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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Thirty-ninth session (23 July to 10 August 2007)
25th anniversary celebration
23 July 2007

Statement by
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Vice-Chairperson
Commission on the Status of Women

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegations,
Representatives of the United Nations system and agencies

It is a great pleasure to be here today – representing the new Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women – on the opening day of the thirty-ninth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Committee’s work. There is certainly ample cause for celebration of the contribution that the Committee has made to the advancement of women worldwide and the recognition and respect of their rights.

Over 60 years ago, the Commission on the Status of Women was established to promote the advancement of women. Its earliest focus was on standard setting to protect the human rights of women and on awareness-raising about the status of women throughout the world. Not long after its creation in 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women became involved in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ensured that provisions on women’s equality with men were included. Moreover, the Economic and Social Council arranged for the Commission on the Status of Women to be represented by its officers at the sessions of the Commission on Human Rights that were devoted to consideration of the draft international bill of human rights. This was a pivotal part of the early work of the Commission on the Status of Women to codify the rights of women; it is credited with helping to ensure that the new instruments would apply equally to men and women.

Madam Chairperson,

We will also recall that a committee selected from within the Commission on the Status of Women began drafting in 1965 what became the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which was adopted by the General Assembly on 7 November 1967. The impact of this Declaration was inadequate and the need for a legally

binding comprehensive instrument was soon recognized. The Commission on the Status of Women therefore worked on a convention on the elimination of discrimination against women from 1972 to 1976. Three years later, on 18 December 1979, the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The drafting process was not an easy one. There were diverging views on key issues, including on how compliance with the new instrument should be monitored. Some delegations would have preferred to see the Commission on the Status of Women take on this responsibility, although it was recognized that the Commission already had a heavy workload. There were also concerns that the establishment of another body would undermine the prestige of the Commission on the Status of Women or would interfere in its work. The viewpoint that prevailed, as we all know, was that a committee of independent experts would be established. It met for the first time in October 1982, and on behalf of the Commission on the Status of Women, I am honoured to be part of the celebration of your anniversary today.

Madam Chairperson,

The role of the Commission on the Status of Women in support of promoting women's rights did not stop with the elaboration of the draft treaty. It was acutely aware of the reality of widespread violations of women's rights and persistent discrimination against women and, in March 1994, the Commission on the Status of Women agreed to examine the feasibility of introducing the right to petition the Committee about violations of Convention rights. One Committee member was designated to participate as a resource person in the subsequent negotiations of the Commission. Work on the Optional Protocol – with its communications procedure and its inquiry procedure – took place from 1996 to 1999. This new procedural instrument entered into force on 22 December 2000, and responsibility for action under both procedures was entrusted to the Committee.

Madam Chairperson,

The Commission on the Status of Women has recognized that the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and the fulfilment of the obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are mutually reinforcing in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. In accordance with the recommendation of the Platform for Action (paragraph 322), the Committee regularly takes the Platform for Action into account when considering the reports that States parties submit to the Committee under article 18 of the Convention. The Committee has noted that the 12 critical areas of concern are compatible with the Convention and within its mandate. The Committee also asks States parties in all its concluding comments to widely disseminate the Platform for Action and the outcome of its review at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Over the last quarter century, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women have built a strong relationship based on mutual respect and cooperation – with each contributing to the work of the other. It has now become customary to extend an invitation to the Chairperson of the Committee to address the Commission at its annual sessions. Members of the Committee have been regularly asked to participate in panel discussions and expert group meetings in connection with themes under the Commission’s consideration. As recently as in 2006, when the Commission revisited its organization and methods of work, it invited all gender-specific United Nations entities and other relevant United Nations entities, including the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, to contribute, where appropriate, to the discussion on the priority theme of the Commission.

Madam Chairperson,

I would like to congratulate the Committee on its remarkable achievements in the field of women’s human rights and gender equality during its first twenty-five years. I wish it continued success in the next twenty-five years and beyond and trust that it will maintain its strong ties with the Commission on the Status of Women.

Thank you.