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**Statement by
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CHAIRPERSON

**COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

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**Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,**

Today is the first time that I have the honour to address and engage in an interactive dialogue with the Third Committee of the General Assembly in my capacity as the new Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). From among the many issues the Committee has worked on in the past 12 months, I would like today to focus on four: the recently adopted Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs); economic empowerment of women; gender based violence against women; and women's access to justice.

CEDAW and the SDGs

Two weeks ago, the United Nations Summit adopted the Agenda 2030, "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." In Goal 5 of the Agenda, Member States have committed themselves to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Already before the Sustainable Development Summit, 189 States had accepted these principles as legally binding by becoming a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW Convention).

However, CEDAW's experience over the past 33 years in examining periodic reports from States parties on the implementation of the Convention has shown that women continue to be under-represented in political and economic life, are excluded from decision-making

processes at all levels, and are often the primary victims of violence, discrimination and conflict. We must therefore seize the opportunity offered by the Agenda 2030 to make women's substantive equality with men a reality.

Women's rights must be placed at the centre of the process to achieve fair and sustainable development. It is heartening to see that Goal 5 was included as a stand-alone goal in the Agenda 2030, echoing the calls of our Committee, UN Women and many other stakeholders. At the same time, it is of great importance to ensure that the implementation of the SDGs is soundly grounded in a human rights based approach to development. This includes the norms and standards contained in the CEDAW Convention.

At the 27th meeting of Chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies, held in San José, Costa Rica, last June, we adopted a joint statement emphasizing that the treaty bodies enjoy the legal authority to gather, receive and review information on a wide range of human rights issues. According to the Chairs, this information, which includes data from States and other stakeholders, will be an invaluable contribution to ensure reliable and validated means of measuring progress in achieving the SDGs for all population groups.

In order to ensure an effective, inclusive and transparent review framework for the implementation of the SDGs, and in line with the joint statement of the treaty body Chairpersons, CEDAW therefore calls on the Member States to ensure that information gathered and acted upon by CEDAW, as well as by other human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms, is systematically included in the follow-up and review of the SDGs.

With 189 States parties, the CEDAW Convention enjoys almost universal ratification, and is the only human rights instrument that provides comprehensive protection of human rights of women. 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. The relevant SDG indicators that are being developed and will be adopted in March next year should therefore be based on the CEDAW obligations of States.

Mr. Chairperson,

Economic empowerment of women

The Secretary-General underlined the fact that gender equality goes hand in hand with the SDGs, when he called for a 50:50 Planet by 2030 in addressing the Global Leaders Meeting on gender equality and women's empowerment two weeks ago here in New York. Our Committee echoes his call and agrees that the SDGs cannot be achieved without full and equal rights for all women. The Secretary-General also called on Member States to remove structural barriers to women's economic empowerment (such as unequal pay), to ensure equal opportunities for women and girls in education and employment, to alleviate women's unpaid care burden, and to promote women in leadership and decision-making positions, including in the private sector.

In its concluding observations on States parties' periodic reports, our Committee regularly makes similar recommendations. In addition, the

Committee is currently drafting three General Recommendations that are linked to women's economic empowerment, with a view to guiding States on their related legal obligations under the CEDAW Convention. One of these draft general recommendations focuses on the rights of rural women. This group constitutes one fourth of the world's population. Their contributions are vital to the well-being of their families and communities, and for local and national economies. And yet, in many parts of the world, rural women face enormous social, cultural and legal barriers in access to and control over land. They often lack access to credit, to loans, and to matrimonial savings, as well as financial and business skills. Limited access to new labour-saving technologies and agricultural equipment also impedes rural women's economic empowerment. We should not be witnessing this state of affairs in 2015. The Committee calls on all States to empower their rural women economically, socially and politically.

Women's limited access to land, resources and information reduces their capacity to cope with the impact of disasters such as natural disasters exacerbated by climate change. Chaos and economic disruption caused by disaster increase violence against women and enable human trafficking from areas of poverty and food insecurity. When attending the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction last March in Sendai, Japan, I was pleased to see that particular attention was paid to mainstreaming gender in the disaster risk reduction agenda. This also encouraged CEDAW to prepare a General Recommendation on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change. Sustainable development cannot be achieved unless disaster risk is reduced, especially for women. CEDAW therefore calls on States to reach a strong universal climate agreement at the Paris 2015 Conference.

Over the past year, the Committee has also devoted significant time to girls' and women's right to education. Education is a key instrument to empower women, as it enhances the enjoyment of other human rights. As such, it serves as a basis for women's economic empowerment. Education enables women to claim their rights to equal employment opportunities. Educated women are less likely to enter low paid, low status occupational categories and vulnerable areas of work which fail to meet decent work conditions. Moreover, access to quality education at the primary and secondary levels increases women's bargaining power within the labour force and facilitates their access to health care and adequate sanitation. Despite the considerable progress achieved in providing access to primary education, 58 million children are still out of school with 53 percent of them being girls. In addition, girls' enrolment rates tend to decrease at the secondary school age. In times of economic and financial crisis, decreases in household incomes and the tendency to cut back public expenditures often lead to withdrawal of girls from school to help with unpaid domestic work, including care work in households, or to take menial jobs to increase family income. The political commitments made by Governments to the new development goals will remain hollow unless States also honour their legal obligations to ensure women and girls, men and boys equal rights to quality education. The Committee hopes to adopt guidance to States in the form of a general recommendation on girls' and women's right to education in the coming year.

Gender-based violence

Empowering women through education, skills training and legal literacy is vital for addressing what is perhaps the most widespread violation of women's rights: gender-based violence against women. In

order to combat violence against women, States have to be looking to tackle poverty and empower women by addressing power imbalances across societies and the underlying structural barriers to gender equality, such as unequal access to and control over resources and gendered division of labour. The Committee is also currently updating its General Recommendation No. 19, i.e. its landmark guidance from 1992 on this most blatant form of discrimination against women.

Gender-based violence often lies at the heart of harmful practices inflicted on women and girls, still in today's world. In November 2014, the Committee, together with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, adopted joint General Recommendation No. 31/General Comment No. 18 on harmful practices, the first ever document of this type adopted jointly by two human rights treaty bodies. In the joint text, the Committees recall the obligation of States parties to both Conventions to prevent and eliminate harmful practices inflicted on women and girls, which are deeply rooted in social attitudes that regard women and girls as inferior to men and boys and are often used as a way of controlling women's choices and expressions, in particular their sexuality.

Gender based violence, coupled with armed conflict and extremism, often forms a push factor in women's decision to leave their home countries and seek protection abroad. As we commemorate the 15th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, we witness massive influxes of refugees who are fleeing armed conflict and violence. We all remember the tragic events in the Mediterranean Sea this year, where hundreds of people, including women and children, perished in the search for a better and safer life. In response to this distressing global trend, the Committee, in November 2014,

adopted General Recommendation No. 32 on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women. The General Recommendation stresses that violence against women is one of the major forms of persecution experienced by women in the context of refugee status and asylum and that States have an obligation not to return women to countries where they risk facing serious forms of discrimination, including gender-based violence. Gender-based violence as a form of persecution is increasingly recognized as a legitimate ground for international protection and may include FGM, child, early and forced marriage, crimes committed in the name of honour as well as other harmful practices and forms of violence.

Women's access to justice

Mr. Chairperson,

Access to justice is another pillar of women's empowerment. It is vital for the realization of all the rights protected under the Convention. Without access to justice, women cannot obtain redress for violations of their rights. In its General Recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice, adopted in July 2015, the Committee identifies six interrelated components of justice systems that are essential to ensure women's access to justice, that is, namely, justiciability of their rights, availability, accessibility, good quality, provision of remedies and accountability. The General Recommendation provides guidance to States on how to eliminate discriminatory procedures, practices as well as stereotyping within justice systems. It also makes recommendations on how to ensure women's access to justice in specific areas of law and within specific mechanisms such as plural justice systems, specialized

judicial and quasi-judicial systems, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. The General Recommendation states that the presence of plural justice systems can itself limit women's access to justice by perpetuating and reinforcing discriminatory social norms. It argues that practices embedded in plural justice systems should be harmonized with the Convention in order to minimize conflict of laws and ensure women's access to justice.

Through its work on individual communications and inquiries under the Optional Protocol, the Committee seeks to strengthen women's access to justice, when they are unable to obtain redress at the national level. Over the past year, CEDAW adopted final decisions on nine individual communications and found violations in three cases, while six cases were declared inadmissible. It concluded the proceedings in relation to two inquiries where grave or systematic violations of the Convention were found and also decided to conduct three new confidential inquiries.

Treaty body strengthening and cooperation with partners

In an effort to further rationalize its working methods, in line with General Assembly resolution 68/268 on the outcome of the treaty body strengthening process, the Committee began implementing the simplified reporting procedure. It further harmonized its approach to conducting constructive dialogues with State delegations, preparing concluding observations and elaborating General Recommendations with those of the other treaty bodies.

Before I close, I would like to thank the Committee's partners. The Inter-Agency Group on CEDAW Reporting, comprising UNICEF,

UNDP, UNFPA, FAO and UN-Women, provides invaluable country-specific information to the Committee. OHCHR, UN Women, UNICEF, UNDP, FAO, WFP, IFAD and UNISDR generously support the elaboration of the Committee's General Recommendations. The International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW) Asia-Pacific brings local NGOs to our sessions through their Global to Local Programme, and the Geneva Academy for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights regularly hosts thematic events for CEDAW.

Finally, let me thank OHCHR for its support as Secretariat of the Committee. The work of the Committee has continued to grow in 2014-2015, and while the treaty body strengthening outcome provided welcome new resources, our staffing support has not kept pace with the growth in our work nor the expectations placed on the Committee by women across the world.

In closing, I wish to stress the key role of all of you in delivering on the promise of ensuring equal rights for all women without discrimination. We need you to fulfil this promise in order to make the new development Agenda a success.

On behalf of the Committee, I thank you for this opportunity and stand ready to answer any questions you may wish to pose.
