

**United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women  
in collaboration with  
United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

***Judicial colloquium on the application of  
international human rights law at the domestic level***

4 to 6 November 2002  
ESCAP Headquarters

Bangkok, Thailand

**Message by**

on an equal basis with men, as well as to provide effective remedies against acts of discrimination against women.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the body of experts established by the Convention to monitor its implementation in those States that have ratified or acceded to the Convention, is particularly concerned with the status of the Convention in domestic legal systems. The Committee has advocated the incorporation of the Convention into national constitutions, as well as the implementation of the various rights in the Convention through legislation. In response, many Governments have introduced new laws, or amended those that discriminate against women and girls. They have adopted policies and programmes and have sought to harmonize customary norms with the requirements of international law relating to women's rights and non-discrimination on the basis of sex. Governments have also organized legal literacy campaigns so that women are aware of their rights and the means available to enforce them.

Government action is essential to implement the obligations of international human rights treaties. At the same time, courts and the judicial officers have pivotal roles in ensuring that the legal framework is applied fully, justly and evenly, and benefits all individuals equally. Proper application of the legal framework can only be achieved where decision makers are aware of, or sensitive to, the realities of the lives of those who seek the protections and remedies that the law offers. Judicial decisions can be based upon a restrictive interpretation of the domestic law or be approached in an expansive and creative way that will truly provide justice to women. International human rights law, and particularly the principles of the Convention, can provide the background and framework for such judicial decision-making.

This judicial colloquium for the Asia Pacific region builds on a similar event the Division for the Advancement of Women organized in 1999, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention. Almost 100 judges and magistrates from 65 countries, and representing most legal cultures and traditions, considered the application of international human rights law at the national level as a strategy to advance the rights of women. Participants in the Vienna judicial colloquium focused on three key areas of concern, namely nationality, and marriage and family relations; violence against women; and work and work

leadership roles among the expanding number of enlightened and courageous judges who are prepared to interpret domestic law in the light of the international human rights framework.

On behalf of the Division for the Advancement of Women, I wish you well in your deliberations.