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**Statement by Ms. Naéla Gabr
Chairperson
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against
Women**

53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women

6 March 2009
New York



Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies

Distinguished delegates, colleagues from the NGO community and friends,

I have the honour to present to the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women the main outcomes of the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Committee's report on its forty-second session is available in the Committee's report to the sixty-third session of the General Assembly (A/63/38). The main outcomes of the forty-second and forty-third sessions, which ended on 6 February 2009, will be before the Commission for its information in document E/CN.6/2009/CRP.1.

Before I turn to issues relating to the Convention, its Optional Protocol and the Committee, I would like to congratulate the Commission on its work in relation to the important theme of the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS. Throughout its work, the Committee has emphasized that the elimination of discrimination against women is a collective responsibility, with men being especially important. Equal sharing in caregiving, particularly in family life, is critical to providing an environment in which the objectives of the Convention can be realized.

There are now 185 States parties to the Convention. 96 States parties have also ratified or acceded to its Optional Protocol. There are 53 acceptances of the amendment to article 20, para 1 of the Convention concerning the Committee's meeting time. The acceptance of two-third majority of States parties to the Convention (123 States parties) is required before the amendment enters into force. I would like to encourage those States which are not yet a party to the Convention, its Optional Protocol, or have not accepted the amendment to do so as soon as possible.

Eight new members of the Committee began their four-year terms on 1 January 2009, namely Ms. Nicole Ameline, Ms. Violet Awori, Ms. Barbara Bailey, Mr. Niklas Bruun, Ms. Indira Jaising, Ms. Soledad Murillo De La Vega, Ms. Victoria Popescu and Ms. Zohra Rasekh. These members, and Ms. Magalys Arocha, Ms. Silvia Pimentel and Ms. Zou Xiaoqiao, who were reelected last year, join those whose terms will end on 31 December 2010. The Committee elected a new bureau at its forty-third session for 2009-2010, composed of Ms. Silvia Pimentel, Ms. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari, and Ms. Xiaoqiao Zou as Vice-Chairpersons, Ms. Violeta Neubauer as Rapporteur, and myself as Chairperson.

The Committee remains grateful to the General Assembly for granting, through its resolution 62/218, an extension of its meeting time from 2010 to three annual sessions of three weeks, each preceded by a one-week working group. The extended meeting time granted by the Assembly over the past three years has allowed the Committee to clear the backlog in States parties' reports awaiting review. The Committee intends to continue its efforts to ensure that incoming reports are considered in a timely manner and monitor the implementation of the Convention in States parties with long overdue reports. The

Committee has requested 20 States parties with long-overdue initial reports to submit their reports by a specified date. Failing receipt of the reports within the suggested time-frame, and as a last resort, the Committee will proceed with consideration of the implementation of the Convention in the States parties concerned in the absence of a report. As a result of this initiative, six of the States concerned have submitted their reports. Also, for the first time, at its forty-third session, the Committee considered the implementation of the Convention in a State party in the absence of a report but in the presence of a delegation.

The Committee has worked hard to make its concluding observations more concrete and country specific. It has also introduced a follow-up procedure whereby it includes a request to individual States parties in the concluding observations to provide information on steps taken to implement a small number of specific recommendations contained in those concluding observations within one or two years. This procedure will be evaluated in 2011.

As you know, after 25 years of work, as of January 2008 the servicing of the Committee was transferred from the Division for the Advancement of Women to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The collaboration between OHCHR and the Division for Advancement of Women has ensured a smooth transition. I particularly commend the Division for its excellent efforts in continuing to promote the Convention and the work of the Committee, especially at the national level. During its forty-first session in New York last year, the Committee met with the Division for the Advancement of Women, which briefed the experts on the Secretary-General's campaign to eliminate violence against women. The Committee benefits significantly from the work of the Division in this area, and looks forward to using the coordinated database on violence against women launched during this session of the Commission.

The Committee has also taken full advantage of the support provided by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. At its forty-second session, which was held in Geneva, the Committee met with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay, who pledged full support to the Committee. During its forty-second session, the Committee strengthened its cooperation with other United Nations human rights mechanisms. It met with the Special Rapporteurs on violence against women, and on the right to health, and, in light of the fact that the reports of Haiti were before the Committee, the Independent Expert on Haiti. Some members of the Committee also met informally with the Working Group of the Advisory Committee currently working on draft guidelines on gender-mainstreaming within the UN system.

The Committee continued to work in cooperation and coordination with other treaty bodies on issues of common concern and interest, including through participation in the annual meetings of chairpersons. During the forty-third session, the Committee's Bureau met with the Bureau of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. A joint working group was also established with a view to exploring areas of common concern. The Committee is also working with UNHCR on a joint seminar on "Examining the Particular Relevance of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women to the Protection

of Women of Concern to UNHCR" currently scheduled to be held in New York in July 2009.

During its past sessions, the ILO, IOM, UNHCR and the Inter-Parliamentary Union have met with the Committee and provided information relevant to various areas of its work. The Committee has also begun the practice, implemented by most other treaty bodies, of meeting with national human rights institutions. In this regard, I wish to remind distinguished delegates that at its fortieth session, the Committee adopted a statement emphasizing the important role played by national human rights institutions. National human rights institutions are fast developing into a critical tool for strengthening implementation of human rights at the national level. I would urge the Commission on the Status of Women to consider how they could participate more fully in its work.

The Committee's sessions have continued to be characterized by the strong presence and participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These provide information to the Committee on States parties under consideration in informal meetings during the plenary, and also through lunch time briefings.

At the invitation of the Government of Luxembourg in September 2009, a delegation of the Committee conducted its first-ever follow-up visit to a State party to discuss implementation of its concluding observations. The delegation held discussions with various parts of Government, in particular the Ministry of Equal Opportunities, the Parliament, the judiciary, the bar and civil society. The delegation also met with the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess who showed keen interest in the work of the Committee. The visit, which was the first of its kind undertaken by CEDAW, highlighted the importance of follow-up to the reporting process. It also indicated how important it is for States parties to interact with members of treaty bodies at the national level. The visit also pointed to the importance of follow-up in developed countries, particularly in Europe where it is often thought that the UN mechanisms are less relevant.

At its forty-second session, the Committee adopted a General Recommendation on Women Migrant Workers (General Recommendation N.26). It continued its work with respect to the draft general recommendation on article 2. In this context, it has held an informal meeting with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as well as non-governmental organizations during its forty-first session in New York. The Committee has also started work on two new general recommendations, on older women and on economic consequences of divorce respectively.

Also at its forty-second session, the Committee adopted a statement on the occasion of the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At its forty-third session it has also adopted statements on "the recent military engagement in Gaza between Israel and the Hamas (January 2009)", and "the international financial crisis and its consequences on the human rights of women and girls".

Distinguished delegates,

In concluding, I would like to remind the Commission that this year is a great opportunity to emphasize the importance of full implementation of the Convention and the steps that have been made to achieve elimination of discrimination and equality of women and men as we are celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention and the tenth anniversary of the adoption of its Optional Protocol. I know that a number of high profile events are being planned to celebrate these important anniversaries, and I encourage you all to consider organizing such events, and would urge you to focus on implementation, progress made and the further steps that I required. I also reiterate the Committee's readiness desire to continue its close cooperation with the Commission, and to discuss ways in which this can be deepened as we pursue our shared goal of accelerating the realization of enjoyment of all human rights for all women and girls. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Commission for its continued support, and wish you well in your important deliberations.

Thank you.