

**United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of  
Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)  
Examination – 10 July 2008**

On Thursday 10 July, the UN CEDAW Committee carried out its formal examination of the UK's 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report, on progress on implementing the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, Barbara Follett MP, led the UK Delegation at the UN in New York. The Minister was supported by a team of officials both in New York, and in London via video-link, led by Janice Shersby, Director of the Government Equalities Office. This was the first time that a video-link had been used for a CEDAW examination.



A number of NGOs attended to observe the examination, both at the UN and in London. NGOs in New York included representatives from the [Northern Ireland Women's European Platform](#), Lee Eggleston, [Rape Crisis](#), Hannana Siddiqui, [Southall Black Sisters](#) and [South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre](#) Sheila Coates representing [WNC](#), along with WNC Commissioner, Professor Liz Kelly. Also represented were the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. Other countries examined by the CEDAW Committee during that week were, Lithuania, Finland, Iceland, Slovenia and Tanzania, Yemen and Nigeria, with a day being set aside for each examination.



It is the role of NGOs to brief the Committee so that they are fully equipped to hold the Government to account on its policies since the last examination. NGOs can submit shadow reports, contribute to other shadow reports like the one produced by WNC, give brief oral presentations to the Committee at the UN in New York, provide additional information papers, lobby the committee and/or attend the examination. Some NGOs attend training courses to enable them to lobby the Committee effectively.

### **Shadow reports**

The WNC compiled and submitted a UK Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee. Further Shadow Reports were also submitted by, the Committee on the Administration of Justice (NI), Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP), [Women's Resource Centre](#) and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland; the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) Campaign. Information contained in all these reports inform the CEDAW Committee's thinking and questions and

give a more comprehensive picture of gender equality in the UK, including where further work is needed.

### NGO oral presentations

Formally, input from UK NGOs would be in the form of a short 10 minute oral presentation on Monday of the examination week, between 3pm and 4.45pm. The UK oral presentation would be likely to include input from a range of UK NGOs including WNC, which should be agreed. Who delivers the oral presentation to the Committee also needs to be agreed.



On Monday 7 July, NGOs and Human Rights institutions read out their oral statements and took questions from the Committee: Liz Kelly read out a statement on behalf of WNC partners and the [End Violence Against Women Coalition](#); Ann Marie Gray read out a statement on behalf of [NIWEP](#); Churches Against Sex Trafficking in Europe (CHASTE) read out a statement on trafficking, and [Equality Now](#) read out a statement on the participation of women in the Armed

Forces. Questions from the CEDAW Committee followed, which focused on issues in the oral statements and included any others arising from Shadow Reports and additional information papers prepared by NGOs for this session. These highlighted the main issues the Committee would focus on, when they questioned the Government on 10 July. The WNC's questions from the Committee were on funding of the Women's Sector, a gender equality strategy, violence against women strategy, and BME women's health.



After the NGO session with the CEDAW Committee was completed, it was followed by a session with national human rights bodies. Both the EHRC and NI HRC read out their oral statements and took questions to support their shadow reports and additional information.

All statements to the CEDAW Committee were necessarily tight and short as the total time for national oral statement presentations, was just ten minutes. Some NGOs had participated in training from International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW). This five day intensive training / orientation session was held to raise NGOs' awareness and understanding of the CEDAW



Convention, the dynamics of the reporting process, the CEDAW Committee's working methods and the role NGOs can play within the review process. Separate written statements or lobbying documents were also submitted to supplement the oral statements, but these were again necessarily short.

NGO representatives play a full part in the CEDAW examination process by helping to brief members of the CEDAW Committee to robustly question the official delegation on the UK's official report. Members of the CEDAW Committee welcome information to support the examination process, but NGOs must press and lobby on those points of greatest concern, to ensure that the Committee are aware of all the facts.



That evening, UK NGOs arranged further presentations to the Committee and provided an opportunity for Q and A to clarify and elaborate on points for the Committee, but also again to focus and steer them in their questioning of the UK Government. Questions from the Committee included, no recourse to public funds and age of marriage; the current funding crisis for women's NGOs; women's representation in Parliament and the Civil Service; women in public life; coverage in the process of CEDAW; interventions by Parliamentarians on CEDAW; why CEDAW is not used and quoted as much as EU legislation; disappointment about NGOs not bringing cases under the Optional Protocol; engaging Government Departments in the gender duty and the possible dilution of gender in the Equality Bill; and the continuing absence of a national violence against women strategy.

Further lobbying of the Committee by UK NGOs took place in the form of short additional information notes to pick up on any points raised in the meeting as well as catching members outside the Committee room as they were examining other countries.



Besides formal input, NGOs have the opportunity and are encouraged to informally meet individual Committee members throughout the week in New York, to lobby the Committee members when they are not in session, by speaking to them in breaks or arranging to have a lunch-time meeting with them. It is also recommended that a meeting takes place at lunchtime on the day of the examination, to focus on whether the Delegation is giving full answers during the dialogue in the morning session.

## The CEDAW Examination

The official examination sessions take place between 10am and 1pm and between 3pm and 5pm, and NGOs are not allowed to intervene during the examination itself. The Committee will then meet in closed session between 5 and 6pm, to discuss the detail of the examination and official responses to their questions.

The examination, which was video-linked to the BERR Conference Centre on Victoria Street, London, was opened by Barbara Follett MP and Ann Keeling



who announced a CEDAW Action Plan working with WNC and other stakeholders to develop it. The CEDAW Committee asked perceptive and penetrating questions of the UK delegations, getting to the real issues that concern women in the UK, and covering many of the issues raised in shadow reports. The range of questions highlighted the continuing gaps in gender equality that exist, variations in levels of equality that exist between devolved nations, and with other Overseas Dependencies – A Minister from Turks and Caicos attended. UK NGOs listed out all those questions that had not been addressed by the UK delegation during the morning

session, for the Committee in the lunch break. The process did not allow Committee members to *discuss* issues with the delegation and there was a push at the end as Committee members tried to pursue their unanswered points further. Questions that remained unanswered by the end of the day will be responded to by the Government in writing.

During the examination itself, NGOs are encouraged to take notes of the dialogue so that following the examination; NGOs can prepare statements on what they would like to see in the Concluding Comments. The concluding statement must respond to the dialogue and responses. It should verify, or identify weakness of the Government's responses and include NGO recommendations of what should go into the Concluding Observations. As the Concluding Comments should only include what was raised during the examination, it is critical that NGOs lobby the Committee before the formalities begin, to ensure the Committee raises all the critical issues during the examination.



After the examination had finished, NGOs met to frame questions to inform the Committee's concluding observations and submitted them to the Committee early the following day (Friday). No new issues are allowed to be raised in the concluding comments that were not covered in the examination. The knowledge, intelligence, concentration and energy levels of the Committee were very impressive!

Highlights of the UK's examination can be accessed via the following link:

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/wom1694.doc.htm>. Other relevant documents such as the Government's 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Reports, the lists of issues and questions from the Committee, and the other UK shadow reports can be found at

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/cedaws41.htm>

The Government's response can be found at

<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/337/31/PDF/N0833731.pdf?OpenElement>

The NICAJ shadow report can be found at

<http://www.caj.org.uk/Front%20page%20pdfs/Submission%20to%20CEDAW%20Feb%202008.pdf>

The website to [IWRAW](http://www.iwraw.org/) - the primary international nongovernmental organisation that facilitates use of international human rights treaties to promote women's human rights and rights within families – can be found at: <http://iwraw.igc.org/>



We thank and congratulate you all for your contributions to the WNC Shadow Report, and any other contributions or lobbying you carried out. We now look forward to the publication of the CEDAW Committee's Concluding Remarks, which the Government will be expected to progress between now and the next UK report, which is due in 2011.

## CEDAW Committee Elections

The CEDAW Committee is made up of members from 22 countries. July 2008.

Ms. Ferdous Ara Begum	Bangladesh
Ms. Magalys Arocha Dominguez	Cuba
Ms. Meriem Belmihoub-Zerdani	Algeria
Ms. Saisuree Chutikul	Thailand
Ms. Dorcas Coker-Appiah	Ghana
Ms. Mary Shanthi Dairiam (Rapporteur)	Malaysia
Mr. Cornelis Flinterman	Netherlands

Ms. Naela Mohamed Gabr (Vice-Chairperson)	Egypt
Ms. Françoise Gaspard (Vice-Chairperson)	France
Ms. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari	Israel
Ms. Tiziana Maiolo	Italy
Ms. Violeta Neubauer	Slovenia
Ms. Pramila Patten	Mauritius
Ms. Silvia Pimentel	Brazil
Ms. Fumiko Saiga	Japan
Ms. Hanna Beate Schöpp-Schilling	Germany
Ms. Heisoo Shin	Republic of Korea
Ms. Glenda P. Simms (Vice-Chairperson)	Jamaica
Ms. Dubravka Šimonović (Chairperson)	Croatia
Ms. Anamah Tan	Singapore
Ms. Maria Regina Tavares da Silva	Portugal
Ms. Zou Xiaqiao	China

During April 2008, the UN was seeking applications for membership to the CEDAW Committee, to replace those members whose term was due to end. This meant there were 11 places becoming vacant, with the deadline for receipt of names being 30 April. The UK did not officially propose or support any UK experts for these places.

The official response from Foreign and Commonwealth Office for not proposing any UK experts for the Committee was that;

- Individuals on all Treaty Monitoring Bodies serve in a personal capacity and do not represent nations or governments (although their nationality is published);
- FCO and other government departments have limited resources and agree across Whitehall and with FCO Ministers, the need to focus on one or two election campaigns per year;
- Running an election campaign is resource-intensive, but 'resources' does not just mean money, but also time and staff both at home and overseas.
- Every 18 months, priorities are re-visited. But this year FCO are focused on election to the newly formed Human Rights Council (previously the Commission on Human Rights) and to the International Court of Justice. Both elections involve lobbying all members of the UN General Assembly;
- FCO decided to focus on election to one of the two places available on the Human Rights Council, given its overarching UN human rights role - the HRC is in its infancy and it is important that the UK is engaged at this point to ensure that it develops good practice to address all human rights issues, including for women.

The UK was successful in their campaign to be elected to the Human Rights Council, having been elected to the Council along with France.

Briefing provided by Women's National Commission.

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**Additional information:**

Government report on 'Tackling Violence Against Women' On 1 April 2008 the government published 'Tackling Violence Against Women: A Cross-Government Narrative'. This report draws together work being done across Government to tackle violence against women and responds to the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) coalition's annual Making the Grade survey.

<http://www.equalities.gov.uk/publications/7589-TSO-Tackling%20Violence%20WEB.pdf>

At the end of July 2008 the government produced

[http://www.equalities.gov.uk/publications/7783-TS-ChangeWomensLives\(P\).pdf](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/publications/7783-TS-ChangeWomensLives(P).pdf)

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*"Violence against women continues to persist as one of the most heinous, systematic and prevalent human rights abuses in the world"* Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General

Violence against women persists in all regions of the world as a pervasive violation of human rights and a major impediment to achieving gender equality. The [United Nations General Assembly](#) provides critical leadership in the global effort to combat such violence. Its landmark [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women \(A/RES/48/104\)](#) constitutes the framework for analysis and action at the national and international levels.

Forms and manifestations of violence against women, and action to prevent and address it, are identified in many other instruments and documents, including the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), and the outcome of the [twenty-third special session of the General Assembly](#) entitled: "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century", [resolution 1325 \(2000\)](#) of the Security Council on women, peace and security, and resolutions of the [Commission on Human Rights](#) The [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#) monitors steps taken by States parties to the [Convention on the](#)

[Download the Study of the Secretary-General: Ending violence against women - From words to action](#)

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, including its causes and consequences significantly contributes to the common effort to address violence against women.



The work of the United Nations to address all forms and manifestations of violence against women has gained new momentum with the launching, on 9 October 2006, of the [Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women](#) and the adoption by the General Assembly, on 19 December 2006, of an action-oriented resolution on the "Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women":

For further information go to:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/index.html>

## **Background to CEDAW**

### History of CEDAW

In 1972 on the back of work on international human rights, the UN Commission on the Status of Women began considering the possibility of preparing a single, binding treaty to address equality between men and women. A working group was appointed to consider the production of such a convention, and in 1974, the Commission decided in principle, to prepare a single, comprehensive and internationally binding instrument to eliminate discrimination against women.

The text of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was prepared during 1976 and extensive deliberations by a working group from 1977 to 1979. Although suggestions were made to delay completion of the text for another year, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the General Assembly in 1979 by 130 votes to none, with 10 abstentions.

Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, the text of the convention defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

The full text of the convention can be found at:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

At the special ceremony at the Convention to the mid-decade World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, in Copenhagen on 17 July 1980, 64 States signed the Convention and two States submitted their instruments of ratification. On 3 September 1981, 30 days after the twentieth member State had ratified it, the Convention entered into force - faster than any previous human rights convention had done. Currently, 185 countries - over ninety percent of the members of the United Nations - are party to the Convention. The UK signed CEDAW on 22 July 1981 and ratified it on 7 April 1986, with reservations on the Optional Protocol. By ratifying the Optional Protocol, a State recognises the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to receive and consider complaints from individuals or groups within its jurisdiction.

More information about the 41st CEDAW Session, including all of the official documents, are available on the website of the Office of the UN High Commissioner For Human Rights (OHCHR):

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/cedaws41.htm>.

### CEDAW Reporting Procedures

The Convention obliges States parties to submit to the Secretary-General a report on the legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures that they have adopted to implement the Convention within a year after its entry into force, and then at least every four years.

National reports are intended to update the initial and previous reports, detailing significant developments that have occurred over the last four years, noting key trends, and identifying obstacles to the full achievement of the Convention. Reports are reviewed prior to the examination by a Pre-Session Working Group (PSWG) constituting of five Committee members. The working group draws up questions to guide the full Committee's examination of the report. These questions are submitted to the country's representative in advance. The representative then meets with the Committee to respond to these questions and any others that members may wish to ask.

The PSWG for the forty-first session met from **16 to 20 July 2007**. The report of the PSWG and the responses of States parties to the lists of issues and questions drawn up by the pre-session working group will be before the Committee.

Following consideration of each State Party report, the CEDAW Committee produces concluding comments which outline factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention for that State party, positive aspects, principal subjects of concern, and suggestions and recommendations to enhance implementation of the Convention.



This year, the UK Government was examined by the CEDAW Committee, for the four year period 2003 to 2007. The UK should have been examined in 2003, but due to decisions taken at the UN, this did not take place. Therefore, the examination on 10 July covered two periods totalling eight years, from 1999 to 2007.



### NGO Involvement in the CEDAW Process

Since its early sessions, the CEDAW Committee has invited NGO's to follow its work. In order to ensure that it is as well informed as possible, the Committee and the Pre-Session Working Group (PSWG), invite representatives of national and international NGOs to provide written information on

States parties whose reports are before it. The Committee and the PSWG also provide an opportunity for representatives of NGOs to provide oral information.

### Shadow Reports

The Committee welcomes country-specific information from NGOs, in the form of alternative or **shadow reports**. NGOs submit their reports to the Committee prior to, or at, the session concerned. Submission of shadow reports to the UN is coordinated by the international NGO, International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP), who provide initial guidelines to any NGO coordinating a shadow report, and offer assistance throughout the drafting process and examination process through their "From Global to Local" training programme (see below for details). IWRAP are officially recognised by the UN in this role.



NGO representatives attending the examination bring 40 copies to the session itself, so that they can be distributed during the meeting of the Committee with NGOs. NGOs wishing to have their reports sent electronically to experts must email them to IWRAP Asia Pacific at least 3 weeks before the session. Those wishing to have hard copies of their shadow/alternative reports distributed to experts in advance of a session must email their reports to IWRAP Asia Pacific at least seven weeks before the opening day

of the session concerned. The WNC sent the final version of the UK CEDAW Shadow Report to IWRAP on 1 May 2008.

For this year's examination, six UK NGO's/Equality Bodies submitted Shadow Reports to the 41<sup>st</sup> Committee on CEDAW:

- **The Women's National Commission:** *UK CEDAW Shadow Report*
- **The Women's Resource Centre (WRC):** *State of the Sector*

- *CEDAW Thematic Shadow Report on Violence Against Women*, drafted by Purna Sen and Professor Liz Kelly

- **The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)**, an NGO from Northern Ireland:

- **The Northern Ireland European Women's Platform (NIWEP)**

- **The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)**

The **Concluding Observations** for the 41st CEDAW session is available on the website of the OHCHR at:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/cedaws41.htm>.

We have also compiled them by country for easy access:

- Finland:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/CEDAW.C.FIN.CO.6.pdf>

- Iceland:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/CEDAW.C.ICE.CO.6.pdf>

- Lithuania:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/CEDAW.C.LTU.CO.4.pdf>

- Nigeria:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/CEDAW.C.NGA.CO.6.pdf>

- Slovakia:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/CEDAW.C.SVK.CO.4.pdf>

- UK:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/CEDAW.C.GBR.CO.6.pdf>

- Tanzania:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/CEDAW.C.TZA.CO.6.pdf>

- Yemen:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/CEDAW.C.YEM.CO.6.pdf>