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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 first 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 the elected Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW Committee).

In February, CEDAW elected a new Bureau and welcomed six newly elected members. Over the past year, the Committee held dialogues with 24 States parties in Geneva and adopted concluding observations on their reports, preventing a further increase of its current backlog of 45 received State party reports that are pending review. In addition, it adopted 11 lists of issues in relation to reports from States parties and 12 lists of issues prior to reporting under the simplified reporting procedure. Of the 189 States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW Convention), only 13 have opted out from simplified reporting procedure since the Committee's decision in 2022 to make it the default procedure for the submission of periodic reports.

Under article 2 of the Optional Protocol, ratified by 115 States parties, CEDAW took action on 11 individual complaints. It found violations of the authors' rights in 6 cases concerning violence against a disappeared girl; obstetric violence; non-refoulement; failure to provide gender-sensitive drug therapy and rehabilitation to a pregnant woman; continuing discrimination against women victims of sexual violence during World War II; and discrimination against a rural women human rights defender in a land dispute. Under article 8 of the Optional Protocol, the Committee conducted a confidential inquiry visit to a State party and adopted the assessment of the follow-up report received from another State party in response to an inquiry report. It also requested country visits in relation to several pending inquiry proceedings.

CEDAW's work on general recommendations

In October 2022, CEDAW adopted its General Recommendation No. 39, which provides guidance to States parties to implement their obligations under the Convention in relation to the rights of indigenous women and girls. It acknowledges

that indigenous women and girls face intersecting forms of discrimination based on sex, gender, indigenous status, and other factors, and calls on States parties to prevent, prohibit and punish all forms of gender-based violence against indigenous women and girls, including indigenous women human rights defenders and environmental activists. It also calls on States parties to promote the meaningful and informed participation of indigenous women and girls in political and public life. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has translated General Recommendation No. 39 into several indigenous languages and will continue to do so throughout 2023.

Currently, the Committee is elaborating general recommendation No. 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, scheduled to be adopted in the fall of 2024, to coincide with the Summit of the Future. Building on existing good practices and with a focus on youth, innovation and the deconstruction of gender-biased patriarchal structures, it will make recommendations to different levels of governance and the private sector to reach parity between women and men in decision-making by 2030. It will stress that women's equal participation in decision-making is a crucial factor to overcome global challenges such as climate change, protracted conflicts and economic crises.

At its 84th session in Geneva in February, CEDAW held a half-day of general discussion on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, which was attended by many States parties, civil society organizations and experts. The Committee continues engaging with women leaders and experts through a series of academic expert group meetings that will feed into the draft general recommendation. In early 2024, CEDAW will be publish the first draft with a call for comments by all stakeholders. In addition, 5 regional consultations will be organized to ensure that the general recommendation is tailored to the needs of each region.

Another draft general recommendation, on gender stereotypes, is on the horizon. CEDAW plans to adopt a concept note at its upcoming October session.

To provide guidance to States parties on the implementation of their obligations and accountability as set out in General Recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, the Committee's Working Group on gender-based violence against women is

preparing a guidance note. It approved its first two sections on conflict-related sexual violence and harmful practices, respectively. It is also elaborating a position paper on a proposed second CEDAW Optional Protocol on violence against women.

Women, peace and security

The Committee remains deeply concerned that sexual violence continues to be utilized as a means of warfare in armed conflicts across the globe. Recently, a UN mechanism approached CEDAW to request an exceptional report from a State party, where conflict-related sexual violence, including exploitation of prostitution, is reportedly rampant in camps for internally displaced persons.

Through its Ukraine task force, CEDAW continues to monitor the situation of women and girls affected by the war against Ukraine. In October 2022, the Committee 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. It 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. In May, CEDAW replied that it is keen to accept the invitation, as soon as the necessary logistical and logistical support can be ensured.

In January, CEDAW received a response from the de facto authorities in Kabul to its request for information on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. The information has been published on the CEDAW website and referred to in a recent report on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls (A/HRC/53/21). The CEDAW task force on Afghanistan closely consults with these and other relevant human rights mechanisms, including the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls.

Harmonization of working methods

Over the past year, CEDAW also continued to streamline and harmonize its working methods with those of other treaty bodies. In May, CEDAW and the Committee on the Rights of the Child for the first time held back-to-back dialogues

with a State party during their pilot review of the reports of Sao Tomé and Principe. This pilot allowed the Committees to formulate several joint recommendations in relation to issues affecting the rights of girls, such as child marriage, school drop-out and early pregnancy, in addition to separate treaty-specific recommendations.

Also in cooperation with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, CEDAW has endorsed a joint statement on "Safeguarding girls' lives, health and future through minimizing unwanted pregnancies and guaranteeing access to safe abortion", to be issued on the International Day of the Girl Child on 11 October.

CEDAW furthermore adopted a methodology for the examination of State party reports in the absence of a delegation, drawing on the practices of several other treaty bodies, and continued its pilot project for structuring constructive dialogues with States parties thematically rather than by clusters of articles of the CEDAW Convention, to be decided on a case-by-case basis by the respective country task force.

Treaty body strengthening process

General Assembly resolution 68/268 mandated the inter-governmental 2020 review process of the human rights treaty body system, that was led by Switzerland and Morocco as co-facilitators and resulted in outcome recommendations (A/75/601).

At their 35th annual meeting in May/June, the Chairs of the ten human rights treaty bodies reaffirmed their decision to establish a predictable 8-year schedule of reviews that covers all States parties, with a follow-up review in-between, provided that the necessary resources can be approved; to continue aligning the Committees' working methods; and to use accessible IT tools to replace any outdated work processes. The Chairs also welcomed an OHCHR Working Paper on options for the development of an implementation plan for their conclusions reached at their 34th annual meeting in 2022, based on the outcome of the 2020 inter-governmental review process. They considered that the Working Paper provides possible elements for the next biennial General Assembly resolution on the human rights treaty body system in December 2024, which should include a budget to implement the conclusions. The Chairs decided to establish a treaty body coordination mechanism on the simplification and harmonization of working methods and substantive coordination on common issues, as a sub-organ to the Chairs' meetings. The Chairs also called for

several improvements to increase accessibility and the provision of reasonable accommodation in the context of the work of all treaty bodies.

Please allow me to recall the Secretary-General's report to the 77th session of the General Assembly on the status of the treaty body system (A/77/279), which stresses that the implementation of a predictable review calendar requires increased resources for the treaty bodies and their Secretariats to match the workload and ensure adequate support for mandated activities under the relevant human rights treaties. The active support of Member States in the consideration of the resource requirements by the General Assembly will be critical to the future success of the treaty body system.

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; the International Disability Alliance and CERMI Women's Foundation, which provided captioning and international sign language interpretation during the Committee's informal public meetings with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and national human rights institutions (NHRIs) over the past year; and the various NHRIs and NGO representatives, who provided country-specific information to the Committee.

Finally, let me thank OHCHR for its support as the Secretariat of CEDAW. 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, I thank you for this opportunity and stand ready to answer any questions you may wish to pose.