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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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Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Today is the last time that I have the honour 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, as my term as a Member and Chair of the Committee is coming to an end. Seven new members will join the Committee next year as a result of the CEDAW elections held in June, for which I did not run again after having served two full terms.

I am heartened to be able to engage with this august forum in person this year. I am equally pleased that the Committee has been able to resume its physical sessions in Geneva since last October following four sessions held on-line during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The resumption of sessions held in person has enabled the Committee to hold dialogues with 26 States parties in Geneva and adopt concluding observations on their reports, preventing a further increase of its backlog of State party reports pending review. In addition, it adopted 13 lists of issues in relation to periodic reports from States parties and 3 lists of issues prior to reporting under the simplified reporting procedure over the last year. In June, the Committee decided to make the simplified reporting procedure the default procedure for its consideration of State party reports (with an opt-out option for States parties that wish to be reviewed under the traditional procedure).

40th anniversary of the Committee

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the CEDAW Committee, the monitoring body of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which is the only near universal treaty with 189 States parties that comprehensively protects women's rights. The Committee calls on those Member States that remain outside the Convention to ratify it as well as the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

Over the years, the Committee has been able to witness important progress in the advancement of women in many States parties. For example, since October 2021, it has assessed the follow-up reports of 17 States parties under the follow-up to concluding observations procedure. In these assessments, it has acknowledged legislative, budgetary or other effective measures by States parties to implement its recommendations in areas such as national machineries for the advancement of women, gender-based violence, personal status laws, political participation, economic empowerment, and the protection of women victims of armed conflict.

One of the main achievements of the Committee in the past 40 years has been to ensure that women have access to justice at the international level through the individual communications procedure under article 2 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, ratified by 115 States parties. In the last year, CEDAW acted on 11 individual complaints, finding violations in cases concerning: gender-based violence against women committed in the name of so-called honour; obstetric violence; discrimination against a lesbian activist; discrimination based on gender stereotypes concerning the expected behavior of a rape survivor; and discrimination concerning women's entitlement to Indian status as First Nation descendants on the maternal line.

In addition to a substantial body of case law, the Committee since its inception has elaborated 38 General Recommendations, providing guidance to States parties on measures to implement their obligations in relation to specific articles of or issues arising under the Convention. At its 83rd session starting next week, CEDAW will adopt its General Recommendation No. 39 on the rights of indigenous women and girls. This will be the first time that a human rights treaty body issues guidance focusing exclusively on discrimination faced by indigenous women and girls. It will be the culmination of a two-year participatory and inclusive process with multiple consultations held by the Committee and its Secretariat at OHCHR to hear the voices, priorities and experiences of indigenous women and receive inputs from stakeholders.

Women, peace and security

The Committee is deeply concerned about the current global conjuncture. Armed conflicts in different parts of the world are adversely affecting women's human rights as well as their families, communities and societies. Sexual violence in several extreme forms continues to be utilized as a means of warfare across the globe.

States parties have a due diligence obligation to prevent and protect women and girls from all forms of gender-based violence by State and non-State actors, including in armed conflict, and to prosecute perpetrators. Under the UN Charter, States have a responsibility to refrain from military attacks against another State. They must also abide by their international obligation not to target civilian populations, including women and girls, in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law, and to refrain from providing support to further military hostilities that would expose more women and girls to violations of their rights under the Convention.

The CEDAW Committee favours efforts aimed at negotiations for peace in the context of continuing and emerging armed conflicts worldwide, while preserving the UN Charter principles of sovereign equality and territorial integrity of all States. In line with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security, States should ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security, including the prevention, management and resolution of armed conflicts. Wars destroy not only the livelihoods of many women and girls but seriously affect the social fabric of nations and limit sustainable development for the next generations. Gender-responsive humanitarian work with women's involvement is a key factor to ensure their access to education, health care and other basic services.

The Committee is closely monitoring two ongoing armed conflicts and uses its State reporting procedure to raise concerns about violations of women's rights in this regard. In February, it established a task force to monitor the situation of Ukrainian women and girls and engage with national and international stakeholders as well as with other UN treaty bodies. On 18 and 19 October, the Committee will review the ninth periodic report of Ukraine during its 83rd session in Geneva.

In November 2021, the Committee established a task force on Afghanistan and subsequently requested the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to submit an exceptional report on the situation of women and girls in the country since 15 August 2021. This was the first interaction by a human rights treaty body with the Afghan *de facto* authorities. In April, CEDAW member Bandana Rana and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, Reem Alsalem, undertook a joint technical visit to Kabul on invitation by UNAMA to hear

about the situation of Afghan women and girls, devise strategies for protecting their human rights, and follow up on the Committee's request for an exceptional report.

The impact of natural disasters and climate change on women's rights

Hurricanes, floods and forest fires are on the rise in many parts of the world. Natural disasters and climate change pose an existential threat to women's livelihoods, particularly for indigenous women and girls, who are heavily impacted by the risks connected to climate change, environmental degradation, the loss of biodiversity, and barriers to access food and water security. CEDAW's forthcoming General Recommendation on indigenous women and girls recommends that States parties ensure that indigenous women and girls have equal opportunities to meaningfully and effectively participate in decision-making related to the environment, disaster risk reduction and climate change. Disaster risk reduction strategies should be gender-responsive and sensitive to indigenous knowledge systems, including indigenous women's knowledge on the protection of land and water resources.

The Committee is moreover alarmed by the increasing attacks, threats, harassment and killings faced by indigenous women human rights defenders advancing their environmental, land and territorial rights, and those advocating against the implementation of development projects without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned. They are particularly targeted due to their leadership, their defiance of socially expected roles and opposition to particular economic interests. General Recommendation No. 39 therefore calls on States to ensure the safety and support the work of indigenous women human rights defenders engaged in advocacy for environmental protection and climate justice.

Global pushback against women's rights

At this year's Commission on the Status of Women, Secretary-General António Guterres called for a push back against the anti-rights pushback, recalling that gender inequalities and injustices have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, millions of women and girls have been driven out of work or school and relegated to domestic roles during the pandemic. We continue to witness a rise of conservative narratives, a renewed emphasis on traditional values and attacks against the so-called "gender ideology". The pushback against women's rights is

particularly acute in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights. A recent example is the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court striking down Roe v. Wade, a near half-century legal precedent that has protected women's right to choose to have an abortion. In a statement issued shortly after the Supreme Court decision, the Committee expressed its solidarity with women and girls in the United States and urged the United States administration to adhere to the CEDAW Convention.

The Committee stands united with feminist movements to protect hard-won gains on women's rights from the backlash. CEDAW is alarmed by the risk of erosion of the international multilateral system for the protection of women's rights, such as 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 8 March, the Committee together with other independent women's rights mechanisms issued a statement calling on "the international community, first and foremost States, to reaffirm the existing legal frameworks and to allocate greater efforts towards their effective implementation in order not to erode the established rights that these frameworks protect."

The need to strengthen the human rights treaty body system

As human rights face pushback and the multilateral system is under attack, it is crucial to strengthen the human rights treaty bodies. The Secretary-General in his Call to Action on Human Rights and his report "Our Common Agenda" has called for sustainable financing of the treaty body system and all human rights mechanisms.

At their 34th annual meeting in June, the Chairs of the ten treaty bodies addressed the key recommendations of the co-facilitators of the General Assembly's 2020 review of the treaty body system and decided to establish a predictable 8-year schedule of reviews that covers all treaty body reporting procedures and all States parties, with a follow-up review in between. The predictable schedule will bring various benefits for Member States and stakeholders, including improved predictability of the system and equal treatment of all States parties. The Chairs also agreed to continue aligning the Committee's working methods, including by ensuring accessibility and reasonable accommodation for experts with disabilities, and to use accessible, fit-for-purpose IT tools to replace any outdated work processes.

As outlined in the report of the Secretary-General on the status of the treaty body system (A/77/279) to the 77th session of the General Assembly, in order to implement the predictable schedule, it will be necessary to increase resources for the treaty bodies and their Secretariats to match the workload and to ensure adequate support for all mandated activities under the relevant treaties. This investment is worthwhile. The treaty body system provides an objective non-political assessment of human rights issues, together with guidance and technical support to States for implementing human rights reforms. The outcome of the dialogues held between the Committees and the State parties are the backbone of the entire UN human rights system, including the UPR.

The active support of Member States in the consideration of the resource requirements of the treaty body system by the General Assembly will be critical to the future success of these efforts.

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 brought local NGOs to our sessions; 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, yet the human and financial resources afforded by the Member States have not kept pace with the exigencies and the growth of our work, particularly under the individual communications and inquiry procedures. I count on your support to address these resource issues so that we can 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.