

6 December 2011

Original: English

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**Commission on the Status of Women**

**Fifty-sixth session**

27 February-9 March 2012

Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda\*

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters**

**Results of the forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women**

**Note by the secretariat**

*Summary*

The present note reflects the results, including decisions taken, of the forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, held in New York from 11 to 29 July 2011 and in Geneva from 3 to 21 October 2011.

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\* E/CN.6/2012/1.

## **I. Introduction**

1. In its resolution 47/94, the General Assembly recommended that the sessions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women be scheduled, whenever possible, to allow for the timely transmission of the results of those sessions for information to the Commission on the Status of Women.

2. The Committee held its forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions from 11 to 29 July 2011 and from 3 to 21 October 2011, respectively. At its forty-ninth session, the Committee decided to send letters to the Governments of Egypt and Tunisia on the rights of women within the context of the political transitions taking place in both States (see annex I). The Committee also decided to transform the task force on working methods into a standing working group on working methods, in line with the Committee's desire to strengthen and rationalize its working methods as part of the broader treaty body strengthening process (see annex II, decision 49/VIII). The Committee further took a number of related decisions with respect to the list of issues adopted at the meetings of the pre-session working group (see annex II, decision 49/IX), the establishment of task forces to enhance the constructive dialogue with States parties (see annex III, decision 50/I) and strengthening the role of the country rapporteurs (see annex III, decision 50/II). Moreover, the Committee decided at its fiftieth session to establish a task force on inquiries under article 8 of the Optional Protocol, a joint working group of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Human Rights Committee, a focal point for the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) (Dubravka Šimonović, and Zohra Rasekh as alternate), and a focal point for HIV and Gender Equality (Zohra Rasekh). In addition, the Committee adopted a statement on the anniversaries of the adoptions of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961 (see annex IV) and a statement on rural women on the occasion of the upcoming fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women with its priority theme related to empowering rural women (see annex V).

3. As at 21 October 2011, the closing date of the fiftieth session of the Committee, there were 187 States parties to the Convention and 103 States parties to the Optional Protocol to the Convention. A total of 64 States had accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, concerning the meeting time of the Committee. In order to bring the amendment into force, two thirds of the States parties to the Convention, in other words 125 States, are required to deposit their instruments of acceptance with the Secretary-General.

## **II. Results of the forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions of the Committee**

### **A. Reports considered by the Committee**

4. At its forty-ninth session, the Committee considered the reports of eight States parties submitted under article 18 of the Convention and issued its concluding observations thereon, namely Costa Rica (CEDAW/C/CRI/CO/5-6), Djibouti (CEDAW/C/DJI/CO/1-3), Ethiopia (CEDAW/C/ETH/CO/6-7), Italy (CEDAW/C/ITA/CO/6),

Nepal (CEDAW/C/NPL/CO/4-5), the Republic of Korea (CEDAW/C/KOR/CO/7), Singapore (CEDAW/C/SGP/CO/4) and Zambia (CEDAW/C/ZMB/CO/5-6).

5. At its fiftieth session, the Committee considered the reports of eight States parties submitted under article 18 of the Convention and issued its concluding observations thereon, namely Chad (CEDAW/C/TCD/CO/1-4), Côte d'Ivoire (CEDAW/C/CIV/CO/1-3), Kuwait (CEDAW/C/KWT/CO/3-4), Lesotho (CEDAW/C/LSO/CO/1-4), Mauritius (CEDAW/C/MUS/CO/6-7), Montenegro (CEDAW/C/MNE/CO/1), Oman (CEDAW/C/OMN/CO/1) and Paraguay (CEDAW/C/PRY/CO/6).

6. Representatives of United Nations entities, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations attended the sessions. The reports of the States parties, the Committee's lists of issues and questions, the States parties' replies thereto and their introductory statements are posted on the web page of the Committee, which is hosted on the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ([www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)).

7. In regard to each of the States parties considered, the Committee adopted concluding observations (see paras. 4 and 5, above), which are also available on the website.

## **B. Action taken in relation to the implementation of article 21 of the Convention**

### **General recommendation on the economic consequences of marriage and its dissolution**

8. No action was taken by the Committee in plenary at the forty-ninth session on this issue. The working group entrusted with the preparation of the draft general recommendation on the economic consequences of marriage and its dissolution, however, met during the session and continued to work on the revised draft general recommendation, during a two-day retreat following the session on 31 July and 1 August 2011. At the fiftieth session, the Committee started the first reading of the revised draft general recommendation in plenary. Meetings of the working group were also held during that session.

### **General recommendation on the human rights of women in armed conflict and post-conflict situations**

9. The Committee held a general discussion on 18 July 2011, during its forty-ninth session, on women in conflict and post-conflict situations, as the first phase in the preparation of a general recommendation on the subject. Nearly 300 people attended the discussion. The discussion was opened by the Chair of the Committee, Silvia Pimentel, followed by opening addresses by Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary-General for Intergovernmental Support and Strategic Partnerships, UN-Women. The general recommendation was introduced by Pramila Patten, a member of the Committee and Chair of its working group on women in conflict and post-conflict situations. Keynote speakers included: Margot Wallström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict; Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the

Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Rashida Manjoo, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences; Juan Mendez, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; and Jessica Neuwirth, Coordinator of the High-level Panel on Remedies and Reparations for Victims of Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Oral Statements were made by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UN-Women and 17 civil society organizations, including Amnesty International, International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific, International Disability Alliance, Widows for Peace through Democracy, International Alliance of Women, Global Alliance against Traffic in Women, Global Action, Forum for Women, Law and Development and others. No action was taken by the Committee in plenary during the fiftieth session, however the working group met during the session.

**Joint general recommendation on harmful practices**

10. No action was taken by the Committee in plenary on this issue at the forty-ninth or fiftieth sessions. The working group met during the fiftieth session and also held a joint meeting with the working group of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to review an annotated outline of the joint general recommendation on harmful practices.

**General recommendation on access to justice**

11. No action was taken by the Committee on this issue at the forty-ninth session. A draft concept note was circulated to the Committee during the fiftieth session, although no discussions took place in plenary on the topic. The working group, however, did meet during the fiftieth session.

**Working group on gender equality in the context of asylum, statelessness and natural disasters**

12. No action was taken by the Committee in plenary at the forty-ninth session, however the working group met during the session. During the fiftieth session, the Committee authorized the working group on gender equality in the context of asylum, statelessness and natural disasters to elaborate a general recommendation in this regard. The Committee also decided that any work on a general recommendation would take place intersessionally until decided otherwise by the Committee.

**Working group on rural women**

13. At the fiftieth session, the Committee decided to establish a working group on rural women for the purpose of preparing a general recommendation in this regard. The Committee also decided that any work on a general recommendation would take place intersessionally until decided otherwise by the Committee.

## **C. Action taken in relation to ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee**

### **Enhancing the Committee's working methods under article 18 of the Convention**

#### **Working methods**

14. The Committee established a standing working group on working methods to continue to refine the working methods of the Committee in order to fulfil its responsibilities in a more effective manner within the broader framework of the treaty body strengthening process. Previously, the Committee had taken steps to improve its reporting guidelines and the constructive dialogue with the States parties. It also refined its concluding observations. The Committee also took a number of related decisions at its forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions relating to the list of issues adopted at the meetings of the pre-session working group to better focus priority issues, the establishment of task forces to enhance the constructive dialogue with States parties and strengthening the role of the country rapporteurs.

15. At its forty-ninth session, the Committee decided to confirm its current practice of referring to comments received from States parties relating to concluding observations of the Committee without reproducing them in the report of the Committee. Furthermore, the Committee decided to post comments formally transmitted by States parties relating to concluding observations on the web pages of the relevant session of the Committee, on the Committee's website, upon the request of the State party concerned. Such comments will be posted as received and will not be translated. A reference to the website will be provided in the report of the Committee.

16. The Committee also decided by vote that references to general recommendations in its concluding observations and other outputs of the Committee should be made in a consistent fashion and follow the same format, in other words, title followed by year without any reference, footnote or other mention.

#### **Follow-up procedure**

17. At its forty-ninth session, the Committee adopted the report of the Rapporteur on follow-up to concluding observations and considered the follow-up reports of and issued its related concluding observations on Azerbaijan (CEDAW/C/AZE/CO/4/Add.1), Iceland (CEDAW/C/ICE/CO/6/Add.1) and Portugal (CEDAW/C/PRT/CO/7/Add.1). The Committee also sent reminders to the following States parties whose follow-up reports were overdue: Armenia, Cameroon, Germany and Rwanda. In addition, the Committee sent reminders to the following States parties to which it had already written requesting overdue follow-up reports: Belgium, Ecuador, El Salvador, Madagascar, Mongolia and Uruguay.

18. At its fiftieth session, the Committee adopted the report of the Rapporteur on follow-up to concluding observations, considered the follow-up reports, additional information and letters received from, and issued its related concluding observations regarding the following States parties: Canada, Denmark (CEDAW/C/DEN/CO/7/Add.1), Germany (CEDAW/C/DEU/CO/6/Add.1), Japan (CEDAW/C/JPN/CO/6/Add.1), Kyrgyzstan (CEDAW/C/KGZ/CO/3/Add.1) and Myanmar (CEDAW/C/MMR/CO/3/Add.3). Canada provided a letter stating that it would provide additional information in its next periodic report, due in 2014. In this

regard, the Committee took the decision to stop the follow-up procedure on Canada. The Committee also sent reminders to the following States parties whose follow-up reports were overdue: Bhutan, Guinea-Bissau, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liberia, Spain, Switzerland and Timor-Leste.

19. Moreover, the Committee assessed the follow-up procedure to concluding observations during the fiftieth session and concluded that given the relatively short time of two years during which the follow-up procedure has been implemented, the information contained in the reports submitted suggests that the follow-up procedure is achieving its stated goal of acting as a tool of implementation of the Convention and, more specifically, the identified recommendations set out in the concluding observations, and is proving to be an effective reporting procedure that enables the Committee to monitor progress achieved between reporting cycles. The Committee also appointed Barbara Bailey as the new Rapporteur on follow-up and Yoko Hayashi as alternate rapporteur for a period of two years, until 31 December 2013.

#### **Overdue reports**

20. The Committee decided that the secretariat should systematically remind States parties whose reports are five years or more overdue to submit their reports as soon as possible. There are currently 12 States parties whose report are 5 years or more overdue: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Central African Republic, Kiribati, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Solomon Islands, Swaziland and Trinidad and Tobago. States parties had been responsive to the reminders transmitted by the secretariat, as evidenced by the number of reports submitted and scheduled for consideration. The Committee currently has a total of 46 reports scheduled for consideration between the fifty-first session (February 2012) and the fifty-sixth session (October 2013).

#### **Dates of future sessions of the Committee**

21. The Committee confirmed the dates of its fifty-first, fifty-second and fifty-third sessions as follows:

##### **Fifty-first session**

- (a) Twenty-second session of the Working Group on Communications under the Optional Protocol: 7-10 February 2012, Geneva;
- (b) Plenary: 13 February-2 March 2012, Geneva;
- (c) Pre-session working group for the fifty-third session: 5-9 March 2012, Geneva;

##### **Fifty-second session**

- (a) Twenty-third session of the Working Group on Communications under the Optional Protocol: 4-6 July 2012, New York;
- (b) Plenary: 9-27 July 2012, New York;
- (c) Pre-session working group for the fifty-fourth session: 30 July-3 August 2012, New York;

**Fifty-third session**

- (a) Twenty-fourth session of the Working Group on Communications under the Optional Protocol: 26-28 September 2012, Geneva;
- (b) Plenary: 1-19 October 2012, Geneva;
- (c) Pre-session working group for the fifty-fifth session: 22-26 October 2012, Geneva.

**Reports to be considered at future sessions of the Committee**

22. The Committee confirmed that it will consider the reports of the following States parties at its fifty-first session: Algeria, Brazil, Congo, Grenada, Jordan, Norway and Zimbabwe. In addition it will consider the reports of the following States parties at its fifty-second session: the Bahamas, Bulgaria, Guyana, Indonesia, Jamaica, Mexico, New Zealand and Samoa. At its fifty-third session, it will consider the reports of the following States parties: Central African Republic (in the absence of a report), Chile, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Serbia, Togo and Turkmenistan.

**D. Action taken by the Committee in respect of issues arising from article 2 and article 8 of the Optional Protocol**

23. At the forty-ninth session, the Committee endorsed the report of the Working Group on Communications under the Optional Protocol on its nineteenth and twentieth sessions. The Committee took action on communications Nos. 17/2008, 20/2008 and 23/2009 and adopted views on those communications by consensus. In addition, the Committee decided to discontinue its consideration of communication No. 21/2009 and to allocate additional time for the consideration of communications at the Committee's fiftieth session.

24. No action was taken by the Committee regarding follow-up to views during the forty-ninth session, as no representative of the Permanent Mission of the Philippines was available for a follow-up meeting in relation to communication No. 18/2008.

25. No action was taken by the Committee at the forty-ninth session with respect to inquiries under article 8 of the Optional Protocol.

26. At its fiftieth session, the Committee endorsed the report of the Working Group on Communications under the Optional Protocol on its twenty-first session. The Committee took action on communications Nos. 22/2009, 26/2010 and 27/2010 and adopted one view and two inadmissibility decisions on those communications by consensus. In addition, the Committee took the following decisions:

- (a) To maintain the current format of three Committee sessions, including one session in New York, serviced by the Petitions Unit;
- (b) To improve the Committee's website, with a view to reflecting all cases adopted by the Committee, including discontinuance decisions;
- (c) To include information on the Optional Protocol in the Committee's Extranet page, to ensure that members have access to updated information on all registered cases;

(d) To develop, during 2012, a methodology with regard to follow-up.

27. The Committee decided to appoint the following rapporteurs on follow-up: for communication No. 17/2008, Olinda Bareiro-Bobadilla and Magalys Arocha Dominguez; for communication No. 20/2008, Dubravka Šimonović and Victoria Popescu; and for communication No. 23/2009, Yoko Hayashi, Violeta Neubauer and Patricia Schulz.

28. No specific follow-up action could be undertaken at the fiftieth session in relation to communication No. 18/2008, as the Permanent Mission of the Philippines did not respond to the Committee's request for a follow-up meeting, which had been transmitted earlier in the session.

29. With respect to inquiries under article 8 of the Optional Protocol, a request for an inquiry was received and registered by the secretariat (No. 2011/III), and members of the Committee were appointed to undertake a preliminary consideration of the information received, in accordance with rule 82 of the rules of procedure of the Committee. The Committee also examined information relating to inquiry No. 2011/II and decided to request additional information on the matter. The Committee further examined information relating to a request concerning inquiry No. 2011/I and decided to establish an inquiry pursuant to rule 84 of the rules of procedure. The Committee was also briefed on the status of inquiry No. 2010/I.



## Annex I

### Letter dated 31 March 2011 from the Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women addressed to the Prime Minister of Egypt

On behalf of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, I have the honour to refer to the recent political developments in Egypt and the opportunity provided by such developments to recognize the important role of women in the call for change by ensuring that women's rights are a top priority for the Government of Egypt.

The Committee notes with concern that constitutional, legislative and policy initiatives and reforms may be undertaken without the full participation of Egyptian women. The Committee wishes to highlight in this regard that women's full participation is essential not only for their empowerment, but for the advancement of society as a whole.

As a State party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Egypt has undertaken legally binding obligations to give effect to all of the provisions of the Convention with a view towards eliminating discrimination against women in all its forms and manifestations and promoting equality between men and women. The Convention also calls upon States parties to ensure the development and advancement of women and recognizes that the full and complete development of a country requires the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields, including the formulation of Government policy and institution-building.

The Committee notes that the concept of democracy is only truly realized when political decision-making is shared by women and men alike and incorporates a gender perspective. As such, in the light of the above, the Committee urges the Government of Egypt to:

1. Enable women to fully participate in the process of democratization at all levels of decision-making.
2. Ensure that the constitutional, legislative and policy initiatives and reforms integrate the principle of non-discrimination as provided for in article 2 of the Convention, and respect for and enhancement of women's rights.
3. Ensure that the implementation of such initiatives and reforms integrate a gender perspective and conform fully to the provisions of the Convention.
4. Ensure that the national mechanism on the rights of women is provided with a comprehensive and clear mandate and adequate financial and human resources to effectively discharge its functions.

(Signed) Silvia **Pimentel**  
Chair

**Letter dated 31 March 2011 from the Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women addressed to the Prime Minister of Tunisia**

On behalf of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, I have the honour to refer to the recent political developments in Tunisia and the opportunity provided by such developments to recognize the important role of women in the call for change by ensuring that women's rights are a top priority for the Government of Tunisia.

The Committee notes with concern that constitutional, legislative and policy initiatives and reforms may be undertaken without the full participation of Tunisian women. The Committee wishes to highlight in this regard that women's full participation is essential not only for their empowerment, but for the advancement of society as a whole.

As a State party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Tunisia has undertaken legally binding obligations to give effect to all of the provisions of the Convention with a view towards eliminating discrimination against women in all its forms and manifestations and promoting equality between men and women. The Convention also calls upon States parties to ensure the development and advancement of women and recognizes that the full and complete development of a country requires the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields, including the formulation of Government policy and institution-building.

The Committee notes that the concept of democracy is only truly realized when political decision-making is shared by women and men alike and incorporates a gender perspective. As such, in the light of the above, the Committee urges the Government of Tunisia to:

1. Enable women to fully participate in the process of democratization at all levels of decision-making.
2. Ensure that the constitutional, legislative and policy initiatives and reforms integrate the principle of non-discrimination as provided for in article 2 of the Convention, and respect for and enhancement of women's rights.
3. Ensure that the implementation of such initiatives and reforms integrate a gender perspective and conform fully to the provisions of the Convention.
4. Ensure that the national mechanism on the rights of women is provided with a comprehensive and clear mandate and adequate financial and human resources to effectively discharge its functions.

(Signed) Silvia **Pimentel**  
Chair

## **Annex II**

### **Decision 49/VIII**

#### **Working group on working methods**

The Committee took the following decision, on 29 July 2011, with respect to the Working group on working methods:

The Committee has constantly refined its working methods in order to fulfil its responsibilities in an effective manner. It has improved its reporting guidelines and its constructive dialogue with the States parties and has refined its concluding observations. The Committee's desire to strengthen and rationalize its working methods will be a long-term project. In addition, the Committee's desire to strengthen its working methods is now taking place within the broader context of the treaty body strengthening process. Faced with a challenging workload, the Committee will need to continue to strengthen its working methods, also taking into consideration the harmonization of the treaty body system. As such, it is proposed that the task force on working methods should be transformed into a standing working group.

### **Decision 49/IX**

#### **Pre-session working group and list of issues**

The Committee took the following decision on 29 July 2011:

In order to assist in the prioritization of issues for the constructive dialogue and to keep replies as concise as possible (in some cases replies consist of 100 pages or more), it is proposed that the List of Issues contain no more than 20 questions. Each question should contain no more than 3 issues.

Questions for the List of Issues should be the types of questions which require research and not the type of questions that can be asked during the constructive dialogue.

The transmittal note template for the State parties indicates a page limit of 25 pages for replies; it also indicates that States parties may attach a limited number of additional pages of statistical data only.

It is also proposed that the transmittal letter be modified to clearly state that information contained in the reply should not repeat information already provided in the report.

## **Annex III**

### **Decision 50/I**

#### **Working group on working methods: enhanced constructive dialogue, including task forces**

The Committee adopted the following decision, on 17 October 2011, with respect to enhancing the constructive dialogue with the State parties:

1. Based on its previous practice, the Committee shall establish task forces for the constructive dialogue with States parties, as a pilot project, during the fifty-first and fifty-second sessions. An evaluation of the impact of this task force approach shall be conducted by the Committee during its fifty-second session. Country rapporteurs shall take a leading role in coordinating the work of task forces.

2. The members of the Committee shall express their options for joining the task forces, in consultation with the country rapporteurs, during the sessions prior to the fifty-first and fifty-second sessions respectively. The membership of the task forces will be finalized in an informal meeting of the Committee as a whole, at the end of each of the preceding sessions and will be reflected in the Chair's intersession letter.

3. Membership of a task force should not exceed 14 experts. In order to facilitate coordination of task force members so that all main areas of concern are covered in an appropriate manner, the country rapporteurs should organize task force meetings no later than the day preceding the dialogue. Country rapporteurs should also brief the Committee as a whole on the main concerns relating to the country reports, during the afternoon meeting of the day before the dialogue.

4. The members of a task force may have at most two interventions during the constructive dialogue. Time allocation for interventions should take into account the number of interventions per article of the Convention, as follows: 6 minutes for a single speaker on a given article and 3 minutes per speaker when there are two or more speakers for the same article.

5. Furthermore, any Committee member may ask follow-up questions limited to 2 minutes each, if time allows.

6. The Committee shall strive for better time management during the constructive dialogue. Committee members should prioritize their interventions, limit the number of issues raised and focus on matters most relevant for the country under consideration. During the constructive dialogue experts should not repeat questions asked previously, neither should they resume questions contained in the list of issues, unless these have not been properly and satisfactorily answered. To facilitate better time management, it is proposed that the Committee covers sections I and II of the Convention during the meetings held prior to 1:00 pm and sections III and IV during the meetings held between 1:00 and 5:00 pm.

7. The Chair will continue to coordinate with the head of delegation with respect to time management, providing guidance and reminders when appropriate throughout the dialogue, including reminders to provide precise and brief answers. Likewise, the Chair will advise the delegation to avoid reading out lists of statistics and supply them in writing instead.

8. It is the prerogative of the Chair to move the consideration of the questions relating to articles 15 and 16 of the Convention (part IV), when appropriate and in consultation with the country rapporteur, so that they are considered together with the questions relating to part I. This decision should be announced in the beginning of the dialogue.

#### **Decision 50/II**

#### **Working group on working methods: strengthening the role of the country rapporteurs**

The Committee adopted the following decision, on 17 October 2011, with respect to strengthening the role of the country rapporteurs:

1. Country rapporteurs shall have a more prominent role in providing guidance to experts in the preparation for and during the constructive dialogues, in the drafting and adoption of concluding observations, as well as in handling comments from States parties in response to the concluding observations.

2. Country rapporteurs shall conduct informal consultations with experts in order to ensure full coverage of the main areas of concern in the country and to prevent any overlap. Country rapporteurs should also brief the Committee as a whole on the main concerns relating to the country reports, during the afternoon meeting of the day before the dialogue.

3. It is proposed that better coordination should be ensured between the country rapporteurs, the pre-session working groups and the secretariat. The country rapporteurs shall endeavour to provide inputs to the pre-session working group with respect to the countries concerned, even if they are not members of the working group. The secretariat shall also endeavour to assign the staff member who worked on a particular country during the pre-session working group to the same country for the purposes of the constructive dialogue.

4. The country rapporteurs shall also provide the country briefing notes as early as possible to the secretariat, no later than one week prior to the session. In this regard, the secretariat shall make available all information and inputs from country teams and from other sources as early as possible. The same applies to the output of the pre-session working group and the background notes prepared by the secretariat. It is further noted that all such materials are posted on the Extranet of the Committee as soon as they are made available to the secretariat.

5. Country rapporteurs' notes shall not repeat information contained in the background notes prepared by the secretariat. These notes shall include succinct information about the socio-political context of the country and shall focus on main areas of concern (not necessarily on an article by article basis), as well as on suggestions for recommendations.

6. The secretariat, in consultation with the working group on working methods, shall develop a template for the country rapporteurs' briefing notes.

## **Annex IV**

### **Statement by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the anniversaries of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961, adopted on 19 October 2011 during the fiftieth session of the Committee**

#### **A call for gender equality for refugees and stateless persons**

Together with the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the 1967 Protocol thereto and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provides universal standards for the treatment of refugee and stateless women and girls. These instruments are complementary and their full implementation is essential to achieving gender equality.

On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women requests all State parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to reaffirm their commitment to adhering to their international obligations by ensuring that their laws, policies and practices do not discriminate against refugee and stateless women and girls.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women promotes gender equality and sets out measures for the advancement of all women, without distinction on the basis of their nationality, citizenship or other legal status, such as refugee, migration or marital status. Gender discrimination and inequality against women and girls can be the result of and intensified by forced displacement and statelessness. Situations of forced displacement and statelessness often have different impacts on women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination against women.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women applies at every stage of the displacement cycle. Asylum claims made by women may be based on any of the grounds in the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, but they may also be based on gender-related forms of persecution. The Committee calls on States to recognize gender-related forms of persecution and to interpret the “membership of a particular social group” ground of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees to apply to women. Gender-sensitive registration, reception, interview and adjudication processes also need to be in place to ensure women’s equal access to asylum.

The Committee likewise calls upon States to implement safeguards against sexual and gender-related violence against women and girls in refugee settings and to provide remedies for such violations, to empower women by ensuring their equal participation in refugee leadership positions, including within peace building processes in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). It also calls upon States to guarantee women equal rights and access to health services,

education, food, shelter, security, free movement and opportunities in their search for justice and durable solutions.

In relation to statelessness, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is a significant tool in international efforts to prevent and reduce statelessness arising from discrimination against women with regard to nationality rights. The Convention requires full protection of women's equality in nationality matters. It provides that States shall ensure that marriage does not automatically change the nationality of the wife, render her stateless or force upon her the nationality of the husband. States parties are also obliged to grant women equal rights with men to transfer nationality to their foreign spouse as well as their children. The Committee welcomes the legislative changes made by a number of States parties to change discriminatory nationality laws. Problems persist, however, in approximately 30 countries worldwide.

Notwithstanding the progress made so far, much remains to be done to achieve gender equality, not least within the contexts of displacement and statelessness. The Committee recognizes that the risks faced by women and girls, in particular the scourge of gender-based, sexual and domestic violence and human trafficking, continue to be of paramount concern. The Committee calls on States to remain seized of these issues as a matter of priority and to further strengthen the protection of women and girls.

The Committee also encourages States that have not yet done so to accede to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the 1967 Protocol thereto, the Convention relating to the status of Stateless Persons of 1954, the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, to withdraw any continuing reservations to these instruments and to establish national legal frameworks on asylum and statelessness that respect gender equality principles.

## **Annex V**

### **General statement of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on rural women, adopted on 19 October 2011 during its fiftieth session**

The situation of rural women has been in the forefront of the United Nations agenda for many years, including in the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and in various United Nations agencies. It is also linked to the effective and full implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

In the light of the upcoming fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women with the priority theme “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges”, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women takes the opportunity to make a general statement on rural women.

#### **Normative framework**

The Committee is mandated, inter alia, to specifically address the rights, needs and concerns of rural women. Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women states that States parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles that rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the Convention to women in rural areas. States parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development.

In its General Recommendation No. 16 on unpaid women workers in rural and urban family enterprises, the Committee recommended that States parties take the necessary steps to guarantee payment, social security and social benefits for women who work without such benefits in enterprises owned by a family member.

The Committee’s General Recommendation No. 19 on violence against women states that rural women are at risk of gender-based violence as a result of traditional attitudes regarding the subordinate role of women that persist in many rural communities. Girls from rural communities are at special risk of violence and sexual exploitation when they leave the rural community to seek employment in towns.

#### **Empowerment**

The Committee stresses that despite efforts undertaken to encourage the overall empowerment of rural women, there are still many issues that need to be addressed, as women, and in particular rural women, face discrimination in all spheres of life.



### **Education and literacy**

Two thirds of the roughly 1 billion illiterate people in the world are women and girls. Worldwide, girls from rural areas are particularly disadvantaged, with the lowest levels of literacy and education. Available figures show that only 5 per cent of such services as education programmes and trainings address the needs of rural women. Notably, literacy programmes for girls and women are not easily accessible to more remote rural communities. Distance to schools, fear of sexual assault en route to school or at school and early pregnancy, together with often heavy household responsibilities, discourage or prevent girls' education opportunities.

### **Health**

Rural women are particularly disadvantaged with respect to their access to health-care services. Maternal mortality rates continue to be strikingly high in rural areas, with a rate of 640 deaths per 100,000 live-births in rural areas, compared with a rate of 447 per 100,000 in urban areas. In every region of the world, the presence of skilled birth attendants and medical personnel is lower in rural than in urban areas. Obstetric fistula, a condition that often develops during obstructed labour, is more prevalent among rural women as a result of malnutrition, pregnancy at a young age and difficult working conditions. In addition, access to overall health care for the girl child is often very poor, as she is usually neglected, owing to prevailing patriarchal attitudes in many traditional rural settings that give preference to boys.

### **Access to resources and opportunities**

Rural women have less access to resources, training and skill development opportunities, as a result of illiteracy, the prevalence of negative stereotypes and their overall socio-economic status. This limits their effective participation in the community. As a consequence, in some regions, they suffer from discrimination in relation to their right to land ownership and transfer of property. The reduction of rural poverty depends on improving the access for women to decent work and income-generating opportunities, particularly through ensuring their access to productive assets, including land, credit and technology and developing their skills and human capital. Reducing hunger and malnutrition depends on real and equal access to and control over productive resources for both men and women in rural areas. Investing in women farmers and closing the gender gap in agricultural productivity would reduce the number of undernourished people by 12-17 per cent. That translates into 100 to 150 million fewer people living in hunger. Despite the recognized role of women in combating food insecurity and poverty and the importance of women's access to sustainable energy, water, sanitation, education, nutrition and health to the overall development of a country, necessary funding has not matched policy commitments. Of the \$18.4 billion spent on agricultural aid between 2002 and 2008, donors reported that just 5.6 per cent included a gender focus.

In some countries, only 10 per cent of credit allowances are extended to women, especially rural women, mainly because national legislation and customary law do not allow them to share land ownership/property rights along with their husbands or male members of their families, or because female heads of household are excluded from land entitlement schemes and consequently cannot provide the collateral required by lending institutions.

Rural women also have very limited employment opportunities, in general, and when they seek off-farm employment, they tend to be engaged in less skilled and less financially rewarding jobs. Microfinance credits to rural women and micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises for women's self-employment also need to be promoted.

### **Agriculture, hunger and poverty**

Rural women are key partners in economic and social development. According to comparable data, women comprise an average of 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force of developing countries. In fact, in many countries they are the backbone of local and national food security and a critical force in reducing poverty, malnutrition and hunger and in promoting development. Yet, when it comes to investments and policies, women's contribution to food security and agricultural production is often unpaid, largely invisible, frequently ignored and generally under-supported. Rural women's needs for agricultural technologies, labour-saving agricultural equipment and modern means of communication have to be addressed, as well as the valuing and counting of their non-monetized contribution to the economic survival of the family and national development.

Agriculture is inextricably linked to poverty eradication, especially in developing countries. The main challenges to agricultural productivity include the negative impacts of climate change, natural disasters and man-made disasters, such as internal conflicts, which disproportionately affect rural women. In addition, the lease and sale of large tracts of land to other States or to large private companies, as well as the patenting of seeds, tend to reduce the chances that women will be able to provide adequate food for themselves and their families. Rural women have a central role in combating these negative effects and must therefore be involved in all relevant programmes aimed at addressing such challenges, including in the preservation of the natural environment and of the quality of food.

### **Conflict situations**

Rural women often bear the major burden in armed conflict and post-conflict situations. In addition to violations of basic human rights such as the right to life, safety and freedom of movement, armed conflict violates rural women's rights to productivity, livelihoods, access to food and health care. In addition, they face forced displacement, sexual violence and the loss of family members and children. Despite some attention given to women in conflict, the situation of rural women in times of armed conflict and post-conflict is often ignored.

### **Violence, trafficking, sexual exploitation and forced labour**

Violence against women, trafficking in women and sexual exploitation and forced labour are often linked to poverty and the lack of opportunities in rural areas. Such root causes of violence and trafficking should be addressed through targeted legislative and policy measures. Rural women in both conflict and post-conflict situations are disproportionately affected. The special situation of these women needs focused attention.

### **Participatory development**

The Committee recognizes the importance of rural women's participation as critical agents of development, in such roles as agricultural producers, entrepreneurs or managers of natural resources. It also emphasizes the crucial role that rural women play with respect to enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating poverty. The Committee underscores the right of rural women and women's organizations to participate in decision-making processes that have an impact on their lives, including through representation in parliaments, bodies of local governance and within the authorities entrusted with negotiating and implementing the sale and leasing of national land to foreign States and/or private companies.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee calls upon all Member States and the United Nations, its programmes, funds and agencies to contribute towards the achievement of gender equality in rural areas and stresses the importance of and the need for coordinated action on a broad scale in partnership with civil society, as appropriate, to increase rural women's overall empowerment and their contributions to agricultural productivity and the eradication of poverty and hunger, in particular, by:

- Incorporating gender-sensitive perspectives when designing and implementing rural development strategies, policies and programmes and including the objective of gender equality as an overarching goal of such strategies, policies and programmes, and adopting and implementing temporary special measures in favour of rural women;
- Renouncing policies that might limit the ability of rural women to provide adequate food for themselves, their families and communities, such as purchasing seeds with genetic use restriction technology patents, which produce sterile plants and force farmers to buy seeds each planting season instead of using seeds produced by the plants themselves;
- Involving rural women in all aspects of planning, implementation and evaluation of all policies and programmes that have an impact on their lives;
- Enhancing rural women's representation in parliaments and executive bodies, as well as in bodies of national and local governance, including in authorities responsible for planning, negotiating, selling or leasing national land;
- Ensuring rural women's equal access to basic social services such as housing, education, health-care services, including maternal, sexual and reproductive health-care services, childcare facilities and means of transportation;
- Providing social safety networks to help rural women in developing countries face the impact of economic restructuring and food price volatility;
- Promoting full employment and decent work for rural women, including income-generating activities;
- Reducing rural women's labour time and work effort with innovations in infrastructure and technology;
- Ensuring rural women have equal, easy and affordable access to productive resources, energy, water, land use, ownership and property, environmentally

sound technologies, financing and microcredits, extension and agri-business services, vocational and non-vocational training programmes and markets;

- Integrally incorporating women's concerns and participation in the planning, implementation and monitoring of all development and environmental management programmes to ensure women's involvement, which is necessary for their benefit as well as for the achievement of sustainable development;
- Adopting systematic measures to increase the awareness of rural women about the scope of their rights and to undertake general awareness-raising campaigns in educating society about the roles, rights and status of rural women, including through Government programmes, the media, civil society initiatives and through traditional leaders in order to combat traditions, stereotypes, customary laws and practices that discriminate against rural women;
- Ensuring rural women's access to justice and the supporting institutional mechanisms necessary to fulfil their rights, so that rural women can realize their full potential in every respect;
- Developing strategies to address the special needs of older women, women with disabilities and indigenous women living in rural areas, who often suffer a severe lack of basic resources for subsistence, income security, access to health care and information on and enjoyment of their entitlements and rights.

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