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Sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women



Statement by

Ms. Dalia Leinarte

Chair

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

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Mr. Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In my capacity as newly elected Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, it is my honour to address this forum for the first time today.

This year's priority theme of the Commission on the Status of Women, "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work", and its review theme, "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development goals for women and girls", have been at the centre of the work of our Committee over the past year which I shall present to you today.

Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Considerable progress has been made in reducing poverty and maternal mortality and in increasing girls' access to education since the millennium, thanks not least to the global commitment of States to the Millennium Development Goals. However, the MDG process to some extent bypassed the poorest and most marginalized, the majority of whom are women. It is therefore of pivotal importance that the Sustainable Development Goals are solidly grounded in human rights, including women's rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The concluding observations that our Committee adopts at the end of its review of periodic reports submitted by States parties to the Convention systematically call

for the realization of substantive gender equality throughout the process of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Consequently, this year, the Committee has begun, as a pilot, to make references to specific SDGs in its recommendations addressed to States parties. Most of the 27 concluding observations that CEDAW adopted since July 2016 link specific SDGs and targets to relevant articles of the Convention. Also since July 2016, the lists of issues and questions that the Committee's pre-sessional working group adopts in preparation of the review of State party reports incorporate a question that closely replicates the wording of the proposed SDG indicator on "legal frameworks in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex" (indicator 5.1.1).

With support from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Committee's dedicated Working Group on SDGs continues to collaborate closely with UN Women in the development of a methodology for this indicator. In June 2016, two CEDAW members participated in a workshop organized by UN Women in New York to discuss the methodological framework for measuring SDG indicator 5.1.1. The workshop endorsed the Convention as the principal legal framework and as a data source to inform the indicator. It agreed on a list of thematic questions for assessing whether the indicator has been met at the national level. This list will be recommended to the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDGs.

Over the past year, my Committee has also closely followed the work of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and in 2016, it made a gender-specific submission on the theme of "Ensuring that no one is left behind". It has prepared a similar contribution for this year's High-Level Political Forum on the theme of "Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world".

Women's economic empowerment

The Committee consistently raises women's economic empowerment in its dialogues with States parties on the reports that they periodically submit to the Committee. In these dialogues and in the concluding observations that the Committee adopts after each dialogue, States parties have been asked to eliminate sex-based discrimination and horizontal or vertical segregation in the labour market, the gender pay gap, sexual harassment in the workplace, diversify educational choices and career paths for women and men, enable them to reconcile work and family life, provide economic opportunities for rural women, women with disabilities, refugee and migrant women, victims of trafficking, women wishing to leave prostitution, and regularize the situation of women working in the informal economy, especially domestic workers.

In addition, the Committee stresses the importance of education as a vehicle for women's economic empowerment and their full participation in economic, social and political life. In spite of the fact that women in many countries are more qualified than men, they experience higher levels of unemployment and continue to be concentrated in lower paid jobs, at lower levels of employment and in the unprotected informal sector. In our concluding observations, we regularly recommend that States should eliminate discriminatory stereotypes, including in school books and educational materials, about women's traditional role as caregivers and men's perceived role as breadwinners, respectively, and address the preference given by many parents to their son's school attendance. States must also ensure safe school environments to protect girls from sexual and other forms of violence and diversify women's and girls' educational choices in non-feminised fields of study to promote their access to scientific, technical and managerial professions. CEDAW is currently

preparing a draft general recommendation on girls' and women's right to education to provide guidance to States parties in that regard.

Today as we look to 2030, large-scale movements of migrants and refugees around the world arising from conflicts, disaster and poor economic conditions increase the challenges that States are facing in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Such situations of instability exacerbate pre-existing patterns of discrimination against women and girls, exposing them to an increased risk of violations of their human rights, such as higher levels of gender based violence, women's and girls' exclusion from education, employment and decision-making, as well as denial of their sexual and reproductive health rights. It is in such grave times when women's rights are under threat that respect for the principles underlying the CEDAW Convention become all the more relevant, and the Committee's advice to State parties all the more critical.

To mark the UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants in September 2016, CEDAW, the Committee on Migrant Workers, OHCHR and UN Women issued a joint statement calling on States to recognize the contribution of refugee and migrant women to global economic growth and socio-cultural progress. The statement stresses that migrant women fill labour demands in transit and destination countries, remit larger proportions of their income to their countries of origin, and are more likely than men to spend remittances on education, health and family care. CEDAW also held a side event together with the Committee on Migrant Workers on "Promoting and protecting women migrant workers' labour and human rights through CEDAW and CMW", organized by OHCHR and UN-Women in Geneva in July 2016. In November, members of CEDAW and other treaty bodies participated in an expert meeting hosted by OHCHR and UN Women in Geneva that formulated

recommendations for addressing women's human rights in the global compact for safe orderly and regular migration to be adopted in 2018, as called for in the New York Declaration endorsed by the General Assembly at the UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants. The recommendations underline the human-rights based and gender-responsive approach to migration governance, call for respect for migrant women's labour rights, access to decent work and social protection, and are strongly informed by the 2030 Agenda.

Gender-based violence against women

Gender-based violence against women is another issue that is intrinsically linked to women's economic empowerment. Such violence often prevents women from breaking out of the cycle of poverty and dependence. Efforts to empower women economically must be accompanied by effective legal and policy measures to protect women from violence aimed at depriving them of their economic gains. It is in this light that the Committee continued during the year to update its landmark General Recommendation No. 19 (1992) on violence against women to reflect new developments in the national regional and international spheres as well as its growing jurisprudence. The draft of the updated General Recommendation has been shared with the public and comments received from more than 100 stakeholders have been integrated into the text. It will guide States parties in their efforts to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence against women, including gender-based killings of women (sometimes referred to as femicide/feminicide), whether committed through acts or omissions intended or likely to cause or result in death or in physical or mental harm. It will elaborate on States' due diligence obligations in that respect. It will also address the need for systematic data collection and analysis on all forms of gender-based violence against women, disaggregated by relationship between victim

and perpetrator and in relation to intersecting forms of discrimination. The Committee plans to adopt the updated General Recommendation by the end of 2017 to mark the 25th anniversary of the adoption of General Recommendation No. 19 in 1992.

In that regard, I would like to highlight the Committee's continued collaboration throughout the process on updating the General Recommendation with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Dubravka Šimonović, and thank her for her contribution. I would also like to thank the London School of Economics Centre for Women, Peace and Security for having organized two expert meetings in 2016 and 2017, in cooperation with OHCHR, where members of the Committee's Working Group in charge of updating General Recommendation No. 19 were able to discuss specific substantive issues with external experts and seek their expertise regarding the integration of these issues into the draft updated General Recommendation.

Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate

Natural disasters and climate change have an important impact on women's rights and add to large-scale migration movements. This is recognized in the draft General Recommendation on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate that CEDAW is currently elaborating, with a view to providing guidance to States parties on measures to achieve gender equality as a factor that will reinforce the resilience of women and communities in the context of climate-related disasters. While climate change resilience and adaptation programmes may provide new employment and livelihood opportunities in sectors such as agricultural production, sustainable urban development and clean energies, failure to

address the structural barriers faced by women in accessing their rights could exacerbate existing gender inequalities. The draft General Recommendation also recognizes the need to improve coherence, accountability and the mutual reinforcement of different international agendas on disaster risk reduction, climate change, sustainable development and human rights, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement, the SDGs and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), to ensure a consistent and effective approach.

The CEDAW Convention is nearly universal with 189 States parties and the only international human rights instrument that provides comprehensive protection of women's human rights. Through its substantive rights and the State reporting procedure, the Convention vests the Committee with a strong mandate to periodically gather, receive and review information on the progress achieved by States parties in realizing human rights of women and gender equality. Linking the Convention to the 2030 Agenda has great potential in advancing women's economic empowerment and enables the Committee to support States in implementing the SDGs and, at the same time, strengthen their accountability for achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. I would like to take this opportunity to commend States parties on the high level of expertise of their delegations which has greatly contributed to the quality of the State reviews.

CEDAW's work under the Optional Protocol to the Convention

Under its Optional Protocol, ratified by 108 States, CEDAW despite a constrained financial environment took action on 13 individual complaints last year. While most of these complaints concerned cases of domestic violence and

refoulement, one related to sex-based discrimination in employment. The Committee, with help from its Working Group on Inquiries, also continued its work on a number of confidential inquiry submissions alleging grave or systematic violations by a State party of rights set forth in the Convention.

The additional meeting time allocated under General Assembly resolution 68/268 to treaty bodies to deal with their backlog of State reports will be reduced starting from 2018. As a result, CEDAW will have limited capacity to continue reducing its backlog of currently 32 reports and for its time-consuming work on individual complaints and inquiries under the Optional Protocol to the Convention. We therefore seek your support to be able to effectively undertake our work on these mandated activities in light of the existing budgetary constraints.

Treaty body strengthening process

The Committee supports and has implemented many of the measures envisaged in General Assembly resolution 68/268 on treaty body strengthening. Accordingly, we have (1) offered the simplified reporting procedure, prepared lists of issues prior to reporting for four and examined the simplified reports of two States parties having requested to be examined under that procedure; (2) limited the number of recommendations in our concluding observations on which follow-up information is requested to two issues; (3) continued to operate in country task forces in examining periodic State reports; (4) formulated shorter and more focused, concrete and country specific concluding observations; (5) adhered to a harmonized procedure of the treaty bodies for the adoption of General Comments/Recommendations; and (6) increased the use of videoconference technology for our consultations with UN country teams and for remote participation of delegation members in constructive

dialogues. We count on the continued support from Member States to be able to cope with the increased workload resulting from the treaty body strengthening process.

Mr. Chair,

Before concluding, let me express the Committee's gratitude to all other partners, including other treaty bodies and human rights mechanisms, the United Nations and its specialized agencies, Member States, NGOs, national human rights institutions and many other actors. The support and information received from these partners are crucial for the Committee to gain a clear view of the status of women's rights around the globe. In addition to our colleagues at OHCHR, I would especially like to thank United Nations country teams, particularly those which were represented at the Committee's sessions, as well as the Interagency Group on CEDAW reporting comprising UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, FAO and UN Women. We are also grateful to UNHCR, ILO, UNESCO, the IPU and civil society organizations, particularly IWRAW-Asia Pacific, for their support.

I thank you for this opportunity to have addressed you.
