Sixty-eighth 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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Mr. Chair,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today is the second and last time that I have the honour to address this forum in my capacity as Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee).

From among the many issues the CEDAW Committee has worked on in the past 12 months, I would like to focus on CEDAW's recent work on women, peace and security; on gender-based violence against women; and on women's equal and inclusive representation in decision-making systems.

The CEDAW Committee deplores the high toll of victims, mainly women and children, killed, wounded, and displaced by the war in Gaza/Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel. In a recent statement, the Committee called for an immediate and sustained ceasefire and a peaceful and lasting resolution of the armed conflict that involves the leadership and decision-making of both Israeli and Palestinian women.

More than one two years after the launch of the military aggression against Ukraine, the CEDAW Committee, through its Task Force, continues to monitor the situation of women and girls affected by the war and has been briefed last month by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine. In May 2023, the Committee responded to the Ukrainian government that it is keen to accept its invitation to conduct a technical follow-up visit to the country as soon as the necessary logistical support can be ensured.

Also, the Task Force on Afghanistan continues to monitor violations of women's human rights in the country. In a statement adopted last month, CEDAW Committee observed that the system of institutionalized violations of women's human rights in Afghanistan may amount to gender persecution, which is recognized as a crime against humanity in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and that those responsible should be held accountable.

The CEDAW Committee is also deeply concerned that sexual violence continues to be utilized as a means of warfare in armed conflicts across the globe; alarmed by reports of conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls, including sexual exploitation in IDP camps in a State party to the CEDAW Convention. In this regard, the Committee requested an exceptional report from that State party, and it adopted a list of issues prior to the submission of the exceptional report, which was transmitted to the State party concerned last month.

It is important to mention that the CEDAW Committee addresses all forms of gender-based violence against women, including new forms such as online violence. Through the working group on gender-based violence, the CEDAW Committee recently issued a background paper that analyses how the work of the Committee comprehensively covers all issues related to gender-based violence against women and girls under the State reporting, individual complaint, and inquiry procedures, as well as in its general recommendations.

The CEDAW Committee is honoured to co-chair the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform) this year, together with MESECVI, the follow-up mechanism to the Belem Do Pará Convention of the Inter-American system. The EDVAW Platform is made up of 7 independent United Nations and regional expert mechanisms that seek to

improve the implementation of international and regional legal frameworks dedicated to ending discrimination and gender-based violence against women. On 8 March, it issued a joint statement titled ‘Awareness and action: Poverty, inequality, and gender-based violence against women’.

The CEDAW Committee has continued to work on its draft of general recommendation No. 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, scheduled to be adopted in October, 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, this new general recommendation will make recommendations to different levels of governance and the private sector to reach parity between women and men in decision-making by 2030.

In 2023, Committee members participated in several academic expert meetings on issues of particular relevance for the general recommendation, such as women’s equal participation in decision-making in the world of work, in international bodies and in the development of artificial intelligence. Earlier this month, the Committee published the initial draft of the general recommendation with a call for comments by stakeholders. In close cooperation with UN Women, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights will hold six regional consultations between now and May in Istanbul, Cairo, Addis Ababa, Bogota and in two other locations to ensure that the general recommendation is tailored to the needs of each region.

The topic of the general recommendation is closely linked to this year’s priority theme of the CSW: ‘Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective’. The equal and inclusive representation of women in all their diversity in decision-making systems is vital to strengthening institutions and overcoming global challenges such as climate change, protracted conflicts, and economic crises.

Women's lived realities must be equally recognized and valorised in decision-making to ensure women's economic empowerment and the inclusion of a gender perspective in the allocation of financial resources.

Another draft general recommendation, on gender stereotypes, is on the horizon. The CEDAW Committee has already adopted the concept note at its 87th session.

Over the past year, the 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 as well as concluding observations on the review of one State party in the absence of a delegation. It also adopted 9 lists of issues in relation to periodic reports received from States parties, 12 lists of issues prior to reporting under the simplified reporting procedure, and one list of issues prior to the submission of an exceptional report requested by the Committee. However, further reducing the current backlog of 37 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, the Committee took action on 10 individual complaints, finding violations in in the following cases: a case concerning discrimination against a rural woman human rights defender in a land dispute; a case of non-identification of women victims of trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation resulting in failure to ensure access to justice; a case of non-refoulement; and a case of sexual harassment of women in detention. I have to stress that the Committee regrets that the meeting time of its Working Group on Communications has been reduced from 10 to 7 days this year.

Under article 8 of the Optional Protocol, the Committee adopted its report of an inquiry concerning restrictive access to legal abortion, which will be made public after the expiry of the six-month period for the State party concerned to make observations.

In December, it also undertook a confidential inquiry visit to a State party and requested country visits in relation to several other pending inquiry proceedings.

Over the past year, CEDAW continued to harmonize its working methods with those of other human rights treaty bodies. In May 2023, the CEDAW Committee and the Committee on the Rights of the Child for the first time held back-to-back dialogues with 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.

CEDAW furthermore adopted a methodology for the examination of State party reports in the absence of a delegation, drawing on the practices of other treaty bodies, and amended its rules of procedure to provide for the possibility of adopting provisional concluding observations following the review of a State party in the absence of a delegation; provisional concluding observations are made final after the expiry of the time limit for the State party to submit observations.

Before I close, I wish to thank our partners, in particular UN Women for its support to our draft general recommendation No. 40, for generously supporting the participation of 5 CEDAW experts in the CSW68, and for coordinating the Inter-Agency Group on CEDAW Reporting, comprising also OHCHR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, IOM, and FAO, which continued to provide invaluable information through United Nations Country Teams; UNHCR; IOM; IPU; the International Women's Rights Action Watch

(IWRAW) Asia-Pacific that continued coordinating the 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 CERMI Women's Foundation for its 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. In that regard, the Committee regrets that the United Nations no longer service public hybrid meetings with interpretation of the treaty bodies, which limits the accessibility of their work for NGO and NHRI representatives or other stakeholders, including those with disabilities.

Finally, let me thank OHCHR for its support as CEDAW's Secretariat despite inadequate staffing levels. As we stressed last month in our letter of the treaty body Chairs to the President of the General Assembly, "we are deeply concerned that the limited resources available to the treaty bodies are being further reduced due to Member States not paying their assessed contributions on time. This is of particularly grave concern, as the liquidity crisis comes at a moment where our world needs human rights monitoring and the prevention of human rights violations more than ever. […] If human rights treaty bodies' sessions were to be suspended for the first time in their over six decades of history for financial reasons, together with visits to prevent torture and other human rights violations, the harm would be concrete and irreversible. When Member States do not pay their assessed contributions to the United Nations budget in full and on time, they undermine monitoring and weaken compliance with their human rights treaty obligations."

On behalf of CEDAW Committee, I thank you for this opportunity and I am at your disposal to answer any questions you may wish to pose.