

Check against delivery

57th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women



Statement by Ms. Navi Pillay
High Commissioner for Human Rights

Geneva, 10 February 2014

Madam Chair,

Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you for the opening of the **fifty-seventh session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women**. I welcome the new members of Committee elected since my last meeting with you, namely Ms Al-Jehani, Ms Gbedemah, Ms Haidar, Ms Leinarte, Ms Nwankwo, and Ms Pomeranzi. The strong and diverse expertise you bring to the Committee has already enriched its work.

Treaty Body Strengthening Process

This 57th session of the Committee coincides with the final phase of the inter-governmental process on treaty body strengthening. The outcome of this process is crucial for the viability and sustainability of the entire treaty body system.

I have just arrived back from New York, where last week the final negotiations took place before the mandate of the Co-facilitators and the inter-governmental process expires on 15 February. This date was decided by the General Assembly with a view to meeting the deadline of the resumed session of the Fifth Committee in March 2014.

Throughout the consultations, I have made it clear to the Member States that the treaty body system is facing the triple challenge of a significant backlog, chronic under-resourcing and insufficient compliance with reporting obligations. If no prompt action is taken to rectify these problems, the treaty body system is threatened with collapse.

I am pleased to share with you that the Third Committee is about to adopt a compromise resolution. The text is until tonight under the silent procedure and if adopted it will then go rapidly to the ACABQ and to the Fifth Committee for final approval. I do not want to anticipate the final outcome but I can tell you that at this stage we are very comfortable with the resolution as it includes, among others, additional resourced meeting time and resources for capacity building. The first hurdle has been passed successfully and we will keep you closely informed on next developments.

Let me emphasize how much I value the constructive contribution of the treaty bodies and their Chairs to the treaty body strengthening process. I met

with your Chair, Ms Ameline in New York where she was meeting delegations to advocate for treaty body strengthening. This followed the very timely informal consultation of Chairs in Washington, D.C. At this meeting, the Chairs met with the Co-facilitators and prepared a very substantive joint statement which was shared with all Member States. I witnessed myself in New York how this joint statement influenced the consultations: it was quoted by the Co-facilitators and by a number of delegations. I also quoted it in my own interactions.

There is a very important lesson here which I would like to emphasize. Treaty bodies should act as a system; your strength lies in your unity and your impact depends on the degree to which treaty body members trust and empower the Chairs. I know this is a delicate issue and there is a balance you need to strike between, on the one hand, the due respect for the views of all experts and, on the other hand, the need for the treaty body system to speak with one voice, particularly in times of decision-making and engagement with member States.

This is why I truly value what I call “the Poznan formula” which was accepted by all treaty body Chairs in their respective annual reports to the General Assembly since 2011. As you know, the Dublin II consultations were the basis of my report on treaty body strengthening to the General Assembly and established the parameters for the current inter-governmental negotiations. The Poznan formula captures the right balance between autonomy and unity within the treaty body system. The Poznan formula as contained in the Dublin II Chairs’ statement reads as follows:

Treaty bodies should ensure that Committee Chairpersons are mandated to take decisions in respect of working methods and procedures, which are common across the treaty body system and have previously been discussed and agreed to within each of the Committees, with particular reference to reporting and individual communications procedures. Such a measure would be implemented by all treaty bodies, unless a Committee subsequently dissociates itself from it.

The fact that the treaty body Chairs collectively took the lead in Addis Ababa in 2011 to self-regulate their own standards of conduct has been an historical initiative in showing that the treaty bodies are moving increasingly as a unified system and have the ability - as a system - to improve their work and reinforce their independence. Thanks to this proactive and forward looking action, the Chairs have successfully prevented the adoption of a Code of Conduct for treaty body members by the General Assembly.

I would like to provide you with a second example of the impact the treaty bodies can have when they speak with one voice. At their annual meeting in May 2013, the Chairs proclaimed five principles which should guide the treaty body strengthening process. I have repeatedly quoted these principles, namely:

1. The treaty body strengthening process must reinforce the human rights protection that the treaty body system offers;
2. the treaty body strengthening process must offer a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the challenges faced by the treaty bodies;
3. any cost-savings resulting from efficiency measures should be reinvested in the ten treaty bodies;
4. the treaty bodies must be made accessible to all; and
5. the independence of the treaty bodies and the treaty body members must be preserved.

I understand that your Chair will brief you in detail on the Washington consultation of the Chairs upon her return, and, of course, my colleagues will keep you updated on the outcome of the inter-governmental process.

Women's rights and the post-2015 agenda

Madam Chair,

I take this opportunity to congratulate Ms Ameline on her participation in the eighth and last session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. This took place from 3 to 7 February and discussed the issue of equality, including gender equality. The fact that the Chair was invited to speak at the Open Working Group sends a very positive signal about the importance being attached to human rights in elaboration of development goals for the post-2015 period. It was a crucial opportunity to put forward the position of the Committee that progress on women's rights is central to sustainable development outcomes, and that the post-2015 development goals should be aligned with human rights in general, and on the CEDAW Convention in particular.

Meanwhile, my Office has continued forcefully to advocate that human rights are fully integrated into the post-2015 agenda. This must, of course, include the integration of gender equality throughout all the goals, targets and indicators. In addition, we believe there should be a stand-alone goal or goals on equality and non-discrimination that addresses all kinds of discrimination,

including discrimination on the basis of sex. The discussions on the post-2015 agenda set to take place at the Commission on the Status of Women in March will be another critical opportunity to emphasize the centrality of women's rights and gender equality to any development agenda.

Security Council

Distinguished members of the Committee,

I turn now to progress made by other UN bodies dealing with women's rights. On 18 October 2013, the very same day that you adopted general recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, the **Security Council** held its open **debate on women, peace and security**. In my remarks to the Security Council, I emphasized that efforts to ensure accountability for conflict-related violations of women's rights must take into account the underlying structural sex- and gender-based discrimination that allowed them to occur. I also referred to this Committee's adoption of general recommendation No. 30 on the same day. I emphasized that according to the spirit and letter of the CEDAW Convention and other human rights instruments, efforts to halt violations must spring from States' obligations to address structural and systemic gender inequality and discrimination through comprehensive legislative, policy and institutional reforms. You may be aware that the Secretary-General and the Executive Director of UN Women also welcomed the adoption of GR No. 30 in their remarks to the Security Council.

Also on 18 October 2013, the Security Council adopted resolution 2122 (2013) which, among other things, launches the 15-year review of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. I encourage you to explore ways to contribute to this 15-year retrospective review and ensure that it is solidly framed in the rights guaranteed under the Convention. In addition, the Secretary-General presented his report on women, peace and security to the Security Council (S/2013/25). This report provides an overview of the progress made since 2012 in implementing resolution 1325 and puts forward recommendations for consideration by the Security Council, member States and regional organizations.

General Assembly

During its 68th session, the General Assembly adopted several resolutions that are of particular relevance to your work, notably on women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control; gender-related killing of women and girls; the protection of women human rights defenders; the prevention of violence

against women migrant workers; and regarding improvement of the situation of women in rural areas. The Secretariat will be pleased to provide you with copies of these resolutions.

In all these areas, this Committee is recognised for its expertise. You have adopted or are currently elaborating general recommendations. The great value of your concluding observations lies in the country-specific, targeted and rights-based recommendations they contain to help States parties to implement their obligations and commitments in these and other areas covered by the Convention. In addition, there are many other ways for you to contribute your expertise. By continuing to disseminate your general recommendation No. 30, you will be able to further consolidate the UN's women, peace and security architecture. Your draft general recommendation on rural women will help clarify concepts for responding to the challenges faced by rural women, especially in the area of economic, social and cultural rights. Lastly, I wish to inform you that the recent General Assembly resolution on gender-related killing of women and girls requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with relevant UN entities and human rights mechanisms, to convene an open-ended intergovernmental expert group meeting, to be hosted by Thailand, to discuss ways and means to more effectively prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish gender-related killing of women and girls. CEDAW will surely provide substantive input into this consultation.

Human Rights Council

Before concluding, let me recall Human Rights Council resolution 24/23, adopted in September 2013, on child, early and forced marriage. With this resolution, the Council mandated OHCHR to prepare a report, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, on preventing and eliminating child, early and forced marriage, with a particular focus on challenges, achievements, best practices and implementation gaps. The report will be considered at the 26th session of the Council in June this year and will serve as the main document of reference for a Human Rights Council panel during the June 2014 session. As I have said before, it would be important to obtain CEDAW's input into this process, one which, as you know, complements your joint elaboration, with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, of a general recommendation on harmful practices.

Conclusion

*Madam Chair,
Distinguished members of the Committee,*

As I move into my last six months as High Commissioner, let me conclude with an expression of appreciation for your work. As you know, the struggle for realising the human rights of women has been a *leitmotif* of my entire professional career. The same goes for many of the individuals who have served on this distinguished Committee over the years. The struggle has been long, and it seems to me that, rather than just mulling over our setbacks or assessing the challenges ahead, we too rarely pause to appreciate our accomplishments along the way. The work of the Committee, in my view, is a cause for great pride. Over more than 30 years, this Committee has worked assiduously to elaborate in detail the contours, content and details of the full range of women's rights. Through hundreds of concluding observations, 30 general recommendations, views on individual communications and, increasingly, country inquiries, you have established the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women as the foremost international body on women's rights. I firmly support of making this Committee's impressive body of know-how and experience ever more vital to the implementation of women's rights, be it through ensuring ever-more effective application of the Committee's conclusions at national level, or the gender-sensitive elaboration of the post-2015 world development agenda. You are a precious resource that should be applied towards overcoming the remaining challenges to the full enjoyment by women of all their rights. In this, you can count on my support and that of OHCHR.

Thank you.
