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Statement by
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CHAIR

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

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Third Committee
Item 26: Advancement of women

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Madam Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Today is the last time that I have the honour, albeit remotely, to address and engage in an interactive dialogue with the Third Committee of the General Assembly in my capacity as Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW Committee).

From among the many issues the Committee has worked on in the past 12 months, I would like to focus on four: the anniversaries of the CEDAW Convention and of the Fourth World Conference on Women; CEDAW's engagement on the Sustainable Development Goals; CEDAW and the COVID-19 pandemic; and the 2020 review of the human rights treaty body system.

Anniversaries of the CEDAW Convention and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Last year, we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and this year the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Two historic milestones for women's rights.

To mark the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, the only near universal international treaty with 189 States parties that comprehensively protects women's human rights, the Committee convened a side event in New York on 18 December 2019, with support from UNFPA, OHCHR, UN Women and the Permanent Mission of Trinidad and Tobago, to take stock of progress achieved over the past 40 years, identify gaps and challenges and define action to close these gaps.

Both the Convention and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have been driving forces 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: gender parity in education has almost been achieved globally; the maternal mortality ratio has fallen by 38% between 2000 and 2017; and more than 150 countries have legislation specifically addressing domestic or other forms of gender-based violence against women.

However, as I have stated in my video message to the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women last week, the global rights landscape has changed since Beijing. The gains of the past 25 years and the normative standards protecting women's rights are increasingly under attack. Attempts to dilute the Convention and a new emphasis on "traditional values" seek to confine women to family spaces and undermine the women's rights agenda, especially their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Women human rights defenders face threats, violence, including online, prompting interventions by CEDAW's Rapporteur and alternate Rapporteur on Reprisals.

CEDAW's engagement on the Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without women's equal participation in decision-making and leadership across all areas of the Convention, the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs.

Over the past year, the Committee continued to promote the mutually reinforcing relationship between the Convention and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In November 2019, CEDAW adopted a Guidance Note for States parties for the preparation of reports under article 18 of the Convention in the context of the SDGs gender-

related targets (CEDAW/C/74/3) thereby linking States' political commitments concerning the SDGs with their legally binding obligations under the Convention. In February this year, CEDAW adopted its Beijing+25 contribution entitled "Women as leading forces of change", which analyses good practices and challenges encountered in achieving the SDGS.

The Committee further strengthened its cooperation with partners in respect of SDG targets. In November 2019, together with the Permanent Mission of Japan, OHCHR and UN Women, it convened a panel discussion on "Women's economic empowerment and the SDGs: How to close the gap in a rapidly changing world". The Permanent Missions of Canada, Finland, France, Mexico and Thailand and the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights co-sponsored the event.

The Committee also continued to promote the 2030 Agenda through its thematic work on the legally binding norms of the Convention.

General recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration

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 is finalizing its work on a general recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration (article 6 of the Convention).

From April to May, the Committee posted the draft general recommendation online to invite stakeholders' comments. It received almost 200 submissions from States parties, UN entities, national human rights institutions, NGOs, academics and other stakeholders. With

support from Switzerland and Japan, the chair and some members of CEDAW's working group on trafficking participated in regional expert meetings for the Middle East and Northern Africa, organized by UN Women, UNODC and the IOM in Cairo on 24 and 25 November 2019; for Europe and Central Asia, organized by OHCHR, UNODC and the OSCE in Vienna on 30 January 2020; for the Americas, organized by the OHCHR Regional Office in Panama City in cooperation with the United Nations Country Team in Panama, from 6 to 15 May but held remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and for Sub-Saharan Africa, organized by UN Women and the OHCHR Regional Office in Addis Ababa on 26 May and held remotely. Representatives of regional and international inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, academics and human rights experts participated in these meetings to identify region-specific good practices and challenges that the general recommendation should address.

Over the past year, CEDAW considered 39 States parties to the Convention under its State reporting procedure. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was only able to hold dialogues and adopt concluding observations on 15 countries. In addition, it adopted 15 lists of issues in relation to initial or periodic reports received from States parties and nine lists of issues prior to reporting under the simplified reporting procedure.

Under article 2 of the Optional Protocol, ratified by 114 States, CEDAW, despite a constrained financial environment took action on 19 individual complaints. Most of these cases concerned non-refoulement or gender-based violence against women; most recently the murder of a woman with disabilities by her husband and sexual violence in armed conflict. Under article 8 of the Optional Protocol, the Committee published an inquiry report on female genital mutilation and completed its first reading of another inquiry report on domestic violence. It also

assessed follow-up information from a State party in relation to an inquiry report on abduction of women and girls for forced marriage.

Additionally, CEDAW issued several statements, sometimes jointly with other human rights treaty bodies, to draw attention to issues such as women as a leading force in global anti-racism protests, the shrinking civil space for "Women's activism in political processes", and "Sexual harassment against women and girls with disabilities".

CEDAW and the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic impacts women in a disparate manner. Confinement and other restrictions on freedom of movement have exposed women and girls to an increased risk of domestic, sexual, economic, psychological and other forms of gender-based violence by abusive partners, family members, and care persons, and in rural communities. The COVID-19 crisis adversely affects women in low-paid jobs and in informal, temporary or other precarious forms of employment, with no or limited access to social protection. School closures have negatively affected girls' continued education and relegated many women and girls to stereotyped roles in domestic work. In addition, overburdened health systems and reallocation of resources have undermined women's and girls' access to sexual and reproductive health services.

CEDAW addressed these challenges in its "Call for joint action in times of the COVID-19 pandemic", which it formally submitted to the 2020 High-level Forum on Sustainable Development. To provide States with the necessary tools to protect women's rights in their COVID-19 responses and post-crisis recovery plans, the Committee adopted a Guidance Note on CEDAW and COVID-19. Recently, the Committee

adopted a new standard paragraph for lists of issues and lists of issues prior to reporting to ask States parties about the impact of COVID-19 on women's rights and gender equality.

CEDAW and the 2020 review of the human rights treaty body system

CEDAW continued to implement the measures provided in General Assembly resolution 68/268 on treaty body strengthening, harmonizing its procedures and practices for engaging with national human rights institutions with those developed by other human rights treaty bodies. It also adopted a predictable review cycle to ensure regular and timely reporting by all States parties. CEDAW further requested the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure the full accessibility of online platforms and reasonably accommodate members with disabilities who require personal assistance during online sessions of the Committee, including financial compensation for personal assistants.

Last month, after a series of consultations with Member States, treaty body experts and other stakeholders, the co-facilitators appointed by the President of the General Assembly for the 2020 review of the treaty body system, the Permanent Representatives of Morocco and Switzerland, issued their "Report on the process of the consideration of the state of the UN human Rights treaty body system". In that regard, I note with appreciation that the report supported many of the elements the treaty body chairs agreed on in their common vision for the future of the treaty body system, including the predictable cycle of State party reviews.

As human rights face pushback, and the United Nations faces financial crisis, it is crucial to strengthen the treaty bodies. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, treaty bodies are carrying out most of their

mandated activities except constructive dialogues, online to avoid a protection gap for rights holders, including many women and girls. CEDAW, as other treaty bodies has held online sessions, despite the logistical, technical and financial limitations we are trying to overcome together with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. As the Chairs suggested in their written contribution to the co-facilitators, "work on line is a supplementary tool, which cannot replace in-person meetings". However, there is a need to innovate and keep pace with new technological developments. We also need to ensure that any online platforms or tools we use are accessible to persons with disabilities, and that reasonable accommodation is provided to experts and participants with disabilities, in line with the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS). This in concrete terms is the meaning of leaving no one behind.

Madam Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

Without the necessary resources, the treaty bodies will continue to fall behind in their work, with dire consequences for many rights holders. It is therefore crucial that Member States adequately fund the treaty body system from the regular budget of the United Nations to enable it to fulfil its mandate and prevent gains made under General Assembly resolution 68/268 in reducing treaty bodies' backlogs from being rapidly lost. As highlighted in the report of the co-facilitators, without coordinated actions at the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly and a concrete outcome to complement resolution 68/268, we face a risk of possible erosion of the treaty body system.

In closing, I wish to thank our partners, including the Inter-Agency Group on CEDAW Reporting, comprising UN Women, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, IOM, and FAO, which continued to provide invaluable information through relevant United Nations Country Teams, including online, and the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW) Asia-Pacific that brought local NGOs to our in-person sessions through its Global to Local Programme and ensured that the voices of NGOs were heard during our online session in July.

Finally, let me thank OHCHR for its support as the Secretariat of CEDAW. The work of CEDAW has become more complex in these challenging times, yet the human and financial resources of the Secretariat have not kept pace with the exigencies and the growth of our work, particularly under the individual communications and inquiry procedures. I remain hopeful that the outcome of the 2020 treaty body review process will address these resource issues so that the expectations placed on CEDAW by women across the world can continue to be met.

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