

Check against delivery

62nd session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women



Statement by
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Geneva, 26 October 2015

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you for the opening of the sixty-first session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and to welcome you on behalf of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

On 25 September, the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda sets out a people- and planet-centred vision for human rights-based, gender-sensitive sustainable development. In Goal 5, Member States commit to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” by 2030. This goal is reinforced by gender-sensitive targets underpinning other goals. For example, in Target 3.7, States undertake to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including family planning. Target 4.5 calls for eliminating gender disparities in education.

However, certain targets include caveats about national law, which could be seen to set lower standards than those forming part of States’ existing international obligations. For instance, Target 5.a on women’s equal rights to economic resources, land and property is qualified by a reference to “in accordance with national laws”, which in some cases may be below existing international obligations. The fact that States reaffirm their commitment to international law in the Agenda and emphasize that the Agenda “is to be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the rights and obligations of States under international law” is therefore of crucial importance.

It is critical that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is based on a robust follow-up and review framework that is grounded in international human rights standards, including the CEDAW Convention. While Governments have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review in relation to the progress made in implementing the Agenda, human rights input to the follow-up and review of the goals and targets should be ensured through structured linkages to the UN human rights mechanisms, including CEDAW as well as the other treaty bodies, in order to address remaining gaps in the Agenda during the implementation phase.

Madam Chair,

In your statement to the Third Committee two weeks ago, you reiterated the call on Member States by the treaty body Chairpersons to ensure that information gathered and acted upon by the UN human rights mechanisms, in particular CEDAW and other treaty bodies, is systematically included to ensure an effective, inclusive and transparent follow-up and review framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. I understand that the Committee will look into possible ways and means of engaging in relation to the achievement of Target 5.1, the indicator for which shall be adopted in March 2016.

General Assembly

Distinguished members,

I would like to now turn to the work of other UN bodies dealing with women's rights. In parallel to the Sustainable Development Summit, the People's Republic of China and UN Women co-hosted the "Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Commitment to Action" on 27 September. The meeting was the culmination of the 18-month review by 167 States of the status of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action on the occasion of its 20th anniversary. It was attended by 86 Heads of State/Government who made personal commitments to accelerate implementation of gender equality and achieve a Planet 50-50 by 2030.

During the present 70th session, the General Assembly will devote time to discussing the situation of rural women as well as violence against women migrant workers. Both issues are of relevance to your current work on a draft General Recommendation on rural women and on updating General Recommendation No. 19 (1992) on violence against women. In addition, the General Assembly will assess the reflection of gender perspectives in its own work, that of ECOSOC and of its functional commissions.

Human Rights Council

On 15 September, during its 30th session, the Human Rights Council held its annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective in the work of the Council, which this year focused on gender parity. The High Commissioner for Human Rights opened the discussion, recalling that achieving gender equality remains one of the most persistent challenges in the human rights landscape, as no country has yet achieved full equality between women and men. He emphasized that gender parity is a matter of rights, allowing women and men to participate equally in all spheres of life. The aim of the 2015 panel discussion, which was moderated by your colleague Patricia Schulz, was to analyse main challenges to achieving parity in international human rights bodies, in particular the Council and its mechanisms.

In his opening statement, the High Commissioner also announced his commitment to the Office being a member of the Geneva Gender Champions campaign launched by UNOG Director-General Michael Moller and U.S. Ambassador Pamela Hamamoto to promote gender parity. The High Commissioner pledged that he would no longer take part in any panel that does not include women experts and to improve gender parity within OHCHR, in particular at the senior management level.

Security Council

On 14 October, the independent Global Study on implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 was launched during the High Level Review convened by the Security Council to assess 15 years of progress in implementing the resolution at global, regional and national levels. The Global Study, led by Radhika Coomaraswamy with the support of a High-Level Advisory Group comprising your colleague Pramila Patten, states that resolution 1325 was conceived as a human rights resolution and that any policy or programme on women, peace and security must be conducted with this in mind. Throughout the chapters of the Global Study, there are many references to CEDAW, in particular General Recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict

situations, as well as to other treaty bodies, relevant special procedures and the work of the UPR. Chapter 12 of the Global Study explores the role of human rights mechanisms, in particular CEDAW, in holding Member States accountable for human rights obligations relating to the women, peace and security agenda. The Global Study also contains a checklist of questions for States parties reporting to CEDAW that are based on General Recommendation No. 30. It is noteworthy that this year's report of the Secretary-General on women, peace and security calls for another High Level Review in 2020.

The Security Council also adopted resolution 2242 on women, peace and security, which reaffirms the obligations of States parties to the CEDAW Convention and its Optional Protocol, notes General Recommendation No. 30 and contains strong language on access to justice for women in conflict and post-conflict situations.

A panel discussion with Pramila Patten on the complementarity between CEDAW and UNSCR 1325 was organized by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN and UN Women on 12 October.

Treaty body strengthening

In resolution 68/268, the General Assembly decided to review the entire human rights treaty body system by 2020. In that regard, you should be aware that one important outcome of the Chairpersons' meeting last June was the call of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica for academic institutions across the world to begin a reflection on options for the further strengthening of the human rights treaty body system. Such reflection can build on the successfully concluded treaty body strengthening process, and will form a timely contribution to the General Assembly's 2020 review.

Your 62nd session

Distinguished members of the Committee,

With the week of additional meeting time granted under General Assembly resolution 68/268, this will be your first four-week session. Accordingly, your agenda for the 62nd session is particularly heavy. You will conduct dialogues with eleven States parties; meet with UN bodies and specialized agencies, other international organizations, NGOs and NHRIs; hold an informal joint meeting with the Human Rights Committee; and work on a host of other items related to general recommendations such as the one on rural women, individual communications and inquiries under the Optional Protocol. You will also convene a panel discussion on "Connecting CEDAW and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda", continue discussing the implementation of GA resolution 68/268 on treaty body strengthening, and explore ways and means of contributing to the follow-up and review of target 5.1 of the 2030 Agenda on ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls.

Before I conclude, allow me to congratulate on behalf of OHCHR your colleague Feride Acar, who in September was elected as the first President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) monitoring the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention).

I intend with your consent to participate in as much of your session as possible, to learn from you, understand your expectations and of course provide support to my

colleagues whose well regarded work is essential to the success of your session. With these remarks, I wish you a successful and productive 62nd session.

Thank you.
