

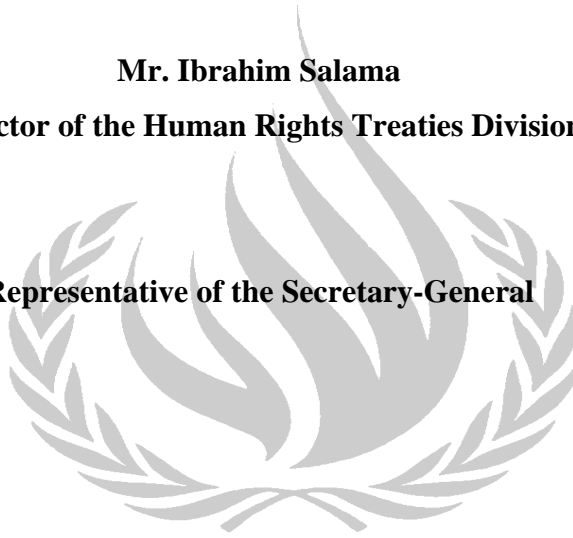
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**Committee on the Elimination
of Discrimination against Women
47th session, Geneva, 4 October 2010
Palais des Nations, Salle no. XVI**

Opening address by

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Representative of the Secretary-General



**Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the forty-seventh session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Before turning to your work during this session, allow me to bring to your attention a number of **important new developments** of interest to the Committee that have taken place since your last session and also note some **upcoming events** which relate to your work.

Allow me to begin with the Human Rights Council. The High Commissioner for Human Rights addressed the Council at its fifteenth session, which began on 13 September and will run until 11 October, where she stressed the pressing need for human rights protection both in emergencies and chronic human rights situations. She in particular addressed the need for protection of human rights defenders. The High Commissioner also drew the Council's attention to reports presented by her Office, including the **report on discrimination against women, in law and practice**, and on how the issue is addressed throughout the United Nations human rights system. As part of the thematic study on this topic, the Council also held a half-day discussion on the issue in order to consider taking further possible action on discrimination against women.

Ms. Victoria Popescu played a particularly important role in representing CEDAW on the panel and providing a presentation focusing on the **commitment of States under article 2 of the Convention** relating to eliminating discrimination from legislation and guaranteeing women's access to justice on an equal footing with men as one of the basic objectives of the Convention, along with ensuring gender equality, both *de jure* and *de facto*, and eliminating gender stereotyping. Ms. Popescu stressed that the topic was a major priority for CEDAW and that the Committee in its constructive dialogue with States Parties stresses the need to assess the impact of laws,

policies and action plans and to evaluate the progress achieved towards the realization of women's substantive equality with men.

In this context I would like to inform you that on **1 October**, the **Human Rights Council adopted a resolution** establishing a new mechanism, in the form of a **Working Group on the discrimination against women, in law and in practice**. This is a victory after many years of advocacy, research and lobbying from stakeholders, from NGOs, the Special Rapporteur on the right to health, the Office itself, and key States, both with the Commission on the Status of Women and the Human Rights Council. The resolution specifically asks the Working Group to work in close coordination with CEDAW, the Commission on the Status of Women, and UN Women to make the reporting available also to the General Assembly, the Commission of the Status of Women and UN Women.

As we are in the month of October, it is fitting we note at the start of this session that **this month is the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325** (2000), the landmark resolution on women, peace and security. Since then, the Security Council has not diminished the importance it attaches to this theme, adopting three additional resolutions from 2008 to the present. The new resolutions which build upon SCR 1325 include: **SCR 1820 (2008)** and **SCR 1888 (2009)**, which address the situation of **sexual violence in conflict**, and **SCR 1889 (2009)** which aims to **strengthen women's participation in peace-building**. These resolutions remind States of their international human rights obligations with regard to women peace and security.

In relation to **SCR 1888**, and the appointment of the **Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Margot Wallstrom**, I would like to highlight that Ms. Wallstrom just returned from a visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo (along with the Secretary-General) to coordinate a response to the mass rape of more than 300 civilians two months ago in the country's east, some raped multiple times. In her most recent report

to the Human Rights Council, the **Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women** made clear that reparation measures should address, *inter alia*, the worst forms of crimes or violations targeting women and girls, rather than concentrate on the “fairly limited and traditionally conceived catalogue of violations of civil and political rights.” The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights was also in the country to assess the issue of reparations for rape and sexual abuse victims and established a high-level panel, which met from last week under the leadership of the Deputy High Commissioner, to consider how survivors of sexual violence and others perceive responses to the crimes committed against them, with a particular focus on the adequacy of remedies and reparations.

I am certain that members of the Committee will welcome, as did I, the news that the **Secretary-General appointed, on 14 September, Ms. Michelle Bachelet** as Under Secretary-General for the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – or UN Women – which brings together the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW). This newly created entity is tasked with accelerating progress in achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment.

I am pleased to advise that the High Commissioner’s repeated call on different stakeholders to reflect on how to **strengthen the treaty body system**, has, as you well know, led to a number of initiatives. I recently returned from a meeting by treaty body experts on this topic held in Poznan, to which all Chairpersons of treaty bodies were invited. **Ms. Violet Awori represented CEDAW at the meeting**, which was organized by the University of Poznan with the support of the Polish authorities. At the meeting, the participants reflected, among other things, on the independence of members and the enhancement of the role of the Chairs. The outcome document of the meeting is undergoing final review and will be circulated to you shortly. In addition,

the OHCHR intends to facilitate **consultations among treaty body members** through the organization of a series of consultations involving the eight treaty bodies that have a reporting procedure. These consultations will be held on a Saturday during treaty body sessions taking place between now and the end of June 2011. Depending on the options offered by the calendar of meetings, each consultation will involve the participation of at least two treaty bodies. CEDAW and CRC Committee members are tentatively scheduled to meet in January. This matter, of course, will be brought to the attention of the Bureau in greater detail.

Furthermore, an international seminar on **Harmful Traditional Practices and Human Rights** will take place from 10 to 13 October in Sion, the last day of which is set aside for a special meeting between CRC and CEDAW members to discuss the development of the **joint general comment on harmful traditional practices** by the working group established with the CRC. I understand that **Ms. Šimonović and Ms. Neubauer** will be participating in the meeting.

Mme Chairperson,

May I draw attention to some practical issues relating to the servicing of the Committees. The difficulties in ensuring the availability of **translated documents** were discussed at length during the ICM. This is of course a concern which we share in the Secretariat. We are very aware of the on-going difficulties faced by treaty bodies to receive timely translation of their documents, including replies to lists of issues sent by States parties. This is one of the serious and persisting problems experienced, not just by the treaty bodies, but also by other United Nations human rights mechanisms, and the situation has been deteriorating in recent years.

The Human Rights Treaties Division is well aware of the needs of the various Committees and works closely with all the relevant units of the UN Office at Geneva to ensure that the highest possible level of servicing can be provided to them. Unfortunately, the demands on the conference servicing

units in Geneva have grown tremendously in recent years, not least due to the explosive growth of documentation needed by the Human Rights Council, and the Committees have felt the impact.

On our side, we are working to try to streamline and rationalize procedures to harmonize practices among the treaty bodies, which hopefully will result in a more efficient treaty body system. At the meeting in Poznan, representatives of all the Committees were looking at precisely these issues. We are also in discussions with the translation services and other units to see how to streamline and make the most effective use of the limited resources available to them and us. As you are aware, **CEDAW is the only committee that works in all six official languages**, whereas most Committees work in English, French and Spanish and some review working documents exclusively in English. This question might be reviewed by the Committee to find ways of alleviating pressure on the editorial and translation services.

In this regard, we welcome that the ICM emphasized the need for all treaty bodies to enforce **page limitations** set in the harmonized and treaty-specific guidelines. The ICM recommended that the Secretariat inform all States parties of the page limits by note verbale. States parties whose reports do not meet the length requirements would be advised by the Secretariat on how to reduce them. I am happy to inform you that a note verbale to that effect was sent out to all Permanent Missions to the UN on 8 September 2010. Some Committees have begun to systematically refer to page limitations in their concluding observations, when specifying the date by which the next report should be submitted. I hope you will find time to discuss whether such an approach might not also be taken by this Committee.

The eleventh inter-committee meeting this year noted with interest the optional reporting procedures adopted by the Committee against Torture (CAT) and the Human Rights Committee (HRCte) in respect of **lists of issues prior to reporting** whereby the consideration of a State party would be based on the replies to the list of issues in lieu of a report. The eleventh inter-

committee meeting encouraged all treaty bodies to consider whether such procedures could be applicable to them and recommended that CAT and the HRCte report back to the twelfth inter-committee meeting on their experiences in implementing this optional procedure in lieu of such procedures. If your Committee would like to learn more about the reporting process based on lists of issues prior to reporting, your Secretariat is ready to arrange a briefing on this question.

I also wish to take this opportunity to inform you that we are implementing **new travel procedures** which we hope will simplify your travel arrangements. Following my remarks, Mr. Kyle Ward, Chief of Programme Support and Management Services, will brief you on the new procedures.

Turning now to the work ahead, it is my pleasure to introduce you to the new Secretary of the Committee, Mr. Bradford Smith, whom most of you met at your last session in New York. Mr. Smith brings with him a wealth of expertise in international treaty law and the depositary practice of the Secretary-General as well as significant management experience, having worked in the Office of Legal Affairs since 1995 and also in the Legal Affairs Section of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste. He will no doubt be a tremendous asset to the Committee.

This Committee session will again be a busy one with **6 reports**, many of which are combined reports, several draft general recommendations, and **8 lists of issues** set for adoption during the pre-sessional working group, in addition to a number of draft views on communications approved by the Working Group last week that you will be reviewing

Please allow me to conclude by wishing you a very successful and productive session.
