

Check against delivery

63rd session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women



Statement by
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*Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

It is a pleasure to be with you for the opening of the sixty-third 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 and the Director of the Division Ibrahim Salama who will be with you this Friday.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Our Office is currently looking at ways and means to ensure that human rights mechanisms, including the treaty bodies, special procedures and the UPR, can be used more strategically to help Member States deliver on their commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As you continue your own deliberations some avenues that we have flagged for consideration include:

a) Treaty body concluding observations which are directly relevant to SDGs and targets should be an integral part of the High Level Political Forum country review.

b) The reporting guidelines of the SDG accountability architecture should request States parties to include recommendations from the three international human rights mechanisms (treaty bodies, special procedures and UPR), even if they do not relate directly to the priority indicator, but to the target. To do this, we are upgrading the Universal Human Rights Index so that it will be possible to index concluding observations (and recommendations of other mechanisms) to the SDG goals and targets which should allow for easy uploading of information to be compiled for GA/ECOSOC reviews of SDGs

(this could be for example part of a UN compilation or an alternative report depending on the ultimate shape of the accountability architecture).

c) The ECOSOC President should communicate the outcome of the country review to the international human rights mechanisms (treaty bodies, special procedures and UPR) so that these mechanisms can in turn take the outcome the High Level Political Forum country reviews into account when implementing their mandates and thereby help reinforce the implementation of the HLPF recommendations through their respective ongoing work. In any case, SDG reports should naturally be part of the background information for treaty body country reviews as was the case with MDG reports in the past.

One present example of linking the 2030 Agenda with relevant international human rights instruments is the recent preliminary mapping by UNICEF of the current SDG indicators against the nine clusters of rights of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. To strengthen the role of the CRC in the SDG follow-up and review process, UNICEF is proposing to bring relevant SDG targets and indicators closer to the CRC reporting cycle. In addition, it is suggested to review the CRC reporting guidelines and prepare a statistical annex in light of the SDG indicators, with a view to raising the SDGs in the Committee's lists of issues, dialogues with States parties and concluding observations, as was recently done in the case of Haiti.

As in the case of the CRC, linking the 2030 Agenda to the CEDAW Convention has great potential to provide increased accountability and strengthened coherence and alignment among the various processes to assist States in delivering on their human rights obligations as well as on their political commitments related to women's rights and gender equality.

Women's rights in Africa

Madam Chair,

The Assembly of the African Union declared 2016 as the “African Year of Human Rights with particular focus on the Rights of Women”. OHCHR will soon deploy a gender advisor to its Regional Office in Addis Ababa and is supporting a number of AU activities. At the request of the AU, OHCHR organized a parallel session during the African Girl’s Summit on Ending Child Marriage in Africa which took place in Lusaka, Zambia, on 26-27 November 2015. The theme of the discussion was “Assessing and measuring progress in child marriage reduction through strengthening the legal and policy framework on preventing child marriage, including community justice systems”. The session focused on the role of regional and international human rights mechanisms in addressing child and forced marriage. It involved two UN special procedures mechanisms (the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Ms. Dubravka Simonovic, and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Ms. Urmila Booth) as well as two AU mechanisms (the AU Goodwill Ambassador of the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa, Ms. Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda, and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Ms. Soyata Maiga). The parallel session illustrated a good example of inter-regional cooperation and complementarity of UN and AU human rights mechanisms.

From 18 to 22 January 2016, the UN Special Rapporteurs on sale of children, child pornography and child prostitution; contemporary forms of slavery; and the right to health conducted a five-day visit to Nigeria to assess measures taken by the Government of Nigeria to assist in the rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children who had escaped or had been liberated from Boko Haram captivity. In their preliminary observations, the Special Rapporteurs commended the initiatives taken so far by the Government, while at the same time noting a protection gap, especially in service delivery and access to justice for women and girls victims of Boko Haram, as well as a lack

of information on the steps taken to find abducted persons, in particular the schoolgirls from Chibok. You might recall that this Committee issued a statement on the abduction of Nigerian school girls in 2014. The Rapporteurs called on the Government to address impunity for sexual violence, including child and forced marriage, to ensure that rehabilitation and reintegration measures are grounded in human rights norms and address stigma, ostracism and rejection of women and children who have been associated with Boko Haram because of their captivity, and to ensure that all school sites are reopened promptly and all children, in particular girls, are able to access free and quality primary education without fear.

OHCHR continued its CEDAW promotion efforts during the 26th AU Summit held from 21 to 31 January 2016 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. During meetings with the AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, Ms. Bineta Diop, and with several AU Member States, the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Ivan Simonovic, raised CEDAW's potential role as an accountability mechanism for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, CEDAW's recommendations to specific States parties, and the importance for all States in the region to engage in the reporting process or to ratify the Convention, respectively.

General Assembly

Distinguished members,

During its 70th session, the General Assembly adopted a number of resolutions that are of direct relevance to your mandate. In resolution 70/176 on “Taking action against gender-related killing of women and girls”, the General Assembly took note of national and international judicial decisions that condemn mass killings of women and girls and urged Member States to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish acts of violence against women, in particular gender-related killing. It invited Member States to take into consideration existing practical tools, such as the Latin American model protocol for the investigation of gender-related killing of women, developed by OHCHR and UN Women, and the recommendations for the effective investigation of the crime of femicide. I invite you to see the Report of the Secretary-General on the outcome of the open-ended intergovernmental expert group meeting on gender-related killing of women and girls held in Bangkok from 11 to 13 November 2014 (E/CN.15/2015/16). The resolution also encouraged Member States to effectively implement the CEDAW Convention and the Optional Protocol thereto. The General Assembly further adopted resolution 70/130 on violence against women migrant workers.

Of direct relevance to your draft general recommendation on rural women are General Assembly resolution 70/219 on “Women in development”, which calls on Member States to promote women’s role in the development process, and resolution 70/132 on the “Improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas”.

Lastly, in resolution 70/212, the General Assembly proclaimed 11 February of each year the “International Day of Women and Girls in Science”. This links to the Committee’s repeated recommendation to States parties to

diversify educational and career paths for women and men and girls and boys and to encourage women and girls to choose non-traditional fields of study, namely science.

Treaty body strengthening

As you are aware, Costa Rica made a call at the Chairpersons' meeting last June to academic institutions worldwide to develop creative and innovative proposals in view of the General Assembly's 2020 review of the treaty body system. Switzerland already supports this call and we understand that other countries should soon follow. The Geneva Academy organized a brainstorming meeting of academics from various parts of the world in December and is the process of launching an independent research process. We hope to ensure that representatives from the Geneva Academy will further brief you about this initiative. Meanwhile, in the next few months, we will prepare the first Secretary General report under General Assembly resolution 68/268.

I am pleased to announce that the English version of the Handbook for Treaty Body Members has been published, and that the other language versions will be ready soon. You may recall that in her 2012 report on treaty body strengthening to the General Assembly, our former High Commissioner Ms. Pillay, had proposed to prepare such a Handbook and to develop a dedicated webpage on Treaty Body elections. Both now exist and we hope that this will assist States parties in nominating and electing competent and independent treaty body members. The Handbook also provides useful information to new and current members. You will receive a hardcopy of the Handbook during this session.

As you know, the capacity of the Secretariat to service the Committee's session is stretched due to an increasing workload and temporary absences of colleagues. As part of the UN greening policy, and to alleviate the physical

burden on staff, the distribution of hard copy documentation has been substantially reduced, with the aim to have paper smart sessions for all treaty bodies by 1 January 2017. All documentation can be easily accessed on the Committee's extranet page, and a printer will be at the disposal of Members during this session. As a transitional measure, a master file for each country has been prepared and can be consulted with the Secretariat.

Your 63rd session

Distinguished members of the Committee,

During this 63rd session, the Committee will conduct dialogues with eight States parties; meet with UN bodies and specialized agencies, other international organizations, NGOs and NHRIs; hold a half day of general discussion on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change; 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. The Committee will also continue discussing the implementation of GA resolution 68/268 on treaty body strengthening and explore ways and means of informing the follow-up and review process of the SDGs.

I look forward to being with you during this session and I and my colleagues wish you a successful and productive 63rd session.

Thank you.
