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**Statement by
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CHAIRPERSON

**COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

68th session of the General Assembly
Third Committee
Item 28 (a, b)

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New York



**Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,**

The time has come to make a realistic assessment of the status of women's rights in our contemporary societies. And where else if not here at the General Assembly's Third Committee, which I have the honour to address today, could one witness the noble commitment of Member States to advancing the cause of women?

While we all agree that women are important drivers of progress, economic growth and peace, the world reminds us every day that women are at the same time the primary victims of violence, discrimination, and conflict.

Moreover, women's rights are especially fragile in times of crisis, including economic crisis, and their full realization is by no means guaranteed. This is why I would like to pay tribute today to all those who tirelessly struggle that the full and equal enjoyment by all women of their rights under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women will become a reality. I am thinking of Member States. I am thinking of the United Nations system. I am also thinking of women's rights activists and human rights defenders. And I am looking forward to a fruitful cooperation with all of you, especially you Madame Executive Director of UN Women.

The 68th session of the General Assembly is of particular importance for the work of the CEDAW Committee in at least two ways.

First, the General Assembly is taking action with regard to the treaty body strengthening process. Secondly, the post-2015 development agenda provides a unique opportunity to place women's rights at the center of the process to achieve fair and sustainable development. There is no development without women's rights and vice versa. CEDAW acts as a catalyst and needs your support to reinforce its role.

Treaty body strengthening process

From the outset, the CEDAW Committee has played an active role in the treaty body strengthening process. We take pride in our consistent efforts to enhance the cost efficiency and quality of our work (e.g. by requesting summary records only in English and only for public meetings; limiting the number of questions in lists of issues; shorter and more focused concluding observations; clustering of questions and effective timekeeping during dialogues with States parties).

The Committee has taken note of the extension of the inter-governmental process until the first half of February 2013 by General Assembly resolution 68/2, adopted on 20 September by consensus. It expresses the hope that a final comprehensive and sustainable solution will be reached by then. In this regard, I wish to acknowledge that the draft elements for a substantive resolution contained in the report of the co-facilitators appear to constitute a solid basis for such an agreement.

Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

The Convention has been ratified almost universally. We have witnessed the commitment of States parties to advancing women's rights during our review of more than 400 State reports, and we have noted the progress realized and the remaining obstacles. We also note that women's enjoyment of their human rights remains fragile.

It is therefore time to close the implementation gap. It is time for governments as well as the international community to make more effective use of the powerful tools that the Convention and the Committee's concluding observations offer them.

Women's rights and development

The CEDAW Convention is not only the single universal treaty for a comprehensive protection of women's rights. It is also a development instrument providing for women's empowerment and participation. Women are the main drivers of development. And yet, they continue to be under-represented in political and public life and are excluded from decision-making processes in all areas, at all levels.

It is therefore heartening to see that in the Outcome Document of the General Assembly's Special Event on the Millennium Development Goals held on 25 September, Member States resolved that the post-2015 development agenda should be based on human rights, with a particular focus on women's rights and gender equality.

The CEDAW Committee supports the call of UN Women for a stand-alone goal on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment in the post-2015 agenda. In our view, this goal should be

complemented by a cross-cutting focus on promoting equality and eliminating discrimination on the basis of sex, race, language, religion, age, disability and other grounds across all goals targets and indicators. Such a cross-cutting approach is necessary to ensure that special measures to eliminate gender-discrimination are taken in all areas, and to address also the cumulative nature of intersecting forms of discrimination.

The CEDAW Convention should be at the basis of this twofold approach for integrating the human rights imperative of equality and non-discrimination throughout the post-2015 development framework. The Convention provides a strong framework for bridging the current divide and consolidating the link between women's rights and development. In addition, it constitutes the accountability mechanism for women's rights that has long been absent from development discourse. Through its periodic review of State reports, the CEDAW Committee in fact already monitors States parties' compliance with their legally binding obligation to ensure that women's rights and gender equality are upheld in any development processes.

The Committee's concluding observations, which provide guidance to States parties on how to implement their legal obligations under the Convention, can be a powerful tool for development, when they are integrated in national development policies, UNDAFs and, importantly, in operational activities on the ground. Unfortunately, they are too often ignored.

CEDAW's reinforced role

Chairperson,

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Distinguished delegates,

This brings me to the last point that I wish to raise with you: The CEDAW Committee is typically associated with its normative, or standard-setting, and monitoring functions.

However, in order to have a real impact on the ground, its concluding observations need to be channeled into the policies of governments and UN Country Teams at the national level. For this, the Committee needs to capitalize more on its advisory role of supporting national and international actors in their operational activities. And it needs to be more visible, especially here in New York, where the UN gender and development entities are based. The close ties of the Committee with OHCHR, although important, will not suffice to bridge the implementation gap. Rather, new and innovative partnerships are needed to build national capacities on gender issues, including by mobilizing private funding.

The Committee continues to benefit from country-specific information submitted by United Nations country teams through the Inter-Agency Group on CEDAW Reporting. However, our cooperation with UN Women and other UN agencies should go beyond a mere information exchange and should be based on a renewed formal and institutional partnership. To advance this goal, the Committee adopted a statement on strengthened cooperation with UN Women at its 55th session in July and established a CEDAW/UN Women Working Group.

The Committee should be closely associated with the Commission on the Status of Women, through participation in the preparation of the themes of its annual sessions as well as in the thematic panels of the CSW.

Such involvement will be of strategic importance in 2014, when the priority theme of the CSW will be “Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls”.

To be able to build on such synergies, the CEDAW Committee has adopted a decision, based on article 20, paragraph 2, of the CEDAW Convention, to hold one of its annual sessions in New York, ideally back to back with the CSW. It has requested the General Assembly to provide the necessary resources to ensure the substantive servicing of such sessions in New York.

The Committee has also requested the General Assembly to provide additional resources to enable its Working Group on Communications to deal with a growing number of submissions in relation to inquiries under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW Convention. A backlash against women’s rights can be witnessed in many parts of the world and sometimes manifests itself in grave or systematic violations of women’s rights under the Convention. Accordingly, the Committee is receiving an increasing number of inquiry submissions. So far, it has delegated the preliminary assessment of such submissions to an informal task force meeting outside its official meeting time due to its heavy workload. However, as a core mandated activity, the Committee’s work on inquiries should be properly resourced and serviced, with full access to interpretation and translation.

In closing, I invite Members States to consider the financial implications of these ad-hoc requests not merely in terms of additional costs (which can later be integrated in the broader treaty body strengthening package, if States so wish), but rather as an investment in

the efficiency of the Committee's work and, ultimately, in a more effective protection of the rights of women and girls worldwide.

Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

CEDAW is a source of pride and inspiration for our common humanity. We need you to fulfil the promises of CEDAW and its ethical imperative.

On behalf of the Committee, I thank for this opportunity and stand ready to answer any questions you may wish to pose.
