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**Statement by
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**Vice-Chairperson
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against
Women**

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**Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and friends,**

I am honoured to address the Third Committee of the General Assembly in my capacity as the Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that oversees implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by its 186 State Parties. The Convention's Optional Protocol, which mandates the Committee to receive and consider petitions and inquire into allegations of grave or systematic violations of the Convention, has now been accepted by 99 States parties, most recently by Equatorial Guinea. There have been four acceptances to the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1 of the Convention concerning the Committee's meeting time since last year, namely by Bulgaria, Morocco, Singapore and Spain, which brings the number of Contracting States to 58. The Amendment needs the acceptance of a two-thirds majority of States parties to the Convention, that is to say 124 States, before the Amendment enters into force.

The Committee remains grateful to the General Assembly for granting, through its resolution 62/218, an extension of its meeting time to three annual sessions for an interim period effective from January 2010, pending the entry into force of the amendment. The extended meeting time has allowed the Committee to alleviate the backlog of the States parties' reports awaiting consideration, and to take up reports soon after their submission. It should be recalled that during 2006 and 2007, the Committee held 11 sessions, 6 sessions in which the Committee met in parallel chambers, which enabled the Committee to consider 146 reports, hence reducing the backlog of reports. As a result, with the continued holding of three annual sessions, the Committee is largely able to consider reports at a pace consistent with the rate of

submission. During its 45th and 46th sessions, the Committee considered the reports of 15 States parties, and a further 7 are being taken up during the forty-seventh session which began on 4 October 2010. At present, 32 reports are awaiting consideration by the Committee. Of those, 24 have been scheduled for consideration in 2011 and 6 have been scheduled for consideration in 2012. The remaining two have not been scheduled as the Secretariat requires all reports to be submitted in Word for formatting and translation purposes.

The Committee is aware that timely consideration is a significant incentive for States parties to report in accordance with the terms of the Convention, and it is continually examining ways of streamlining its working methods to ensure that a backlog of reports to be considered does not develop. In this regard, I wish to highlight that the translation of documentation needed for consideration of reports is vital in order for the Committee to discharge its functions in an effective manner. As such, the Committee hopes that it can depend upon the appropriate level of support and responsiveness from the Translation Division in Geneva as was the case with the Translation Division at Headquarters when the Committee was serviced in New York.

The additional meeting time has also allowed the Committee to monitor the implementation of the Convention in States parties with long-overdue reports. To that end, the Committee systematically reminds States parties whose reports are long-overdue to submit these reports within specified timeframes. In certain cases, States parties are also informed that failure to submit their reports within the specified timeframes will result in the consideration of the implementation of the Convention by the State parties concerned in the absence of such reports. As a result of this initiative, fifteen of the States concerned have submitted their reports. The

Committee will continue to follow-up closely with non-reporting States and States will long-overdue reports, and will continue to explore ways and means of encouraging States parties to comply with their reporting obligations.

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Distinguished delegates,**

The Committee is very conscious of the importance of harmonization of working methods across the treaty body system. Discussions continue to take place among the Secretaries of the human rights treaty bodies and also among the Chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies with a view towards, not only the rationalization of the system and other issues of common concern, but bringing treaty bodies closer to the implementation level, raising awareness in the regions on their work in order to strengthen linkages and synergies, and enhancing implementation between international and regional human rights mechanisms and institutions.

Another step that the Committee has taken to enhance its working methods includes the adoption of a follow-up procedure. The Committee now identifies generally two concerns in the concluding observations requiring priority action on which it requests information from the State party within one or two years. So far the Committee has received and analyzed follow-up information from six States parties and it is hopeful that this new procedure will provide a context in which it can maintain close dialogue with States parties on urgent issues in order to assist them in implementing their treaty obligations under the Convention.

The Committee is also reviewing the format, content and length of concluding observations with a view towards achieving greater efficiency and impact. In this connection, Committee Members attended the eleventh Inter-Committee Meeting of human rights treaty bodies in Geneva, where the discussion focussed on exploring

ways to further rationalize the concluding observations. The Committee has a working group closely following this topic.

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Distinguished delegates,**

The Committee has sought to expand the range of stakeholders with whom it interacts in relation to implementation of the Convention. While States parties have the primary responsibility in this regard, other actors are also critical. The Committee has long encouraged the input and support of non-governmental organizations, the role of national human rights institutions in its work and in follow-up to its recommendations, the role of parliamentarians in implementation of the Convention and other actors, including the United Nations programmes, funds and specialized agencies.

In this regard, the Committee benefited from joint information submitted on countries under consideration by the United Nations country teams and is especially grateful to the Inter-Agency Group on CEDAW Reporting, which oversees the preparation of country team submissions to the Committee. The Committee also is supportive of the Organisation's initiative with respect to the establishment of the new entity dealing with the rights of women – UN Women. The Committee also meets with other experts to stay apprised of relevant issues. During the past year, the Committee met with the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Ms. Rashida Manjoo, and with Ms. Farida Shaheed, Independent Expert in the field of cultural rights.

**Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,**

The Committee continues to draft general recommendations with respect to the interpretation of provisions of the Convention or other related thematic issues. To

date, 26 general recommendations have been adopted by the Committee. The Committee is currently working on four draft general recommendations relating to the interpretation of article 2 of the Convention; on older women and protection of their human rights; on the economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution; and on harmful traditional practices in conjunction with the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It is hoped that the general recommendations relating to older women and to Article 2 of the Convention will be adopted during the 47th session.

The Committee also continues its practice of adopting statements in relation to particular events or developments with a view towards the promotion of women's issues and the protection of their rights, including with respect to humanitarian assistance to Haiti in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in January 2010; on the inclusion of Afghan women in the process of peace-building, security and reconstruction in Afghanistan; on the relationship of the Committee with parliamentarians and their role in the implementation of the Convention; on its relationship with non-governmental organizations noting the vital role played by civil society in monitoring the implementation of the Convention by States parties; on the occasion of the fifteen-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; and on the 10th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The Chairperson recently endorsed a joint statement of the Chairpersons of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies on the occasion of this year's High Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly, which urged Member States to be guided by human rights in finalizing the Summit Outcome Document and in establishing national action plans.

**Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,**

Committee members have as usual been very active in promoting the Convention and women's issues through speaking at numerous United Nations and non-United Nations fora. These opportunities are vital to raise awareness of the Convention and pressing issues for women. During this year, CEDAW experts were invited to numerous engagements organized by the United Nations, other international organizations as well as non-governmental organizations to speak about, for example, discrimination against women in law and practice, the role of parliaments in implementing the Convention, the effects of climate change on women, harmful traditional practices, and structural discrimination.

**Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and friends,**

The Convention and the Committee have made impressive progress. Although universal ratification has not yet been achieved, we are well on the road to this goal. Significant progress has also been achieved in respect of removal of reservations to the Convention. The Committee has also made significant progress in its complaints and inquiry procedure under the Optional Protocol.¹ The Committee is currently conducting several inquiries involving significant women's rights issues. To date, petitions dealt with by the Committee have concerned forced sterilization, possible trafficking, discrimination in family names, financial provision on divorce, pension entitlements, discrimination in the workplace and gender stereotyping used by the judiciary in handling rape cases.

¹ With respect to the Working Group on Communications under the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which also holds three annual sessions pursuant to General Assembly resolution 62/218, the Working Group, since its inception has held 18 sessions and registered 25 communications; the Committee has completed the proceedings related to 14 of those communications. The Committee also continued to implement its mandate under article 8 of the Optional Protocol. To date, the Committee has concluded one inquiry under this procedure (Mexico), while another is currently under way.

I am proud to say that the Committee Members have worked with competence, dedication, integrity and imagination. The Committee, which has become recognized as the legitimate and internationally respected voice for the human rights of women and girls, works diligently to assist States parties in complying with their treaty obligations, seeks to provide individual relief, and stimulates legal and policy reform. Views adopted in petitions and recommendations in the inquiry have also been influential in the creation of an international women's human rights jurisprudence, with the Committee's jurisprudence being used increasingly in regional human rights courts, such as the European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Its role in translating the groundbreaking approach of the Convention from aspiration to practice has been significant. It would be remiss, if I also did not mention that the Committee could not properly function without the dedicated assistance and support of the CEDAW Secretariat.

Despite progress there remain challenges, and these are particularly relevant in the context of national-level implementation. Prime among these are discrimination and violence against women based on the patriarchal attitudes. The Committee frequently sees this played out in the persistence of discriminatory laws, customs and practices in States parties that remain obvious from reporting round to reporting round. Although the Convention and its implementation procedures has encouraged significant changes on the ground, including in relation to laws, policies and programmes and has transformed the lives of many, the potential of the Conventions system to bring about change at the national level has not been exploited to the full, much as a result of its lack of visibility and accessibility, and resource constraints.

Thank you.

