World Conference in Copenhagen, the Western condemnation of what was called a "barbaric custom" was considered as *cultural aggression* by African women who considered that any activities to abolish female circumcision should be decided upon and carried out by Africans with no interference from outside.

27. 1988 Session.

28. 1988 Session.

There are non government organizations (NGO's) working on this issue in the countries affected trying to increase awareness of the issue.

The matter came on to CEDAW's agenda in 1988, in its consideration of reports from Senegal and Nigeria. It was, however, unable to reach agreement on a form of recommendation and the matter has been deferred. It remains to be seen whether CEDAW is able to formulate and agree upon any statement about the practice which on the one hand declares the practice totally incompatible with the equality, rights and integrity of women while on the other hand does not imply the imposition of alien social and cultural values by an insensitive dominant society.

#### **(e) Political Constraints**

Finally, I would like to refer to the general constraints which arise from the political sensitivities of particular States when vital interests appear to be at risk. Once again I give an example where CEDAW has become controversial in the U.N. system and come under fierce attack.

The question relates to the rights and status of women in Islamic countries. A number of Islamic States have, in ratifying the Convention, made reservations in significant areas such as family rights.

In 1987 the Committee looked at two reports from States in which Islam was the main religion. One State had reserved its position on Article 2, which is a central article establishing the basic principle of equality. The reason for the reservation was stated to be its inconsistency with the Koran. The Committee was most concerned about this, particularly as it was informed by Members that there were interpretations of the Koran which were consistent with the equality of men and women and that while Islamic law in some cases gave women more rights than in other countries, it was often misinterpreted in favour of men. This was because men tended to have a monopoly in its interpretation. In its report (paragraph 517) the Committee commented that Bangladesh had not given enough information about the effect of Islam on the rights of women and that Islam had been misinterpreted by men in their own interests, which could be dangerous in an illiterate country. There should be a new interpretation of Islamic law.

The Committee also requested the U.N. system:

to promote or undertake studies of the status of women under Islamic laws and customs and in particular on the status and equality of women in the family on issues such as marriage, divorce, custody and property rights and their participation in public life of the society, taking into consideration the principle of *El Ijtihad* in Islam.

That decision led to a furore in the EcoSoc and in the General Assembly in which the Committee was condemned by (male) representatives of Islamic countries for its temerity in criticising their religion. His Excellency Dr Said Rajaie-Khorassani, of Iran made a statement to the Economic and Social Council in which he expressed shock and indignation at -

- the insensitivity of the Committee to the religious beliefs of a quarter of the world's population;
- their ignorance about the subject.

The Committee's legal competence to deal with these issues was called in question.

The representative stressed the progressive manner in which Islam addressed the role of men and women in society.

In the result the United Nations General Assembly did not accept the Committee's decision and the Committee was asked to reconsider its request. At the next session, in 1988, the Committee did not, however, revoke its request but made a statement in which it recalled that the reports of some State parties had referred to Islamic religion and to traditions and customs as a source of or an influence on laws relating to the status of women and



pointing out that the Committee had asked for more information to enable it to carry out its duties under the Convention. The Committee made it clear that it had no intention of criticising any religion.

This episode shows the sensitivity of some State parties to issues of this nature and the problems which can be encountered in the United Nations system.

While the Committee was able to maintain its independence and to stand by its decision, the matter did not completely die at that point. At the Economic and Social Council meeting in May, it was made plain by certain Middle Eastern States that they were unwilling to give wholehearted support to CEDAW, and that they would look for further opportunities to criticise its activities. EcoSoc reiterated the General Assembly decision (42/60) that no action be taken on CEDAW's decision (#E/1988/L.28 24 May 1988).

It is easy these days to be complacent about the gains made by the women's movement over the last 15 years or so. It needs to be emphasised, however, that vigilance has to be maintained. Those who seek to undermine the international machinery on human rights may pick CEDAW as the first target.

It is essential for the Committee to have the support of those whose interests are protected by the Convention, namely women. The Convention needs to be more widely known. Among the recommendations adopted by the CEDAW Committee at its 7th Session in 1988 was one calling upon State parties to disseminate the Convention, the report of State parties and the reports of the Committee in the language of the States concerned. To this was added a recommendation that States report on action taken in this regard.

#### **4. Making the Convention more Effective**

Can the international human rights machinery be improved? In the case of CEDAW, the existence of the Convention and of the Committee can have an influence on the advancement of women, and this tendency may increase when there is a wider knowledge as to its role.

First, there is the question of ratification. Australia was reasonably prompt in doing this, in 1983. In many countries women's organisations have had to lobby extensively to secure ratification. The process of ratification can be a consciousness raising activity, requiring a fairly determined effort by the women's movement. It will be recalled that in Australia the enactment of the Sex Discrimination Act as part of the ratification process was looked at with foreboding by some who thought it would spell the end of society as we know it.

In order to ratify the Convention a country has to consider the extent to which its laws and institutions are in conformity with the Convention. This calls for attention to be given to the Convention and to its individual articles. Sometimes, a State reserves in relation to one or more articles. The CEDAW Committee always gives serious attention to reservations, and calls for explanations. It has called on States to reconsider and to withdraw reservations, some of which appear to be incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention. Australia's own reservations on armed forces and paid maternity leave will be given special attention when the next Australian report is presented.

After ratification, with or without reservations, a State has to submit its report on the measures it has taken to implement the Convention. This requires at least some degree of co-ordinated effort in the particular State to bring together the necessary information. This may help to heighten awareness of the issues at the higher levels of government. The CEDAW Committee has given its support to proposals for technical advisory services to assist State parties in fulfilling their reporting obligations, including regional seminars or training courses organised by the United Nations or State parties.<sup>29</sup> Australia could contribute to such projects, particularly at the regional level.

29. Report of the 7th Session.

When the Committee considers the Report of a particular State it can focus attention on those aspects of the Report which seem inadequate either because they give too little information, or because they reveal an unsatisfactory state of affairs. More could be done in future, particularly in the case of CEDAW to receive additional information from other U.N. bodies such as the I.L.O. which often have quite detailed reports and statistics on the member States. The CEDAW Convention expressly provides that specialised agencies are entitled to be represented when matters within their scope are under consideration.<sup>30</sup>

There could be difficulties for CEDAW in receiving information from NGO's about important issues for women in particular countries, as there is no recognition of NGO's in the Convention. In the case of the ESCR Committee this is not a difficulty, since that Committee is set up directly by EcoSoc, which itself accords recognition to NGO's.

For the future, it would be desirable to enable NGO's to have a greater role in preparing material for the use of the Committee and submitting it on a formal basis. While the Convention does not expressly permit this it would help the Committee in its work, enhance awareness of the Convention and possibly lead to greater use of the Convention in the local debate on women's issues. There is an international NGO working in the field of the CEDAW convention, called International Women's Rights Action Watch. It is trying to establish itself as a clearing house of information, to assist the Committee.<sup>31</sup> It would be of enormous help if women's organisations in particular States were able to submit comments on their own States Report to the Committee.

Future tasks for the CEDAW Committee are to identify with more precision the issues which arise under each Article of the Convention and to develop ideas for minimum standards. Procedures are needed to enable a more effective follow-up of States parties implementation actions when their second Report is considered.

The process may be long and painful, but that is how the U.N. works. The problem is how to ensure that something meaningful is achieved without incurring the wrath of particular States parties that have the power to withdraw, and also to undermine the Committee and its work.

What is needed is a blend of optimism and realism and continuous efforts to keep in dialogue with States while at the same time trying to define more precisely and raise gradually the minimum standards protected by the Conventions.

What is also needed is:

- knowledge of the Conventions;
- use of the Conventions at national level;
- support by NGO's of the Convention and of the Committee.

It follows from all that I have said that the protection of rights is something which cannot be left safely to either national or international bodies. It requires the contribution of everyone concerned.

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30. Article 22.

31. See *The Women's Watch*, published for IRAW, Vol 1, No. 4, Winter 1988.