Thank you, Madam Chair,

Distinguished Committee members,

It is my pleasure to address this important Committee. As a National Human Rights Institution, we have submitted to the Committee our alternative report along with findings and recommendations. Besides, this September I’ve established a Women Council adjunct to the Human Rights Defender to advance this agenda.

Unfortunately, the Azerbaijani aggression on Armenia launched this September affected disproportionality thousands of displaced Armenian women and girls, including those with disabilities; the war crimes committed by Azerbaijani militaries were done with particular cruelty towards the female personnel targeting their gender and ethnicity, but most worrying part -disseminating those videos on social media with particular gender hatred, inter alia making gifs and stickers with the faces of killed Armenian females.

Dear colleagues,

Armenia lacks clear and sound anti-discrimination legislation, so, we strongly recommend to adopt such legislation and establish effective institutional mechanism such as the Equality Body.

The state response to cases of domestic and gender-based violence remains a matter of concern. The national legislation is in odds with international standards, there is no explicit corpus delicti on domestic violence, county has signed but not ratified the Istanbul Convention and despite the adoption of the new Criminal Code in 2021, the fact remains problematic that DV and all acts of gender-based violence, including stalking, are not criminalized.

The inappropriate state response to such crimes is from one side a result of the entrenched stereotypes regarding gender issues and from the other side, there is clearly big gap in capacity of state’s first respondents such as Police, Investigation, Prosecution, Judiciary as well as social and medical workers. These facts are also confirmed by the complaints addressed to our office, so, we recommend to:

(a) Amend the criminal legislation, establishing an explicit corpus delicti for all acts of gender-based violence, including stalking; also enhance the procedural guarantees for protection of victims by changing the rules on investigation of such crimes under public charges in compliance with international standards;

(b) publish unified, comprehensive, and systematic statistics on DV cases;

(c) Ensure access to a sufficient number of shelters and state-funded services covering all the regions with sufficient access for women with disabilities.

(d) Provide tailored training to first respondents and professionals and adopt standard operational rules for law enforcement.

The disproportionate targeting and persecution of human rights defenders working on women’s issues, as well as online sexism towards female public figures remain worrisome.

Despite the welcomed amendments to the Law on Political Parties and the Electoral Code, aimed at encouraging women's political participation, women remain underrepresented in decision-making positions. The only exception is the Parliament, where women make up more than 33% as a result of the continuously increasing gender quota. In the executive branch, only 1 female Minister out of 12. No security or law enforcement body is headed by a woman (except the recently elected Prosecutor General); the Security Council has no single female member. Out of 11 regions, only one is headed by a female Governor, and out of a total 502 local communities, only 8 are led by females.

Stereotypes cultivate more sex-selective abortions. According to 2021 official statistics, the gender ratio remained at 1.10 in 2020 compared to 2019 and decreased compared to 2018. The same data suggests that the gender ratio did not increase in 2020, which is a positive change, but from a general point of view, the issue continues to remain with the same relevance.

Due to the gender-neutral labor legislation, women continue facing labor rights restrictions and discriminatory treatment in the workplace, including sexual harassment.

We inter alia recommend to:

(a) ensure the application of dissuasive sanctions aimed at preventing TV content from promoting the stereotyps about women;

(b)take concrete measures to promote women political and economic participation, introduce gender sensitive budgeting practices, continue improving gender quotas with special focus on law enforcement;

***(***c) introduce the labor legislation addressing the sexual harassment on workplace;

(d) enhance access of women to health care services without any discrimination inter alia by training the health professionals;

(e) provide targeted state support including mental health care, to displaced women and girls.

Thank you!