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Sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women



Statement by

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Chair

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

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Madam Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In my capacity as newly elected Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, it is a great honour to address this forum. It is particularly a privilege as the international community will this year celebrate the 40th year of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This affords us the opportunity to take stock of the progress made and the future challenges.

There is no other appropriate forum than this one to undertake this assessment, as the preparatory conferences of the 1970s which led to the drafting of the Convention, later described as the international bill of rights for women, commenced here. Since its adoption in December 1979, the Convention has alleviated the burden of women's subjugation and shattered the impenetrable glass-ceilings that sought to confine women to the domestic sphere of life. Nevertheless, the Convention as a tool for the advancement of women and ensuring their economic empowerment continues to be challenged despite our forbearers' reaffirmation of their "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the *equal rights of men and women*."

Madam Chair,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This year's priority theme of the Commission on the Status of Women, "Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls", has been at the centre of Committee's work over the past years. Similarly, the review theme, "Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development" is increasingly the subject of the Committee's engagement.

Promoting the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

With 189 States parties, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women enjoys almost universal ratification, and is the only human rights instrument that provides comprehensive protection of human rights of women. Since the last session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Committee has continued to actively promote the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and has taken concrete steps to use its mandate in furtherance of the Sustainable Development Goals - the SDGs. In addition to continuously encouraging States parties to report on measures taken to achieve the targets set by the SDGs, the Committee has revised its reporting guidelines to integrate the SDGs in order to ensure systematic reporting by States parties.

Furthermore, the Committee has made substantive submissions to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, since its inception, to

influence global and national policy-making by reinforcing the links between international human rights standards and the 2030 Agenda to achieve the Agenda's objectives of "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies".

The Committee recognises that in order to effectively pursue the Convention's twin objective of ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment, States parties' efforts to attain the SDGs should be aligned to their obligations under the Convention.

Social protection systems and gender equality

Women are disadvantaged in social protection systems, experiencing lower coverage rates and substantially lower benefit levels. The Committee recognises that social protection policies are an important tool for reducing poverty and gender inequality. Gender gaps in accessing social protection vary per region and country, as they are largely dependent on the characteristics of the labour market and the structure of the social security system.

Discrimination based on age, income, geographic location, race, ethnicity, health, migration status, disabilities among others hinder the effectiveness of social protection systems. In order for women and girls to fully benefit from the social protection systems, all forms of discrimination should be eliminated. Furthermore, different groups of women and girls have particular needs and priorities, which require tailored policies and institutional responses.

The Committee issues country-specific recommendations under Article 13 that seek to prevent women and girls from falling into abject poverty. It recognises that failure to provide appropriate social protection for women and girls, especially in disadvantaged groups, will not only stratify them into extreme poverty, but also prevent them from contributing to the economic growth of their respective communities and countries, ultimately retarding the implementation of the SDGs. The Committee particularly seeks to protect women in the informal sector of employment. In its **General Recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women**, the Committee recognises that "even when formally employed, [rural women] are more often engaged in work that is insecure, hazardous, poorly paid and not covered by social protection". Social protection floors in employment therefore provide an important tool for gender equality and women's empowerment, as they improve equal access to goods and services.

This year's priority theme, "Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls" are interlinked. A human rights-based and gender-responsive approach to the design, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of social protection systems facilitates the availability, accessibility, adequacy, acceptability and quality of services for women and men on an equal basis. Women should be equally involved in the development and strengthening of social protection systems.

Addressing gender gaps and biases in social protection

Robust investments in gender-responsive social protection systems are critical to tackling modern economic, social, environmental and demographic challenges to "leave no one behind". Context-specific assessments of gender-specifics risks and their intersection with other forms of discrimination should inform the design and implementation of social protection schemes.

Comprehensive social protection systems should be extended to all women and their benefits progressively increased. Also, domestic and unpaid care work should be recognized and valued in line with **CEDAW General Recommendation No. 17 (1991) on the measurement and quantification of the unremunerated domestic activities of women and their recognition in the gross national product.** This will ensure that women engaged in such work have access to social protection, including health care and pension coverage. Barriers, including gender pay gaps and narrowly construed means-testing imposed as pre-conditions for accessing social protection schemes should be removed as they prevent women, especially those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination from accessing coverage. Otherwise, these conditionalities push women further into poverty and perpetuate gender inequality. The Committee has observed that due to child care responsibilities, women often work part-time, which affects their pension contributions, resulting in post-retirement poverty. Therefore, access to maternity protection should be guaranteed, the equal sharing of domestic responsibilities be promoted through the flexible work

arrangements and parental leave to enable men play an equal role in raising children.

Trafficking of women and girls in the context of global migration

The Committee has embarked on elaborating a **General Recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration**, to provide guidance to States parties on measures to address trafficking of women and girls as they move across borders. Migrant women and girls have limited or no access to social protection mechanisms, and often face difficulties accessing social protection due to restrictive eligibility and documentary requirements. Other difficulties include the transfer of benefits, exacerbated by the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they encounter based on their gender including migratory status, income, race, ethnicity, religion, and disability. In the absence of social protection, such women and girls face an increased risk of poverty, exploitation and social exclusion. It is, therefore, critical to build the resilience of women and girls on the move to ensure their access to social protection systems to prevent their exploitation by traffickers, and instead enable their effective participation in economic and social life.

Transforming public services for gender equality and women's empowerment

The international community should scale up investment to increase availability of public services for women and girls. This entails identifying and removing financial and non-financial barriers that hinder women's and

girls' accessibility to public services in addition to physical, economic, cultural and religious barriers, lack of information, stigma and discrimination. These public services should be of adequate quality, respectful of the dignity of women and girls, gender-sensitive, age-appropriate and accessible for older women and women and girls with disabilities. Where such services are only required by women and girls, States should ensure that service providers are properly trained on gender-sensitive approaches to service delivery. The services, particularly sexual and reproductive health services should be affordable. Overall, States should ensure they promote a zero-tolerance policy against violence against women and girls, particularly sexual harassment and abuse.

In the provision of education the school curricula should be gender-sensitive and geared towards improving the quality of education and eliminating discriminatory gender stereotypes, which perpetuate unequal power relations between men and women. It is for this reason that the Committee's **General Recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education** calls on States parties to the Convention to "revise and develop non-stereotypical educational curricula, textbooks and teaching materials to eliminate traditional gender stereotypes that reproduce and reinforce gender-based discrimination against girls and women".

Sustainable infrastructure for gender equality

The Committee underscores the importance of prioritizing investments in environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient infrastructure, including in technology and digital telecommunications, particularly those that

facilitate the generation of employment for women in non-traditional fields. Infrastructural projects should therefore, be subjected to a systematic and transparent assessment regarding their environmental, human rights and gender impacts, and States should ensure the full participation of affected women and girls in their communities.

Furthermore, there is a need to ensure the availability of basic services that have an effect of improving women's economic and social life such as access to electricity, potable water, sanitation and transport. Transport infrastructure and policies should facilitate women's multiple roles as workers, mothers and caregivers. This is extremely important with regard to infrastructure for education and health. **General Recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education** recognises that "the right of girls and women of access to high-quality education is based on the availability of adequate infrastructure to meet their needs. Without such availability, the right of access is compromised". It is also critical to guarantee access to clean water and safe sanitation for women and girls, including for menstrual hygiene.

Furthermore, in cases of disasters, the Committee in its **General Recommendation No. 37 (2018) on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change** recognises that a "failure to engage in gender-responsive disaster planning and implementation often results in protective facilities and infrastructure, such as early warning mechanisms, shelters and relief programmes, that neglect the specific accessibility needs of diverse groups of women, including women with disabilities, older women and indigenous women".

Madam Chair,

I would like to express the Committee's gratitude to all other partners, including other treaty bodies and human rights mechanisms, the United Nations and its specialized agencies, Member States, NGOs, and national human rights institutions. whose support and information provision is crucial to the Committee's gaining a clear view of the status of women's rights world-wide. I would also like to thank our colleagues at OHCHR, United Nations country teams, as well as the Interagency Group on CEDAW reporting comprising UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, FAO and UN Women. We are also grateful to UNHCR, IOM, UNESCO, ILO, WHO, the IPU and civil society organizations, particularly IWRAW-Asia Pacific, for their support.

I thank you for this opportunity to have addressed you.