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Statement by
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CHAIR

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

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Madam Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Today is the first time that I have the honour to address and engage in an interactive dialogue, albeit remotely, 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 the many issues the Committee dealt with in the past 12 months, I would like to focus on three: women's leadership and full participation in decision-making and political life, including by indigenous women and girls; gender-based violence against women and trafficking in women and girls; and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CEDAW's work and the need to strengthen the human rights treaty body system.

Women's leadership and full participation in decision-making and political life, including by indigenous women and girls

To build back better from the pandemic, the world needs a paradigm shift based on inclusive and representative governance by 2030. CEDAW highlighted the transformative power of women's equal participation in political life and decision-making, including in the formulation, adoption and implementation of COVID-19 crisis response and recovery strategies, in its 'Call for national action plans to achieve gender parity by 2030', jointly issued with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) on International Women's Day 2021.

Women account for only one quarter of Parliamentarians, slightly more than one fifth of ministerial portfolios and 5.9 and 6.7 per cent of Heads of State and Heads of Government, respectively, worldwide, according to IPU data – despite the fact that women were among the leaders who have kept COVID-19 prevalence rates lower, and countries on track for recovery, as Secretary-General António Guterres stressed on 8 March this year. CEDAW calls on States to recognize that inclusive and representative governance is an essential condition for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5.

In line with the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to "Leave No One Behind", inclusive and representative governance means that disadvantaged and marginalized groups of women have the right to effective participation in decision-making and political life, including in leadership positions.

Indigenous women are primary actors in the achievement of sustainable development of their indigenous peoples and communities. However, according to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, indigenous women are often excluded from decision-making in local, national, and international processes, as well as in their own communities and indigenous systems.

Political participation of indigenous women and girls was one of the two themes of the virtual day of general discussion on the rights of indigenous women and girls that CEDAW held in June this year as part of the elaboration of a General Recommendation on the rights of indigenous women and girls. The five keynote speakers focused on this theme and on intersecting forms of discrimination against indigenous women and girls. In addition, many States, NGOs, UN bodies and one national human

rights institution made statements at the virtual discussion day, reflecting the importance of adequately protecting and fulfilling the rights of indigenous women and girls.

Gender-based violence against women and trafficking in women and girls

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender-based violence against women. The Committee is concerned about the risk of an erosion of the international multilateral system for protection from gender-based violence against women, especially the regressive discourse in a number of countries challenging the legitimacy of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). On 1 July, CEDAW issued a statement expressing concern that the withdrawal by one Member State from the Istanbul Convention in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to deepen the protection gap for women and girls during a time when gender-based violence is on the rise.

The pandemic has also shifted the world's attention away from sexual violence in conflict. In a joint statement on 'Prevention, protection and assistance for children born of conflict-related rape and their mothers', our Committee and the Committee on the Rights of the Child express concern about the grave consequences of sexual violence in conflict. The joint statement will be issued later this month in advance of the open debate of the Security Council on women, peace and security.

In SDG 5, target 5.2, States commit to "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". In

November 2020, CEDAW adopted its General Recommendation No. 38 (2020) on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration, urging governments to discourage the demand for trafficking in all forms, and address the root causes that push women and girls into vulnerable situations, such as sex-based discrimination, socio-economic injustices in home countries, as well as conflicts and humanitarian emergencies.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CEDAW's work and the need to strengthen the human rights treaty body system

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, CEDAW has continued to carry out its mandated activities under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the only near universal treaty with 189 States parties that comprehensively protects women's rights, and under the Optional Protocol thereto. The Committee calls on those Members States that remain outside the Convention to ratify it as well as the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

Since June 2020, CEDAW held four online sessions to avoid a protection gap for women and girls across the globe. In February, it reviewed the ninth periodic report of Denmark during its first-ever online dialogue and adopted concluding observations addressing issues such as women's leadership in COVID-19 recovery efforts, the impact of climate change on indigenous women in Greenland and the growing gender-based violence, among others.

Over the past year, the Committee also assessed the follow-up reports of 24 States parties under the follow-up to concluding observations procedure. In addition, the Committee adopted 18 lists of

issues in relation to periodic reports received from States parties and 9 lists of issues prior to reporting under the simplified reporting procedure. All lists of issues contain a new standard paragraph asking States parties about the impact of COVID-19 on women's rights and about women's participation in decision-making on COVID-19 recovery plans.

Under article 2 of the Optional Protocol, ratified by 114 States parties, CEDAW took action on 7 individual complaints, finding violations in cases concerning gender-based discrimination against a female prisoner, a woman human rights defender as well as against Roma women in access to health care. Under article 8 of the Optional Protocol, the Committee adopted an inquiry report on rampant levels of domestic violence in the State party concerned. It also decided to conduct several confidential inquiries in a hybrid format combining initial online meetings with a country visit at a later stage.

CEDAW further issued a joint statement with the Committee on the Rights of the Child calling on the new power holders in Afghanistan to respect and protect the human rights of women and girls in the country, a joint statement with the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on ending sexual harassment against women and girls with disabilities, and a call in the wake of International Women Human Rights Defenders Day 2020 to release all detained women human rights defenders.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CEDAW has adapted its working methods to the online realities as an exceptional measure. However, the limitation to two hours per day of the use of the online platform with simultaneous interpretation, time zone differences, connectivity issues, limited accessibility of the online platform for experts with disabilities,

and the absence of an honorarium in recognition of the significant effort and time we have dedicated to online work made our virtual sessions very difficult. In addition, the suspension of in-person sessions created a new backlog of State party reports pending review, as all State party reviews had to be postponed since March 2020.

While we very much appreciate the return to in-person meetings and look forward to holding our upcoming 80th session in Geneva again, some of our dialogues with States parties still need to be held on-line because of remaining COVID-19 restrictions preventing the travel of delegations to Geneva. At the same time, the United Nations Office at Geneva still has insufficient meeting rooms and capacity to support on-line dialogues, making our work even more challenging. Reducing our current backlog of 62 State party reports will require additional human and financial resources to support the work of CEDAW.

Unfortunately, the regular budget adopted by the General Assembly for 2021 did not correct the shortfall in staff resources to support the human rights treaty bodies. Our work should be fully funded from the regular budget of the United Nations, as the proper functioning of the human rights treaty bodies is a responsibility of the Member States who established them. We hope that the 2022 budget will redress this shortfall.

The Secretary-General in his Call to Action on human rights has called for developing a funding strategy to provide financial stability for the human rights treaty body system. This is urgently needed.

Madam Chair, Distinguished delegates,

Before I close, 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 online through relevant United Nations Country Teams; UNHCR; IPU; the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW) Asia-Pacific that ensured that the voices of NGOs were heard during our online sessions; the feminist organization, activists, academics and the various national human rights institutions and local civil society representatives who provided country- specific information to the Committee.

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 regrettably, the human and financial resources afforded by the Member States of the United Nations 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 planning and resource issues so that we can continue to meet the expectations placed on CEDAW by women and girls across the world.

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