

Check against delivery

“54th SESSION  
OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION  
AGAINST WOMEN”



Statement by Mr. Ibrahim Salama  
Director, Human Rights Treaties Division  
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

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GENEVA, 11 FEBRUARY 2013

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the **fifty-fourth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women**. This is the Committee's first session in 2013 and so I would like to wish all those present a happy, productive and rewarding new year – hopefully one that is filled with advancements in women's rights.

I would especially like to extend a warm welcome to the new members of the Committee who will assume their duties today, namely: Ms. Noor AL-JEHANI [Qatar], Ms. Hilary GBEDEMAH [Ghana], Ms. Nahla HAIDAR [Lebanon], Ms. Dalia LEINARTE [Lithuania], Ms. Theodora NWANKWO [Nigeria], and Ms. Biancamaria POMERANZI [Italy].

I also congratulate the re-elected members of the Committee who today are commencing a new term: Ms. Nicole AMELINE [France], Ms. Barbara BAILEY [Jamaica], Mr. Niklas BRUUN [Finland], Ms. Silvia PIMENTEL [Brazil], and Ms. Xiaoqiao ZOU [China].

### **Treaty Body Strengthening Process**

I am pleased to note that you are in the process of reviewing the recommendations made by the High Commissioner in her report on strengthening the treaty body system, as well as the guidelines on the independence and impartiality of treaty body members stemming from last year's meeting of Chairpersons in Addis Ababa. My Division is eager to learn about your choices with regard to the implementation of those recommendations,

including the ones relating to the Simplified Reporting Procedure which in the view of the High Commissioner is a key one. As you know, this process concerns all the treaty bodies; all of them are requested to inform the meeting of Chairpersons on a biannual basis on the progress made, including at its next session to be held in the end of June this year.

Regarding the Guidelines on the independence and impartiality of treaty body members, endorsed by the Meeting of Chairpersons last June in Addis Ababa, I wish to inform you that all Committees have indicated their intention to consider how they can include them in their rules of procedure. At this stage, the CRC, the CRPD and the SPT have adopted the Addis Ababa guidelines. I encourage you to continue your review of this important document at your present session.

Let me take this opportunity to also provide you with information on the General Assembly's Intergovernmental Process on the strengthening of the treaty body system. The co-facilitators of the intergovernmental process, the Ambassadors of Indonesia and Iceland, have been re-appointed last December and have set a timeline for the process. They are planning to hold informals at the end of this month and during mid-April, and hope to finalize the process in May by way of an agreed resolution.

As you know, the High Commissioner submitted her report on treaty body strengthening to the General Assembly in June 2012. However, our Office continues to respond to many related queries, including to those regarding the Comprehensive Reporting Calendar. In this regard, we note that the discussions are entering a phase where concrete choices are being deliberated. The Office has been requested by various States to provide responses to questions on the Calendar, including on the possible variables that would affect

the cost of such an approach. In addition, the co-facilitators have requested OHCHR and the UN Office at Geneva to cost the second option proposed in the High Commissioner's report (and before that by the Secretary General in his 2011 report to the General Assembly). The second option consists in addressing the current backlogs of reports and individual communications every two years. We will send all this information to you very soon.

The High Commissioner believes that we are now entering the key phase of the treaty body strengthening process with States negotiating additional support to treaty bodies. As you aware, the innovative good practices of the treaty bodies themselves, including certainly CEDAW, have inspired many of the proposals to strengthen the working methods of treaty bodies that are contained in the High Commissioner's report. I am convinced that your Committee will remain at the forefront of innovative and efficient working methods. The particularity of the treaty body system is that various working methods can be strengthened at no cost, which is particularly relevant in times of budgetary constraints.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

In her opening statement at the last session of your Committee, the High Commissioner informed you about the 7.5 percent cut in OHCHR's extra-budgetary resources for 2012. For the new 2014-2015 biennium, we are anticipating systemwide cuts of 100 million USD in the regular budget of the UN Secretariat, of which 4.5 million USD will be taken from the OHCHR regular budget. Despite the fact that 70 percent of these cuts must be in staff costs, I am pleased to inform you that the CEDAW Secretariat will not be affected by these measures. However, while the Office continues to do its utmost to provide the best possible servicing to the treaty bodies, it seems inevitable that we all make some sacrifices.

In this regard, I am obliged to recall the words of the High Commissioner at your last session, where she highlighted that the Committee will find it untenable to continue to work at this pace. She suggested more concretely that your work on general recommendations be paced out in a way that can be sustained by both members and the Secretariat. The need to reinforce the resources approved for the treaty bodies through stable regular budget funding, as you know, is a prime concern of the High Commissioner and her Office. Until that is achieved, we will continue to have to do with what we have, and in times like this, we are fortunate when we do not lose what we have.

One good practice that is already being applied by other treaty bodies is the replacement of hard copy documents by electronic files for Committee members. I am sure that you would not disagree with me that applying a similar practice is both environmentally and financially required. Hard copies would continue to be provided, not by default to the entire Committee but upon the request of individual members. As some international organisations, including some departments of the United Nations, have already begun to hold paperless meetings, I believe this move is inevitable. Some Committees have accepted NGO webcasting of their public meetings, in particular dialogues with States parties. I am sure that CEDAW, which has always been pioneering good practices, will favourably consider webcasting of public meetings given its impact on the visibility and accessibility of CEDAW's work.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Since your last session, several events involving violations of women's rights have urged the High Commissioner to make strong interventions, for example:

- You will all remember the 14-year old girl Malala Yousufzai who was shot in the head and the neck on her way back from school in the town of Mingora in Pakistan in October 2012. The High Commissioner reinforced your own timely statement on this tragedy by condemning the attempted murder by Pakistani Taliban and recalling that Malala had been attacked not only because she wanted an education for herself, but also because she had been campaigning for all girls to be able to enjoy their right to education. The HC also emphasized that violence against girls travelling to and from school takes place all over the world and deters many girls from attending school.
- In response to the brutal gang rape and murder of a 23-year old Indian woman on 16 December, the High Commissioner called on India to strengthen its legal regime against rape. She quoted from CEDAW's 2007 concluding observations, recommending that India "widen the definition of rape in its Penal Code to reflect the realities of sexual abuse experienced by women and to remove the exception for marital rape from the definition of rape". A few weeks ago, the High Commissioner commended Justice Verma's Committee on Amendments to Criminal Law for having issued a ground-breaking report on violence against women with far-reaching recommendations to the Indian Government.

### **Special Procedures**

Moving now to developments in relation to other UN human rights mechanisms, I am pleased to note references to the need to respect and protect women's rights by various special procedure mandate holders.

On the occasion of the international day for the abolition of slavery on 2 December 2012, the **Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Gulnara Shahinian**, underscored that non-consensual marriages, sale of wives and wife inheritance are forms of slavery that cannot be justified by traditional, religious, cultural or economic considerations. In addition to criminalizing servile marriages, States should take educational and awareness-raising measures to highlight the nature and harm caused by forced and early marriages.

In the context of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence in December 2012, the **Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo**, and the **SRSG on sexual violence in conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura**, issued a joint statement on “Accountability for perpetrators, and the right to truth and justice for victims of war-time sexual violence”. Both experts emphasized the importance for national authorities to recognize the existence of women victims of rape and torture and to ensure that they have equal access to remedies and compensation, including non-material damages. They highlighted that limited access to justice and dysfunctional justice systems form part of the challenges faced by women in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Prior to the referendum in Egypt on the draft Constitution on 15 December 2012, the **Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice** called on the Egyptian Government to include a prohibition of discrimination based on sex, a provision incorporating international human rights treaties into the domestic legal order, and guarantees for women’s right to equality in the family in the draft Constitution. Similarly, the Working Group called for stronger provisions on gender equality and non-discrimination in the draft Tunisian Constitution.

## **Security Council**

On 30 November 2012, the Security Council convened an Open Debate on women and peace and security with a focus on “The Role of Women’s Civil Society Organizations in Contributing to the Prevention and Resolution of Armed Conflict and Peace Building”. The Open Debate marked an opportunity to reflect on the progress made and to accelerate action on the implementation of the Security Council’s historic resolution 1325 (2000) and related commitments and guiding documents on women and peace and security.

## **General Assembly**

During the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the GA, five resolutions on the advancement of women were passed unanimously, including a historic resolution calling on States to eliminate female genital mutilation. The other resolutions deal with trafficking in women and girls; the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls; women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control; and follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (“Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century”).

## **Your 54<sup>th</sup> session**

Distinguished members of the Committee,



You are known to be very conscientious and therefore it comes as little surprise that your agenda for the 54<sup>th</sup> session is again a heavy one. You will conduct dialogues with 7 States parties, meet with UN bodies and specialized agencies, NGOs and NHRIs, hold a half-day of general discussion on women's access to justice, and work on a host of other items related to general recommendations, the Optional Protocol, and your working methods.

Last but not least, you will elect a new Bureau today. I take this opportunity to thank your outgoing Chairperson, Ms. Silvia Pimentel, the Bureau who served with her, and the members who are retiring from the Committee (Ms. Magalys Arocha, Ms. Violet Tsisiga Awori, Ms. Indira Jaising, Ms. Soledad Murillo de la Vega, Ms. Victoria Popescu and Ms. Zohra Rasekh) for their dedication, their tireless work and for the passion with which they have steered the Committee over the past two years.

Before I conclude, I would like to publicly introduce your new Secretary, Mr. Jakob Schneider, whom you already know from his previous time with your Committee. At the same time, I wish to thank your outgoing Secretary, Bradford Smith, for the excellent work he has done over the more than two years that he was in charge of the CEDAW team. Mr. Smith has been appointed as Secretary of the Committee on Migrant Workers and I am sure we all wish him well in his new function.

Without further ado, I wish you successful deliberations and a productive 54<sup>th</sup> session.

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