

Check against delivery

59<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women



Statement by  
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Geneva, 20 October 2014

Madam Chair,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you for the opening of the **fifty-ninth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women** and to welcome you on behalf of the new High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. The High Commissioner is looking forward to engaging with you. He was hoping to open this session, but could not do it because of other commitments outside Geneva.

### **Treaty Body Strengthening Process**

Your current session takes place as we work together towards giving effect to General Assembly resolution 68/268 on the strengthening of the treaty body system. This landmark resolution, adopted in April this year, not only responded to the call to grant the treaty bodies additional resources to address backlogs of reports, but also made numerous suggestions to harmonize the working methods and procedures of treaty bodies.

What is important now is to consider how these proposals can be fully implemented. This Committee has been a pioneer in rationalizing treaty bodies'

working methods. I am pleased to note that at your last session, you decided to offer, on a pilot basis, the simplified reporting procedure to States parties wishing to avail themselves of this procedure for the submission of their periodic reports, provided that they have submitted an updated common core document. I should like to inform you that five of the other treaty bodies have also decided in favour of this procedure, while some are still discussing it.

Other suggestions in the resolution still need to be discussed by your Committee. For example, most other committees have appointed Rapporteurs on reprisals. A harmonized approach to reprisals would prove more effective in countering the damaging effect of reprisals on the free collaboration of civil society with the treaty bodies. The treaty body Chairs therefore decided at their 26<sup>th</sup> annual meeting in June 2014 to prepare a policy on reprisals at their next annual meeting in June 2015. The treaty bodies are not alone in their concern about the detrimental impact of reprisals on the promotion and protection of human rights. In my statement to the last session of the Human Rights Council, I emphasized that reprisals undermine the functioning of the UN as a whole, including that of its human rights mechanisms.

One decision of the resolution that I understand you will discuss at this session is the limitation, as from 2015, of the Committee's working languages to three or exceptionally four languages, if the latter is necessary to facilitate

communication among the members. This limitation will determine the interpretation during your meetings as well as the translation of official documents which are not mandated by the General Assembly, such as, for example, follow-up reports from States parties.

These are some of the specific issues before the Committee. But let me suggest that we should take advantage of the momentum created by the GA Resolution to seek broad improvement in the quality and efficiency of the system and its delivery. As you know, the Secretary General was tasked in resolution 68/268 to report back every two years to the General Assembly on “progress achieved by the treaty bodies in achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in their work” (paragraph 40). Our major aim, that I trust you all share, is to demonstrate results. OHCHR, as usual, will spare no effort to support you in achieving these results, particularly in terms of reducing the backlog of State reports and individual communications.

## **Security Council**

Distinguished members of the Committee,

I now turn to the work of other UN bodies dealing with women’s rights. On 28 October 2014, the Security Council will hold its open debate on women,

peace and security. Directly thereafter, the High-Level Advisory Group for the Global Study on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) will meet for the first time in New York. In addition to the Committee's direct representation on the Advisory Group through Ms. Patten, the only expert from the human rights mechanisms on the Group, you will be invited to provide input on key women's human rights issues for the Global Study. The Chief of OHCHR's Women's Human Rights and Gender Section will brief you in more detail on the process tomorrow.

## **General Assembly**

On 5 September 2014, in the final days of its sixty-eighth session, the General Assembly held an informal panel discussion on "Child, Early and Forced Marriage Worldwide, including the Elaboration of the Post-2015 Development Agenda". The panel was co-organized by Canada and Zambia, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/148 on child, early and forced marriage. On behalf of OHCHR, I delivered a video message to the panel. Panelists stressed that child, early and forced marriage are a human rights violation with detrimental effects on girls' lives and on national economies and development, as well as an impediment to sustainable development which needs to be specifically addressed in the post-2015 agenda.

## **Human Rights Council**

*Madame Chair*

I will now turn to developments in the Human Rights Council. On 15 September 2014 the Council held its annual full-day discussion on gender integration. Good practices mentioned by Member States included the integration of a gender perspective in official development assistance policies and the inclusion of gender experts in Commissions of Inquiry with a view to documenting conflict-related crimes against women and girls.

Also on 15 September, the Council held a panel discussion on the protection of the family. Among the main conclusions of the panel were the strong reaffirmation of States' primary obligation to protect the rights of individuals in the family, with a focus on, inter alia, women and children, and the existence of different forms of family and the need to ensure that support extends to all of them. In an open letter dated 1 September 2014, the Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practice had highlighted the fact that both the Council resolution calling for the panel as well as the concept note for the panel did not make any reference to women's right to equality within the family, despite the recognition of this right in article 16 of the CEDAW Convention.

Several resolutions with a bearing on women's rights were adopted at the recently concluded 27<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council. In a resolution on "Realizing the equal right to education of every girl", adopted without a vote, OHCHR was requested to convene a panel discussion at the June 2015 Council session to feed into CEDAW's draft general recommendation on girl's and women's right to education. In a resolution on "Female genital mutilations", which did not retain a reference to "rights" in relation to sexual and reproductive health in the final text, the Council requested OHCHR to prepare and submit to the June 2015 session of the Council a report compiling good practices and major challenges in preventing and eliminating FGM. A resolution on "Sexual orientation and gender identity" was adopted with 25 votes in favour, 14 against and 7 abstentions, expressing grave concern at acts of violence and discrimination, in all regions of the world, against individuals because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. In addition, the Council adopted a resolution on "Maternal mortality and morbidity" as well as a statement on "Child, early and forced marriages" supported by 104 States.

**Your 59<sup>th</sup> session**

*Madam Chair,*

*Distinguished members of the Committee,*

Your **agenda for the 59<sup>th</sup> session** is again extremely busy. You will conduct dialogues with eight States parties, meet with UN bodies and specialized agencies, other international organizations, NGOs and NHRIs, meet with the States parties to the Convention, and work on a host of other items related to general recommendations, individual communications and inquiries under the Optional Protocol, as well as the implementation of General Assembly resolution 68/268 on treaty body strengthening. Let me mention in particular your work with the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the first ever joint general recommendation/ general comment, which will address harmful practices. The adoption of this text will send a good signal that the treaty bodies are seeking coherence and cohesion in matters of both substance and procedure. I would also highlight the task before the Committee of putting in place working methods to allow for the introduction of the simplified reporting procedure. OHCHR will support you in this task, drawing on the experience gained in the other committees. Your work on this is part of a broader overall drive by all Committees to ensure that their meeting time is used as efficiently and effectively as possible. Available resources must be used in a manner that is most effective for the discharge of your mandate, for the rendering of assistance to States parties, and ultimately for the enjoyment of human rights by all women.

## **Membership**

As you know, since your last session, your colleague Noor Al-Jehani has resigned from the Committee. Sadly, Ms. Kheira Mahdjoub-Ouiguini from Algeria, who had been elected as a member of the Committee on 26 June 2014, for a mandate beginning on 1 January 2015, passed away on 6 September. The Governments of Qatar and Algeria have been invited to nominate another expert from among their nationals to fill both vacancies. We expect to receive their nominations soon, which will need to be approved by your Committee.

This will be the last session for the outgoing members, Ms. Bareiro-Bobadilla, Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani, Ms. Neubauer, Ms. Pires and Ms. Simonovic. I wholeheartedly thank each one of you for your contribution to the Committee's work over the past years. Your strong and diverse expertise and spirit of cooperation have indeed enriched the Committee, personally as well as substantively.

Without further ado, I wish you a very successful and productive 59<sup>th</sup> session and open the floor for questions and comments from members.

Thank you.

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