

Check against delivery

61st Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against
Women



Statement by
Mr. James Heenan
Chief, Groups in Focus Section, Human Rights Treaties Division
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

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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-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.

The SDGs

This morning as you embark on your summer session, I would like to start with the on-going intergovernmental process on the Sustainable Development Goals for the post 2015 period. The goals, targets and indicators that are the centrepiece of this initiative have the potential to provide a new and powerful means for addressing some of the chronic human rights situations we face today, such as poverty, violence against women and the lack of access to health care to name but a few. This transformative potential of the SDGs, building on the lessons of the MDG process, has been long recognized by the human rights treaty bodies. CEDAW, along with other committees, has regularly sounded the call for the new framework be anchored in the internationally agreed human rights norms and standards. The 17 goals and 169 targets released in the Zero Draft Outcome Document on 2 June in many respects to these calls, and I commend the Zero Draft to your reading.

As we move towards the September Summit at which the SDGs will be adopted, two of the key issues for the human rights community are the framework for accountability (termed “follow-up and review” in the Zero Draft) and indicators. At the international level, it is proposed that follow-up and review of progress towards the SDGs will be entrusted to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development under the Economic and Social Council. While the exact contours of this framework are still to be defined, many realise that the information gathered and analysis made by the human rights mechanisms (including treaty bodies such as CEDAW) are tremendous assets that should be exploited. At their recent annual meeting, the Chairpersons of the Treaty Bodies thus urged Member States to ensure that information gathered and acted upon by the UN human rights mechanisms, and in particular the human rights treaty bodies, is systematically included in the follow-up and review system. CEDAW is already moving in this direction and at this session the Committee will be able to explore with UNWOMEN and OHCHR how CEDAW can be involved in monitoring the indicators for SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

Similarly, the indicators which will measure progress towards the targets and goals are currently being deliberated, and a preliminary list of indicators will be published in November 2015, after the adoption of the SDGs. Indicators provide a crucial means of ensuring that human rights lie at the heart of the post 2015 architecture by ensuring that information collected exposes – as far as possible - the reality on the ground of people's enjoyment of their human rights. Again, with together with UNWOMEN, the Committee will be able to explore at this session how it will be able to feed its expertise into the construction of indicators, particularly around Goal 5.

The Chairperson's meeting

Distinguished members

The 27th annual meeting of Chairpersons in San José, Costa Rica, concluded just over a week ago. Your Chair, Ms Hayashi, participated in the meeting which discussed a number of issues from the outcome of the treaty body strengthening process including the process for the elaboration of general comments and the issue of reprisals against individuals or groups for engaging with the UN human rights treaty bodies. The Chairs also met with various regional stakeholders, including the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights. At the conclusion of their meeting the Chairpersons endorsed a set of guidelines against intimidation or reprisals, agreed an aligned process for the consultation and elaboration of general recommendations and issued a Statement on human rights in the SDG process to which I referred earlier. Copies of all of these documents have been share with members and time has been set aside during your session to discuss each of them.

Recent developments

Madame Chair

Allow me to briefly update the Committee on some relevant developments from across the United Nations system since your last session.

- On 16 June, the Secretary-General received the report of the High-level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, established by him in October 2014 to make a comprehensive assessment of the state of UN peace operations today, and the emerging needs of the future. The report contains key recommendations on women, peace and security, calling for gender sensitive analysis, planning, implementation, review and evaluation processes; the integration of gender expertise within all mission components; and improving the policy, substantive and technical support to missions from UN entities, including UN Women.
- On 19 June 2015, the General Assembly adopted resolution 69/293 without a vote, declaring 19 June as the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. The date 19 June commemorates the breakthrough adoption in 2008 of UN Security Council resolution 1820, which recognized sexual violence as a tactic of war and a threat to global peace and security. It further recognized that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity and constitutive acts of genocide. The International Day will aim to raise awareness of the need to end conflict-related sexual violence and to urge the international community to stand in solidarity with the survivors of sexual violence around the world.
- Also on 19 June, the Human Rights Council held its annual full-day discussion on women's rights. The first of the two panels held that day looked at efforts to address the diverse forms of violence against women in the private sphere. In a resolution adopted last Thursday on "Accelerating Efforts to Eliminate all Forms of Violence against Women: Domestic Violence", the Council requested OHCHR to present a report summarizing the panel recommendations at its September session. The second panel discussed

women's rights to political and economic participation as provided for in the CEDAW Convention and other instruments, and was chaired by the Chairperson of the Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practice, Ms. Emna Aouij from Tunisia.

- Earlier, on 16 June, the Council held a panel discussion on realizing the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl, in which your colleague Ms. Bailey participated. The panel was chaired by the President of the Human Rights Council and opened by the High Commissioner. A summary report of the outcome of the panel discussion will be submitted to the Council at its next session. This summary could usefully feed into the Committee's deliberations on a general recommendation on the right to education.
- Also on 16 June, the outgoing Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Rashida Manjoo, presented her final report to the Council (A/HRC/29/27), calling for a United Nations binding international instrument on violence against women and girls, with its own dedicated monitoring body. The Council took note of the report in its resolution adopted last Thursday on "accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women: eliminating domestic violence".
- Late last week the Council also adopted resolutions on "Strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage" which included a welcome a reference to the joint General Recommendation/General Comment of CEDAW and the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices. Other relevant resolutions adopted include those on "Protection of the family" and on "Elimination of discrimination against women". It is notable that there was a relatively high level of disagreement among Member states on these texts, as reflected in a number of amendments being proposed and voted on the texts.

Madame Chair

Before I conclude, allow me to congratulate on behalf of OHCHR your colleague Ms. Feride Acar, who in May was elected as a founding member 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 would add that Ms Acar obtained the highest score of all candidates during the election. On an equally positive note, your former colleague Dubravka Simonovic was appointed by the Human Rights Council as Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences for a renewable term of three years on Friday last week. Each of these appointments promises to open new avenues for the Committee to cooperate with these human rights mechanisms on the issue of violence against women.

With these remarks, I wish you a successful and productive 61st session.

Thank you.
