

Check against Delivery

Statement of Michelle Bachelet

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**CEDAW 30: A Celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women**

Focusing on Women's Political Participation and Leadership—In Pursuit of Equality

9 July 2012, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm

Conference Room 3 of North Lawn Building

United Nations, New York

Distinguished panelists and colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. What a great day this is!

To all members of the CEDAW Committee, past and present, I have one thing to say on behalf of UN Women: Thank you so much for all you have done to advance women's rights, women's empowerment and gender equality.

Your work to bring CEDAW's words to life cannot be overstated. Through your work, you have advanced the universal human rights of women, including the rights to political participation, equality before the law, equality in marriage and family life, in the world of work, in education and health, and in cultural life.

During the past 30 years, the Convention, particularly the work of the CEDAW Committee, has had remarkable impact. States have changed laws, policies and programmes to address violence against women and trafficking, to advance reproductive rights, to ensure women's rights in marriage and in divorce, to advance women's rights in the workplace, and to land, property and inheritance. And women's rights have been enshrined in national constitutions.

All over the world, lawyers and judges, parliamentarians, representatives of non-governmental organizations and national human rights institutions have relied on the Convention and reports of the CEDAW Committee in their pursuit of justice for women.

Women and girls around the world have been empowered to claim their rights because the Convention has spelt out their terms and the CEDAW Committee has made recommendations to governments for concrete action.

Global agreements such as the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action of the Fourth World Women's Conference and the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development are built on CEDAW's foundation.

During the past 30 years, the CEDAW Committee has provided support to the work of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. And UN entities the world over have supported the work of the Committee, CEDAW, and its Optional Protocol, and furthered the reflection of its provisions into national law.

So there is, today, a vast constituency around the world working to implement the Convention and make women's rights a reality. Some people still speak of human rights standards as "just words on paper", but this is certainly not the case for CEDAW. CEDAW has become a **living** law. And the thanks for this reality must go, ultimately, to the members of the CEDAW Committee. You have worked with such wisdom, energy and commitment, year after year, to closely monitor each country's challenges and achievements, and give the concrete guidance so urgently needed to make further progress.

I can tell you that we at UN Women place the highest value on the Committee's role, and that the Convention, in turn, guides all that we do. Today I would like to address our focus theme and

one of our top priorities at UN Women—expanding women’s political participation and leadership in pursuit of equality.

My main message is this: At the 30th anniversary of the CEDAW Committee, more than 30 countries have 30 percent or more women parliamentarians, and we are joining forces to achieve gender parity by 2030. I want you to remember this as 30-30-30.

As we move forward, we have a powerful tool at our disposal to achieve our goal. I speak of temporary special measures, such as quotas or parity laws. Just a few weeks ago, at the Rio+20 Conference, women Heads of State and Government signed a Call to Action for the Future Women Want. They called on governments worldwide to take urgent measures, including temporary special measures, to accelerate women’s full and equal participation in governance at all levels and women’s leadership in all decision-making. The Outcome Document of the Rio Conference itself emphasized the importance of implementing temporary measures for substantially increasing the number of women in leadership positions.

The Committee has consistently advised State parties to consider the adoption of temporary special measures, and women in their own countries have relied on the authority of CEDAW when advocating for these measures. There have been some truly ground breaking results, in countries such as Rwanda, Sweden, South Africa, Nicaragua, Timor-Leste, and most recently, Algeria.

Quotas are very effective. Of the 33 countries with 30 percent or more women in parliament today, 26 have quotas in place that helped to ensure this outcome.

My friends, women’s equal representation is a matter of justice and democracy. As I often say, democracy is not only about the right to vote, it is also about the right to be elected. Women constitute 51% of the world’s population, yet they are under-represented in the allegedly representative bodies that make key decisions affecting their lives: currently women average 19.5% of parliamentarians.

It is a matter of straightforward justice, and it is also a matter of improving the democratic quality of representation. By having more women as legislators, more concerns – different

concerns, will be brought to the public arena to respond to the diverse needs of society, including the concerns of women themselves. Far from me the idea that women in politics should focus only or even principally on women issues; on the contrary. Neither does the fact that a woman is elected to office guarantee that she will be gender sensitive. Yet, the reality is that parliaments and governments composed mostly of men just cannot have the same sensitivity to women's concerns and women's rights.

How else can we explain that today, across the world, the sexual and reproductive rights of women are still being questioned on a daily basis? In Rio, just a couple of weeks ago, it took massive concerted efforts from UN Women, UNFPA, civil society and other partners to ensure that the Member States recommit in the Outcome Document to the Cairo Platform for Action and recognize explicitly the importance of sexual and reproductive health for sustainable development. Not long before that, at the CSW, we had seen how some quarters were trying to question the clear commitments for sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights made in Cairo and Beijing.

Once we have equal representation of women and men in parliaments we will hopefully not need to explain anymore that the spirit and body of women cannot be divided and that if they can vote for or be elected to the highest office, they should also be able to define if, when, and how many children they want to have.

Having more women in politics finally also has a positive effect in terms of creating positive role models for young women and girls and boys. A 2007 MIT study in India found that the increased presence and visibility of female politicians in local government raised the academic performance and career aspirations of young women and also changed for the better the attitudes and expectations of boys and parents.

In villages that had never had female political leaders, researchers found parents were 45% less likely to expect their daughters to continue beyond secondary school. The girls themselves were 32% less likely to have those aspirations. The role model effect of women leaders is important because it paves a path for equality for future generations.

As we mark this 30th anniversary, I again congratulate the members of the CEDAW Committee for their unflagging dedication. I pledge the commitment of UN Women to intensify our support to ensure that the next 30 years mark even greater progress in the struggle to end all forms of discrimination against women achieve real and lasting equality.

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