Sixty-seventh 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,

Today is the first time that I have the honour to address this forum in my capacity as newly elected Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

From among the many issues the Committee has worked on in the past 12 months, I would like to focus on CEDAW's recent work on women, peace and security, in particular on Afghanistan and Ukraine; on women's equal and inclusive representation in decision-making systems; and on the priority theme of the CSW this year.

More than one year after the launch of the military aggression against Ukraine, I wish to reiterate the deep concern of the Committee about the war in Ukraine and the grave humanitarian situation faced by the affected civilian populations. In October 2022, CEDAW reviewed the ninth periodic report of Ukraine and issued recommendations to the State party to protect and promote women's rights in this challenging context, including the rights of women living in conflict-affected areas and internally displaced women.

CEDAW also offered technical assistance for the implementation of the recommendations to Ukraine, which extended an invitation to the Committee to conduct a technical follow-up visit to the country. CEDAW's task force on Ukraine, established in March 2022, is exploring this possibility but is facing logistical and resource limitations.

The grave humanitarian situation of women and girls in Afghanistan is also of similar concern to CEDAW. In April 2022, the chair of the CEDAW task force on Afghanistan, Bandana Rana, and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, Reem Alsalem, undertook a joint technical

visit to Afghanistan. The visit served to obtain an insight into the situation of women and girls in the country; devise strategies for protecting their human rights and follow up on CEDAW's request dated January 2022 for an exceptional report on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. This request was the first interaction by a human rights treaty body with the Afghan de facto authorities.

In January 2023, the Committee received a report from the de facto authorities. CEDAW will continue to consider the situation of women's rights in Afghanistan, in consultation with other human rights mechanisms, such as the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, who have been mandated to submit a report on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan to the Human Rights Council in June 2023.

Two weeks ago, during its 84th session in Geneva, CEDAW held a half-day of general discussion on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems with broad participation by States parties, civil society and experts, as the first step in the elaboration of a draft general recommendation on this crucial topic. The equal and inclusive representation of women, including those from disadvantaged groups, in decision-making systems is a matter of human rights. But it is also essential for addressing the crises and challenges the world is facing. There is growing evidence that women's leadership in decision-making results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to the people's needs, a wider and more responsive range of equitable policy options, enhanced cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and more sustainable peace.

The topic of the general recommendation is also closely linked to this year's priority theme of the CSW: 'Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls'. One of the markers of innovation and

technological change will be the growing influence of artificial intelligence. It is crucial that women are equally represented in the design of and decision-making on artificial intelligence, as otherwise discrimination against women will continue in automated systems that will significantly shape our future. If this technology is not accessible, usable, and available to disadvantaged groups of women, including older women, women and girls with disabilities and rural women and girls, the talent of countless women and girls from all over the world will be left behind.

CEDAW's general recommendation on women's equal and inclusive representation in decision-making systems will be issued in the fall of 2024. At the same time, the United Nations will convene the Summit of the Future. It is high time to share the power and ensure gender parity and the inclusion of the disadvantaged groups of women in decision-making systems, if we are to achieve the SDGs and get them back on track before it is too late.

Over the past year, the CEDAW Committee continued to carry out its mandated activities under the Convention and the Optional Protocol. It adopted 24 concluding observations following constructive dialogues with States parties; 14 lists of issues in relation to periodic reports received from States parties, and 10 lists of issues prior to reporting under the simplified reporting procedure. However, further reducing the current backlog of 45 State party reports will require additional human and financial resources to support the work of CEDAW.

Under article 2 of the Optional Protocol, ratified by 115 States parties, CEDAW took action on 9 individual complaints, finding violations in cases concerning gender-based violence against women, including sexual violence against a girl and obstetric violence; judicial gender stereotyping in a rape case; failure to provide gender-sensitive drug therapy and rehabilitation to a pregnant woman; and continuing discrimination against women victims of sexual violence during the Second World War.

Under article 8 of the Optional Protocol, the Committee undertook a confidential inquiry visit to a State party and adopted the assessment of the follow-up report received from a State party in response to the Committee's inquiry report. It also requested country visits in relation to several pending inquiry proceedings.

CEDAW also continued to harmonize its working methods with those of other human rights treaty bodies. Importantly, it decided to introduce the simplified reporting procedure as the default procedure for the review of State party reports, with an opt-out option for States parties that wish to be reviewed under the traditional procedure. Only 13 of the 189 States parties to the Convention have opted out from the simplified reporting procedure to date.

Before I close, I wish to thank our partners, including the Inter-Agency Group on CEDAW Reporting, comprising UN Women, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, IOM, and FAO, which continued to provide invaluable information through United Nations Country Teams; UNHCR; IPU; the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW) Asia-Pacific that continued coordinating the remote NGO briefings during our sessions; and the various national human rights institutions and representatives of local women's organizations, who provided country-specific information to the Committee. I would also like to thank the International Disability Alliance and CERMI Women's Foundation for their generous support in providing captioning and international sign language interpretation during the Committee's informal public meetings with non-governmental organizations and national human rights institutions.

Finally, let me thank OHCHR for its support as CEDAW's Secretariat. Although the work of CEDAW has become more complex, the human and financial resources afforded by the Member States of the United Nations have not kept pace with the growth of our work, especially under the

individual communications and inquiry procedures. We therefore call on the General Assembly to approve additional resources to address the inadequate staffing levels to support the work of the human rights treaty bodies so that we can continue to meet the expectations placed on CEDAW by women across the world.

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