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Statement by

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Chairperson

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

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Third Committee
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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 Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that oversees the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by its 186 States 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 98 States parties, most recently by Turkmenistan and Guinea Bissau. There are 55 acceptances of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 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.

Chairperson,

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 alleviate the backlog of 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 these by a specified date. Failing receipt of the reports within the suggested timeframe, 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 will continue to explore ways and means of encouraging States parties to comply with their reporting obligations, including through suggesting that they seek technical assistance through the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Division for the Advancement of Women or other entities of the United Nations.

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. At its forty-fourth session, the Committee has also decided to appoint a rapporteur for follow-up and will adopt a methodology for the assessment of follow-up reports submitted by States parties at its forty-fifth session in January 2010.

Chairperson,

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. The High Commissioner has ensured that the strong links between the Committee and the intergovernmental machinery responsible for the promotion of gender equality have been maintained.

The Committee has taken a consistent interest in the question of the United Nations reform pertaining to its gender equality architecture and, in this regard, I wish to congratulate the General Assembly on its recent decision to create a new gender entity. At its next session, the Committee will discuss ways and means to ensure that its interaction with the new entity is effective for a better implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women . During its forty-fourth session, the Committee met with the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, in New York, who also discussed this question with Committee experts. Briefings have also been provided by the Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Director of the Division for

the Advancement of Women (DAW). UNIFEM integrates the Convention and the work of the Committee into its activities, while DAW continued to draw attention to the Convention and the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in regard to priority issues considered by the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as in other mandated reports prepared for inter-governmental bodies on gender equality.

The Committee has taken full advantage of the opportunities provided by OHCHR, interacting regularly with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and her Deputy and other senior staff, and welcoming opportunities for discussion with special rapporteurs and independent experts of the Human Rights Council on issues of mutual concern. At its forty-third session, the Committee met with the Special Rapporteurs on violence against women its causes and consequences and on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. At its forty-fourth session it met with the Independent Expert on Minority issues. The Committee also received a briefing from the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Haiti at its forty-third session during which it considered the combined initial to sixth reports of Haiti. A representative of the Committee attended the first session of the Forum on Minority Issues. In my capacity as Chairperson of the Committee, I also represented the Committee at the Durban Review Conference, in April 2009, in Geneva.

The Committee continued to contribute actively to the work of the human rights treaty bodies, especially within the framework of the annual meetings of chairpersons of treaty bodies, and the inter-committee meeting. The Chairperson, as well as designated members of the Committee, participated in these meetings in 2008 and 2009. A representative of the Committee also participated in a panel event during the eleventh and twelve sessions of the Human Rights Council in June and September 2009 respectively. Close relationships have also been forged with individual treaty bodies. Of particular note is the establishment of a joint Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/Committee on the Rights of the Child working group. The rapporteur on follow-up of the Committee against Torture also provided a comprehensive briefing to the Committee at its forty-fourth session, which served as background in the development of its follow-up procedure.

The Committee continued its interaction with the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system that contribute to its work and support the full implementation of the Convention at the national level. Notably, immediately prior to its forty-fourth session, the Committee participated in a seminar on women of concern to UNHCR co-organized by OHCHR and UNHCR. It continued to benefit from joint information submitted on countries under consideration by United Nations country teams, and encouraged the

entities of the United Nations system to expand this practice and, in particular, to make such information available to the Committee's pre-session working group, as well as to undertake follow-up activities on the basis of the Committee's concluding observations at the country level. The participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the Committee remained of high importance and that of National Human Rights Institutions continued to increase significantly.

The Committee also continued its practice of adopting statements in relation to particular events or developments. Thus, at its forty-second session it adopted a statement on the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, at its forty-third session it adopted a statement on the international financial crisis and its consequences on the human rights of women and girls and a statement on the serious violations of women's rights in Gaza in January 2009. Lastly at its forty-fourth session the adopted a statement on gender and climate change.

I am pleased to report that the Committee adopted a general recommendation on migrant women at its forty-second session. It continued to work on a general recommendation on article 2 of the Convention, while, following a discussion on its long-term programme of work on general recommendations at its forty-second session, working groups were established on general recommendations on the human rights of older women and the economic consequences of marriage and its dissolution. The Committee convened informal discussions on both topics with the participation of United Nations system entities and civil society at its forty-fourth session.

Chairperson,
Colleagues and friends,

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 and practices in States parties all over the world 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. Violence against women in the context of armed conflicts remains widespread and largely unpunished. In this regard, the Committee welcomes the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1888 in which the Council affirmed that it would consider the prevalence of rape and other forms of sexual violence when

imposing or renewing targeted sanctions in situations of armed conflict and requested that the United Nations Secretary-General appoint a Special Representative to provide coherent and strategic leadership, to work effectively to strengthen existing United Nations coordination mechanisms, and to engage in advocacy efforts, in order to address all forms of violence against women in armed conflict including sexual violence.

As we approach the commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which reinforce the provisions of the Convention and constitute a complementary monitoring tool for the Committee, it is of utmost importance that all stakeholders pursue their efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the Convention at national level.

In conclusion, let me say that this year, as we commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the CEDAW Convention and tenth of the Optional Protocol, we should endeavor to raise their visibility and their impact on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Our ultimate goal should be the increase of ratifications of both instruments, and the withdrawal of reservations. We should strive to make this anniversary one of commitments.

Thank you.