

Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice

Statement by Elizabeth Broderick at the 62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62)

Madame Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

(Introduction)

It is with great honour that I take the floor on behalf of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice. I am joined today by my Working Group colleague, Melissa Upreti. This is the very first time that our Working Group has had the opportunity to formally speak before the Commission during its general discussion. We are delighted to see that the key mandate of the Human Rights Council on women's human rights is now formally connected with the Commission on the Status of Women.

(Establishment of the mandate)

The mandate of the Working Group was created in September 2010, thanks to the tireless and determined efforts of many actors. In fact, the idea of a mechanism on the issue of discrimination against women first originated in the CSW in the context of the Beijing plus 10 review. The Working Group together with the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women are the only two mandates, among the 44 thematic mandates, which focus directly on women's human rights.

(The achievements of the mandate)

Madame Chairperson,

The work of our expert group has covered interrelated areas of women's life – from political and public to economic and social, from family and culture to health and safety. On each of these areas, a thematic report has been submitted to the Human Rights Council, informing the Council's annual resolution on the elimination of discrimination against women.

In addition to our annual thematic reports, the Working Group engages with Member States, civil society, and individual rights holders in many fora including on our country visits, letters to Governments and other entities, and our interactive dialogues at the Human Rights Council. We are focussed on identifying where action is needed and making effective recommendations. We have a convening power to bring together all concerned stakeholders. This has provided space for women human rights defenders at the international level to inform our work.

The Group has conducted 14 country visits covering all regions, including a State which has not ratified CEDAW. The Group's 200 plus communications, have tackled issues and individual cases such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, women human rights defenders, domestic workers and access to land. Many of our communications address discriminatory laws including on nationality, marital status, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and adultery.

The Working Group also develops position papers to advance conceptual debates on important issues. Our recent paper is on women's land rights, a subject relevant to this year's theme on rural women.

(Future Focus)

Madame Chairperson,

I pay tribute to the founding members of the Working Group for their contribution and for the solid foundation they have laid for our future work.

As the second group of mandate holders, we will continue to implement this unique and important mandate on women's human rights with the same determination. We hold a deep concern that while recent decades have seen important gains made, overall progress towards an equal and just society has been painfully slow and uneven across the globe.

The struggle for women's rights takes place within a context of increasing backlash and efforts to roll-back progress. In particular, we are seeing the growing emergence and influence of conservative and extremist ideologies with increasing national political power which seeks to scale back the progress which has been made. While these forces are diverse a common feature is the focus on curtailing women's human rights and entrenching stereotypical gender roles. In some contexts, these forces have reshaped laws, state institutions and social norms to entrench discrimination and inequality. These forces are also restricting spaces for the work of women's human rights defenders and civil society.

This challenging context highlights the need to reassert the human rights of women and create enabling environments for women's human rights defenders and women's organisations to continue advancing gender equality. In this regard, we will also work closely with UN mechanisms including the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, the CEDAW Committee and regional mechanisms.

This is the context for the Working Group's overarching framework of 'preventing roll-back and reasserting equality' that will guide its activities over the next 6 years.

We welcome this ground breaking opportunity to come before you. We need your support. Indeed we count on your support to ensure that this enormous task of eliminating discrimination against women entrusted on us by the UN Human Rights Council can be delivered.

Thank you.