**Human Rights Watch oral intervention to the**

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on**

**“Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change”**

29 February 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. Human Rights Watch is delighted by the CEDAW Committee’s decision to focus on this crucially important topic. We are especially grateful for the Committee’s decision to look at climate change as well as disasters, and its decision to use a broad definition of “disaster.”

In our written submission, based on research Human Rights Watch has done on the ground in 15 countries, we have highlighted a number of areas where climate change and disaster have a distinct impact on women and girls. We hope this submission will be useful to the Committee as you move ahead in the drafting process.

I wanted to use my time today to focus on one key issue that underpins all other issues—the right of women and girls to participate in the processes designed to address climate change and disaster. Women play an important role in natural resources management and in other productive and reproductive activities at the household and community levels. Their extensive knowledge and expertise makes them effective actors for climate change mitigation, disaster reduction and adaptation strategies.

As the impact of climate change is increasingly felt, governments around the world are becoming more proactive in developing strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change and in preparing and refining disaster risk reduction plans. This is a positive development, but it will surprise no one on the Committee to hear that women and girls are often excluded from these processes, both as participants and as stakeholders.

This must stop, and the Committee should make it a major priority to push for full participation for women and girls in all processes, local, national and international, that relate to managing climate change and disaster.

We see significant parallels between the fight women and girls face for participation in this area, and the fight that has been going on for years for women to be full participants in peace building processes, as required by Security Council resolution 1325. For 15 years, women have fought to realize the promise of resolution 1325, with little success.

We cannot afford the same experience in regard to climate change and disaster. The Committee has a unique opportunity to fight for women’s participation by asking tough questions as every country comes before the Committee for review about how women have participated in processes to plan for climate change and disaster, and how issues of distinct impacts have been handled to local and national planning processes. This, more than any other approach, has the potential to seriously change the way that women and girls are able to manage the impact of climate change and disaster in their own lives.

Thank you.