Sixty-fourth 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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Chair,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I regret that due to recent events I am unable to be with you to address this forum in my capacity as Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). However, given the critical importance of this meeting to CEDAW, I have requested that this statement be circulated in written form.

Last year, I spoke to you about the 40th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This year, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). Two historic milestones for women's rights.

With the adoption of the CEDAW Convention in 1979, States responded to the claims of women's rights groups worldwide for an "International Bill of Women's Rights". With 189 States parties, the Convention remains the only legally binding near universal international instrument that comprehensively protects women's rights. The rights enshrined in the Convention have to a great extent prefigured the content of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. In Beijing in 1995, the international community reaffirmed the binding commitments made in CEDAW and set out a vision for ensuring women's rights and achieving gender equality across the globe.

The Beijing+25 review – the main focus of this year's Commission on the Status of Women – provides us with an opportunity to recommit to these two landmark documents and embrace the synergies between them. Both the

CEDAW Convention and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have been a driving force for transformative change in almost all societies of the world. In the past decades, the world has witnessed significant progress in the realization of women's rights and gender equality: the number of women in the work force has increased; two in three countries have achieved gender parity in schooling at the primary level; between 2000 and 2017, the maternal mortality ratio declined by almost 38%; and more women are now represented in national Parliaments and Governments.

In February, CEDAW Vice-Chair Ms. Bandana Rana represented the Committee on the high-level panel of the Human Rights Council to commemorate Beijing+25 under the title "Accelerating the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action", during the high-level segment of the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council. The panel recalled the progress made in the past 25 years towards the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. At the same time, it stressed the continued relevance of this visionary document to address the remaining and new challenges to the full realization of women's and girls' human rights.

Since Beijing, the global landscape has changed. We are facing some regression on women's rights, in particular sexual and reproductive health and rights, attacks against women human rights defenders, and shrinking space for women's civil society organizations. Violations of women's rights continue to occur every day across the globe:

- 35% of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at one point in their lives;

- In more than 50 countries, there is no legal protection for women against domestic violence;
- About one out of three married women aged 20 to 24 were child brides;
- 830 women and girls still die every day from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth;
- Approximately 500 million women worldwide were illiterate in 2016.

The promise of CEDAW and Beijing of substantive equality of women and men is hence still far from being a reality.

We need to consolidate the existing legal frameworks on women's rights in order to ensure sustainable and inclusive change. The CEDAW Convention is of pivotal importance as a legal framework and yardstick to guide and assess the implementation of States' political commitments under the Beijing Declaration and Framework for Action, as well as for the achievement of the gender-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, the Convention remains one of the few human rights treaties with the highest number of reservations. The Committee was therefore pleased that 93 States signed a joint statement on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Convention during the 41st session of the Human Rights Council in June 2019, encouraging States to consider the removal of their reservations and inviting those States that are not yet party to the Convention and/or the Optional Protocol, to consider ratifying or acceding to those instruments, as they provide for essential guarantees and strengthen remedies for women and girls.

The call for universality was echoed at the General Assembly side event "CEDAW@40: Past achievements, ongoing challenges and future action."

which was organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) on 18 December 2019, co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Nigeria and Trinidad and Tobago, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Convention. The panellists, who included CEDAW Vice-Chair Ms. Rana, took stock of the progress achieved over the past 40 years in the Convention's implementation, identified gaps and challenges, and defined concrete action to close the gaps.

Over the past year, the Committee continued to proactively engage in promoting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in different ways. First of all, the Committee continued to encourage States parties to report on measures taken to achieve relevant targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), thereby linking States' political commitments concerning the SDGs to their legally binding obligations under the CEDAW Convention. In November 2019, the Committee adopted a Guidance note for States parties for the preparation of reports under article 18 of the Convention in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (CEDAW/C/74/3), which complements the treaty-specific reporting guidelines issued by the Committee. This document provides guidance to States parties in reporting systematically on the steps taken to achieve the gender equality content of the Sustainable Development Goals.

During its 75th session in Geneva last month, CEDAW adopted its Beijing+25 contribution entitled "Women as leading forces of change," which contains a comprehensive analysis of good practices and challenges encountered in striving to achieve relevant SDGs, as identified in the work of the Committee. The Committee further strengthened its cooperation with other human rights mechanisms and UN entities to promote the achievement

of relevant SDG targets. Together with the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on Migrant Workers, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, CEDAW issued a joint statement on "Human Rights and Climate Change" as a contribution to the Climate Action Summit convened by the Secretary-General in September 2019. The statement addresses the duty of all States to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, thereby reinforcing SDG 13, and refers to CEDAW's General Recommendation No. 37 (2018) on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as well as the Paris Agreement.

Equally, the Committee seeks to promote the 2030 Agenda through its thematic work on the legally binding norms of the Convention. For example, in relation to Goal 5, target 5.2 ("Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation"), CEDAW continued its work on a general recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration (article 6 of the Convention).

Following the half-day of general discussion on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration that the Committee held during its 72nd session in Geneva in February 2019, several civil society partners convened consultations in London (May 2019), Athens (June 2019) Helsinki (August 2019) and Nairobi (December 2019) to provide inputs for the draft general recommendation. In addition, OHCHR, in collaboration with UN Women, UNODC, IOM and the OSCE, organized regional expert meetings in Cairo (November 2019) and Vienna (January 2020). CEDAW experts participated in all of these meetings, and the Committee highly values the inputs received from experts from academia, inter-governmental as well as

non-governmental organizations during these meetings. During April and the first half of May 2020, the Committee will put the first draft of the general recommendation online to invite comments from States parties and other stakeholders. It is also planning to conduct further regional expert meetings in Addis Ababa, Manila and Panama City during the first half of 2020, as well as a briefing for States parties in May 2020 in Geneva.

As CEDAW Chair, I participate in the Platform of independent experts on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against Women, launched on the margins of the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which brings together United Nations and regional independent expert mechanisms on the elimination of discrimination and violence against women. Most recently, the Platform adopted a joint statement entitled "Silence the guns, end violence against women before, during and after conflict", in the context of the 20th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

Over the past year, the Committee considered 39 States parties to the Convention under its State reporting procedure, including many countries in conflict or post-conflict situations, and adopted 22 concluding observations with recommendations for action and 16 lists of issues in relation to initial or periodic reports received from States parties, as well as eight lists of issues prior to reporting.

Under article 2 of its Optional Protocol, ratified by 113 States, CEDAW despite a constrained financial environment took action on 18 individual complaints last year. Most of these cases concerned refoulement or gender-based violence, including domestic and obstetric violence. Other cases concerned the forced eviction of pregnant Roma women or the failure by the State party concerned to provide effective consular assistance to a national.

Under article 8 of the Optional Protocol, the Committee conducted one confidential inquiry visit into alleged grave or systematic violations by the States party concerned of rights set forth in the Convention. It also adopted the report of another inquiry on female genital mutilation, which will be made public once the State party concerned has submitted its observations.

The Committee continues to implement the efficiency measures provided in General Assembly resolution 68/268 on treaty body strengthening. In relation to the simplified reporting procedure, CEDAW has continuously reviewed its working methods to ensure alignment with other treaty bodies and to make them more efficient. In July 2019, the Committee removed the requirement of the submission of a common core document for States parties wishing to avail themselves of the simplified reporting procedure for the submission of their periodic reports to the Committee. To date, the Committee has received requests from nearly 50 States parties to report under the simplified reporting procedure, eight of which have already been reviewed under this procedure.

Also in line with resolution 68/268, the Committee adopted a decision in July 2019 to enhance the accessibility of CEDAW documentation for experts with disabilities to ensure their full, inclusive and effective participation in the work of the Committee, and to keep its practices under review with a view to continuously improving the accessibility of its work for all stakeholders with disabilities.

Resolution 68/268 strongly condemns all acts of intimidation and reprisals against individuals and groups for their contribution to the work of the human rights treaty bodies. During the reporting period, the Rapporteur and alternate Rapporteur on reprisals successfully intervened in two reprisals

cases. In another case, information on two individuals facing reprisals was published in the annual report on reprisals of the Secretary-General.

Furthermore, in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 68/268, CEDAW continued to increase the use of videoconference technology for consultations with UN country teams and for remote participation of delegation members in constructive dialogues.

I had the honour to chair the 31st annual meeting of Chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies from 24 to 28 June 2019. The meeting was held in New York in view of the General Assembly's review of the treaty body system this year. The Chairs agreed on a common vision for the future of the treaty body system that includes widely offering the simplified reporting procedure, combined with a predictable schedule of reviews and greater coordination and discipline to reduce unnecessary duplication. Our vision also includes the possibility of increasing the capacity of treaty bodies to review States by working in chambers, working groups or country teams. Moreover, we believe there are considerable benefits in conducting dialogues with States at the regional level through smaller teams of Committee experts. Ultimately, this will depend on the provision of adequate resources.

On the financial situation, the Committee is concerned that the regular budget recently adopted by the General Assembly for 2020 did not correct the shortfall in resources to support the human rights treaty bodies to implement their mandates. As we are all aware, these official mandates should be fully funded from the regular budget of the United Nations, as the responsibility of the Member States who established them. Over the past two years, we have seen that without the requisite resources, the treaty bodies are again falling behind in their work, with consequences that are dire for many

who have turned to them for assistance, including many women and girls. The Committee trusts that the 2020 inter-governmental review of the treaty body system will examine this situation carefully, and trust that it will result in a fully resourced and sustainable system.

It is important to highlight the cooperation with, and appreciation to, CEDAW's partners including the Inter-Agency Group on CEDAW Reporting, comprising UN Women, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA IOM, and FAO, that provides invaluable country-specific information to CEDAW; UNHCR; IPU; the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW) Asia-Pacific that brings local NGOs to our sessions through its Global to Local Programme; and the numerous national human rights institutions and local NGO representatives who provided country-specific information for the Committee's State report reviews.

The work of the Committee could not be undertaken without the work of OHCHR as the Committee's Secretariat. The work of CEDAW has continued to grow in 2019-2020, while the resources for its staffing support have not kept pace with the growth in our work, particularly for the individual communications and inquiry procedures. The Committee remains hopeful that this year's treaty body review process will address this resource problem.

I thank you for the opportunity to have shared this statement with you.