

Check against delivery

67<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women



Statement by  
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Distinguished members of the Committee,  
Colleagues and Friends,

It is a pleasure to be with you for the opening of the sixty-seventh session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. I am pleased to bring you greetings from the High Commissioner for Human Rights Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. In addition, I have the pleasure to congratulate on behalf of the Office, the former Member of CEDAW, Ms. Pramila Patten, on her appointment as Under-Secretary General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Ms. Patten resigned from the Committee on 16 May this year and started her work as SRSO on 12 June. I know the Committee Members will join us in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to thank her for her most important contribution to the work of the Committee. We wish her every success in her new functions.

### **Health and Human Rights of Women, Children and Adolescents**

I now would like to brief you on the work of the OHCHR-WHO High Level Working Group on the Health and Human Rights of Women, Children and Adolescents established by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the WHO Director-General, Ms. Margaret Chan, in May 2016. It is co-chaired by the former President of Finland, Ms. Tarja Halonen, and the prominent Human Rights expert Ms. Hina Jilani from Pakistan. Its nine members comprise a former Prime Minister, Health Ministers, and health and human rights experts. The Working Group was created to generate high level political dialogue for the advancement of the health and human rights agenda at the national and global levels, building on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Secretary-General's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health.

On 22 May, one year after its establishment, the High-Level Working Group launched its landmark report, shared with you today, entitled "Leading the Realization of Human Rights to and through Health" during the 70<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly. We welcome this publication, even though it has been 70 years of World Health Assembly meetings to finally hear a discussion on the right to health, despite the fact that the 1946 WHO Constitution was the first international instrument to proclaim the right to health.

The report of the High-Level Working Group calls on States to create an enabling environment for rights to and through health by upholding the right to health in national law, establishing a rights based approach to health financing and universal health coverage, and removing violence and discrimination against women - including harmful practices and intersecting forms of discrimination - as well as social, gender and cultural norms that prevent the realization of human rights and gender equality being key determinants of health. The report is not a technical report, but a call from leaders to leaders. It concludes that the most persistent gap between the promises and achievements made in relation to the health and human rights of women, children and adolescents is, in reality, a leadership gap.

The High Commissioner has committed to address this gap by working closely with WHO on the implementation of the recommendations of the report. When drafting the report, the High-Level Working Group greatly benefited from the jurisprudence of the treaty bodies, including that of CEDAW. We know that this Committee will continue to be a driving force in holding States accountable for the advancement of women's and girls' rights to health and through health. In this regard, we would welcome the opportunity to further strengthen cooperation between the Office and the Committee to use the momentum created by the

work of the High-Level Working Group and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to counter attacks and negative discourse directed against women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health rights as well as gender equality to prevent further erosion of their right to health and other human rights.

### **35<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council**

I would now like to update you on some relevant developments that took place during the 35<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council:

On 13 June, the Human Rights Council held its annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women – with two panels: one on “Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls”, and another on “Women's rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: health and gender equality”.

The panel on health and gender equality was the opportunity for a second launch of the report of the High-Level Working Group on the Health and Human Rights of Women, Children and Adolescents, this time within the Human Rights Council. The discussion addressed the implementation of SDG 3 on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, and SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. In her opening statement, the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Kate Gilmore, emphasized that the realization of the right to health of women and girls, particularly their sexual and reproductive rights, remained seriously uneven or unattainable at the country level, robbing women of their autonomous decision-making regarding their own bodies. Many adolescent girls are risking their lives and that of their babies due to too early child bearing, frequently in the context of early and forced marriages.

The Committee's former colleague, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Ms. Dubravka Simonovic participated in the panel on Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women. It looked at ways of engaging men and boys as agents of change to challenge discriminatory stereotypes and social norms that relegate both men and women to narrowly confined roles and to work as partners in the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. Gender-based violence against women remains one of the most pervasive human rights abuses. It is one of the fundamental social, political and economic means by which the subordinate position of women, and their stereotyped roles, with respect to men are perpetuated.

In her annual presentation to the Human Rights Council on 12 June, Ms Simonovic highlighted the importance of protection orders and called for comprehensive approaches to integrate services and shelters to prevent violence against women. She referred to CEDAW's important jurisprudence concerning the due diligence obligation of States to combat and prevent gender-based violence.

At the opening of the 35<sup>th</sup> session of the Council on 6 June, the High Commissioner expressed his dismay at the poor reporting record of many States parties to the international human rights treaties. He reminded States that reporting obligations are not optional and appended a list of 74 States, whose reports under one or more treaties have been overdue for a decade or longer, to his opening statement. He also, however, highlighted those 33 States that are fully up to date with their treaty reporting. The High Commissioner stressed that

while not always translating into real progress, reporting procedures help to identify gaps as well as measures to correct them.

### **The Chair's meeting**

The 29<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of Chairs of the Treaty Bodies, in which your Chair Dalia Leinarte actively participated, was held in New York from 26 to 30 June. The Committee shall discuss this in more detail during your meeting but in brief the Chairs:

- Met with States parties, UN entities and agencies, NHRIs and NGOs to exchange views on ways to further enhance the effective functioning of the treaty body system
- Took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the status of the treaty body system (A/71/118), including the request to the General Assembly to review the meeting time allocated to the treaty body system and to provide the necessary resources to support reporting, individual communications, field visits and other mandated activities;
- Resolved to continue working towards alignment of working methods in response to GA resolution 68/268 on strengthening the treaty body system;
- Reviewed the compliance by States parties with their reporting obligations to the treaty bodies;
- Expressed support for an aligned approach to follow-up to concluding observations, decisions and Views;
- Discussed a common approach by the treaty bodies to engaging national human rights institutions;
- Decided to remain engaged in the process leading to the 2020 review of the treaty body system and to formulate proposals for discussion within their respective treaty bodies;
- Recalled the GA's encouragement of an enhanced role for TB Chairs in relation to procedural matters, to foster coherence across the treaty bodies and align working methods; and
- Reiterated their recommendation for all treaty bodies to use and if they have not yet done so, to endorse the Addis Ababa guidelines on the independence and impartiality of treaty body members and the San José guidelines against intimidation and reprisals.

### **The Committee's 67<sup>th</sup> session**

During this 67<sup>th</sup> session, this Committee will conduct dialogues with eight States parties; meet with UNCTs and specialized agencies, other international organizations, NGOs and NHRIs. An informal private meeting shall be held with the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and meetings with FAO, the World Bank, OECD and UN-Women on data collection for SDG indicator 5.a.2 relating to women's land rights and indicator 5.1.1 relating to legal frameworks to end discrimination against women, respectively.

On this note, the Office commends the Committee for the visible momentum it has generated to promote the implementation of the SDGs and provide a best practice for linking the realization of human rights to the 2030 Agenda. We count among its achievements, the substantive inputs made to the High Level Political Forum over the past two years, its expertise in shaping the methodology for indicator 5.1.1 and use of its Lists of Issues to collect data for this indicator. We are highly encouraged that, with the support of OHCHR and UN Women, the Committee will embark on revising its Reporting Guidelines in order to

draw the link between reporting on articles under the CEDAW Convention and collecting data to measure the relevant SDG Targets.

We are heartened that during this session, after considerable consultation and discussion, the Committee will potentially adopt a new general recommendation on gender-based violence against women to update the Committee's landmark General Recommendation No. 19 (1992) on the same topic. The Committee's tasks are as usual heavy as the Members will consider and potentially resolve several proceedings under the confidential communications and inquiry procedures on issues relating to violence against women, harmful practices and sexual and reproductive rights.

In addition, to these various undertakings the Committee shall at its present session, also work on a host of other items related to follow-up and other general recommendations, and continue discussing issues in relation to General Assembly resolution 68/268 on treaty body strengthening.

In all these endeavours I wish the Committee a most successful and productive 67th session and we look forward to working with you these coming weeks.

Thank you.

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