**Statement of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on Virtual Sessions**

Adopted on 14 January 2021

The CEDAW Committee remains deeply concerned about the devastating impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on the realisation of women's human rights and on the international human rights system. The Committee had in that regard issued a statement on 21 April 2020, calling for joint action and solidarity from a women’s human rights perspective in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Regrettably, the pandemic shows little sign of abating in this new year.

The crisis has exacerbated hardship, poverty, gender-based-violence and discrimination faced by women and girls across the world and made it more difficult for measures to be put in place and enforced for their protection. There is a stronger need in such circumstances to exercise vigilance and ensure that women’s rights under the Convention are duly upheld by States parties and all stakeholders. The Committee is mindful in that regard of its important mandate to monitor the progress made by States parties in implementing the Convention. Further, it is aware of the crucial role of women’s rights and empowerment in the post-COVID reconstruction process.

In spite of significant challenges faced by its members, the Committee demonstrated its determination to carry out its mandate and held its 76th and 77th Sessions remotely with a view to ensuring that there is no protection gap as a result of the pandemic. The Committee thus adopted 10 final decisions on individual communications and an Inquiry Report under its Optional Protocol as well as General Recommendation No. 38 on Trafficking in Women and Girls in the context of global migration, during these online sessions. It remains committed to continue to discharge its mandate as effectively as possible this year and to hold, on an exceptional basis, an online constructive dialogue to consider the periodic report of one State party during its forthcoming 78th session in February 2021.

The Committee wishes to stress that online sessions are the singular viable means by which to address the protection gap at this time. The travel restrictions and health safety measures in force around the world including Switzerland make it impossible to hold live in-person sessions.

The Committee nevertheless underscores that online sessions cannot and must not replace live in-person sessions which provide the Committee, States parties and stakeholders, including civil society organisations, with the vital opportunity of interacting together robustly and effectively and on a confidential basis where necessary. The Committee has always valued and continues to give utmost importance to its personal engagement and partnership with civil society organisations in a safe environment. This interaction is key to allowing the Committee to discharge successfully its mandate under the Convention and to maintaining the effectiveness, integrity and credibility of the international human rights treaty body system.

The Committee maintains therefore that in-person sessions and constructive dialogues should be resumed as soon as it is safe to do so.