

**STATEMENT BY MS. SILVIA PIMENTEL,
CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST WOMEN
ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
Istanbul, 1 November 2012**

The Honourable Minister of Family and Social Policies,
The Honourable Deputy High Commissioner
Excellencies,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Honoured guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, it is indeed my great pleasure to be here to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the CEDAW Committee. On behalf of the Committee, I want to thank the Government of Turkey and especially Her Excellency, the Honourable Ms. Fatma Sahin, Minister of Family and Social Policy, all of the civil servants within the Ministry and the Generale Directorate on the Status of Women, who have worked so hard to organize this important event. This event will also allow the Committee, which has a very heavy workload, to finalize some of our outstanding tasks and we are grateful for this opportunity.

I would like to commend Turkey for its support of the CEDAW Committee and to the treaty body system in general. We have been fortunate to have two experts from Turkey. Ms. Feride Acar is a current member and a former Chair of CEDAW. I want to recognize Ms. Acar for her very valuable contributions to the work of the Committee. In addition to Ms. Acar, Ms. Gül Aykor served with the Committee from 1993 to 1996. The Committee also had the pleasure of meeting Parliamentarian Ms. Safak Pavey in New York during its July session, who was recently elected to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

On behalf of the Committee, thank you again for making this event possible and for making us feel so very welcome in the magnificent city of Istanbul. We are all very touched by your generosity and commend your support for the CEDAW Committee and for women's rights in Turkey.

I would like to thank Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, the Deputy High Commissioner for taking time out from her very busy schedule to be with us here today. I also would like to recognize Mr. Ibrahim Salama, the Director of the Human Rights Treaties Division of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Wan-Hea Lee, Chief of the Groups in Focus Section of the same Division, and Ms. Jane Connors, Chief of the Special Procedures Branch of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, along with all of the honoured guests, including civil society. I would like to pay a special tribute to civil society organizations for their efforts in raising awareness of the CEDAW Convention and implementation of its provisions. Turkish civil society should be congratulated for the work that they do to advance the rights of women in Turkey, including with respect to individual complaints brought before the Committee under the Optional Protocol. Thank you for celebrating this milestone with us.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The CEDAW Committee has been assisting States parties in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women for 30 years. The Convention is the most comprehensive international instrument to protect women's rights and essentially constitutes the international bill of rights for women.

The adoption of the Convention by the General Assembly on 18 December 1979 was the culmination of decades of international efforts to protect and promote the rights of the world's women. The Convention entered into force on 3 September 1981 and there are currently 187 States parties – 6 States short of universal acceptance.

The Convention recalls that elimination of discrimination against women and the promotion of equality between women and men are central principles of the United Nations and constitute binding obligations under the Charter and other human rights instruments. The Convention recognizes that discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, and amounts to an obstacle to women's participation, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries.

The Convention identifies many specific areas where there has been notorious discrimination against women, for example, in regard to political rights, marriage and the family and employment. It also spells out specific goals and measures that are to be taken to

facilitate the creation of a global society in which women enjoy full equality with men and thus full realization of their human rights.

Like all treaties, the Convention creates binding legal obligations for States that have agreed to be bound by their provisions. States parties are required by the Convention to eliminate discrimination against women in the exercise and enjoyment of all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Significantly, the obligations of States parties to eliminate discrimination extend beyond public life to incorporate discrimination in private life, and uniquely within the family.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is an international committee of 23 independent experts (22 women and one man) who have the task to monitor the implementation of the provisions of the Convention by the States parties at the national level.

The primary mandate of the Committee is to review reports submitted by the States parties by holding constructive dialogues with delegations of States parties at one of three annual sessions of the Committee. During this dialogue, the Committee examines information received from the States party under consideration as well as from the United Nations system and civil society. The Committee then adopts concluding observations which highlight positive aspects, concerns of the Committee and also provides recommendations for a more comprehensive implementation of the Convention in the territory of the States party. The reporting obligation under the Convention assists States parties in the full implementation of the Convention at the national level and allows the Committee to assess the extent to which the Convention obligations have been met. To date, the Committee has reviewed close to 450 reports.

Since 2009, the Committee has been implementing a follow-procedure to its concluding observations. According to the procedure adopted, the Committee identifies up to two priority issues on which it requests the State party to report back within one to two years on priority issues. The follow-up procedure is an effective way for the Committee to track

progress with the States party concerned in between reports and dialogues with the Committee.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Committee also provides guidance to States parties on how to fulfil their obligations under the Convention through elaborating general recommendations. To date, 28 general recommendations have been adopted, including general recommendations on violence against women, equal remuneration for work of equal value, female circumcision, marriage and family relations, political and public life, health, and the core obligations of article 2 which deals with multiple forms of discrimination that women face, for example. Other very significant general recommendations are currently being elaborated by the Committee and we will discuss these topics later today. Regarding violence against women, the Convention does not contain a provision specifically related to this issue. However, the work of the Committee has significantly contributed to the recognition of violence against women as a human rights issue. It was the Committee's general recommendation No. 19 which brought into the international human rights law framework the issue of violence against women. This landmark general recommendation clearly defines gender-based violence against women as discrimination within the meaning of article 1 of the Convention and therefore sets out the obligations of States parties to eliminate it.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would also like to highlight the tremendous work of the Committee under the Optional Protocol. The Optional Protocol mandates the Committee to consider complaints or communications brought against States parties by individuals or groups who believe their rights under the Convention have been violated. The views of the Committee have been influential in the creation of an international women's human rights jurisprudence. One recent case has been referred to as a landmark decision as it represents the first case on maternal mortality decided by a treaty body. The Committee is also dealing with inquiries under the Optional Protocol. According to its provisions, the Committee may conduct an inquiry if it has received reliable information containing well-founded indications of grave or systematic violations of the Convention in a State party.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The CEDAW Committee has worked with dedication and passion. The Committee's outstanding achievements in facilitating international standard setting for women's human rights, including through its concluding observations, the elaboration of general recommendations and jurisprudence stemming from individual complaints and inquiries under the Optional Protocol, is highly valued and critical to the realization of the fundamental human rights of women in all corners of the globe. Although much has been accomplished, much remains to be done for the human rights of women.

To the CEDAW Committee Members, past and present, a very happy anniversary to you all with heartfelt wishes for much more success in the future as we continue our collective struggle for women's rights and their advancement.

To our hosts and guests, thank you for celebrating this auspicious event with us and let us all continue our work in advancing the human rights of women for the benefit of all humankind.

I would like to close with a quote from the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: "Human kind is made up of two sexes, women and men. Is it possible that a mass is improved by the improvement of only one part and the other part is ignored? Is it possible that if half of a mass is tied to earth with chains, the other half can soar into the skies?"

These words are still thought-provoking and relevant today. Let us take this opportunity of the 30th Anniversary of the Committee to rededicate ourselves to the struggle for gender equality and the human rights of women.

Thank you.
