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## **Commemorative Roundtable**

*Convention on the Elimination of All Form of  
Discrimination against Women:  
25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Adoption by  
UN General Assembly*

**Statement on behalf of  
United Nations entities  
by**

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**New York, 13 October 2004**

Distinguished panelists and colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address this commemorative round table on behalf of many parts of the UN system. Today I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Labour Organization, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNAIDS, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, UNESCO, the United Nations Children's Fund, UNIFEM, and the World Health Organization.

The UN family always strives to speak with one voice, and today we are actually doing it.

There is no better occasion for unity than the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

CEDAW spells out the universal human rights of women, including the rights to political participation, equality before the law, equality in marriage and family life, in the world of work, in education and health, and cultural life. In a unique provision, States are also required to ensure that rural women are able to enjoy their rights, including the rights to benefit from development and enjoy equality in inheritance and land ownership, and States are called on to consider temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between women and men to eliminate discrimination.

The Convention affirms the right to family planning and is the only international human rights treaty which cites the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women as critical forces in shaping gender roles and family relations.

During its twenty-five years, the Convention, particularly the work of its monitoring body, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, has had remarkable impact. States have changed laws, policies and programmes as a result of the Convention, with these changes being seen perhaps most clearly in the area of violence

against women, which the Committee has worked so hard to ensure is addressed as a human rights issue. The Committee has also addressed the issues of gender equality in the world of work, HIV/AIDS, trafficking and smuggling, as well as the situation of refugee, asylum seeking and other displaced women and girls.

The Convention also provided the basis for provisions in many important global agreements. Important here are the agreements, particularly on women's reproductive and sexual health rights, reached ten years ago in Cairo at the International Conference on Population and Development, and in 1995 in Beijing at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Lawyers and judges have relied on the Convention in their quest for justice for women. Parliaments, non-governmental organizations, national human rights institutions and others have been inspired by the Convention as they have pursued their human rights work. And women and girls around the world have been empowered to claim their rights because the Convention has spelt out their terms.

During the 25 years since its adoption, the Convention has guided the work of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in many ways. UN entities around the world have supported the ratification of CEDAW, and its Optional Protocol, as well as the work of the Committee. They have also urged its domestication—or the reflection of its provisions into national law.

The UN system has worked, and continues to work, to build awareness and capacity at the local level to bring the words of CEDAW to life. Support is provided to women's and girls' rights organizations, youth groups, women's health groups, legal associations and other organizations to increase awareness of the Convention's provisions, its reporting system and the monitoring mechanisms established under its Optional Protocol, as well as of strategies to implement its provisions.

To further implementation of the Convention, training is provided to government officials and to the personnel of judicial systems, including police, paralegals, lawyers and judges.

UN agencies, funds and programmes also provide direct support to the Committee. Data and information are provided so that the Committee can review country reports on the basis of the most up-to-date knowledge of the situation on the ground. And support is provided at the country level to enable civil society to participate actively in the reporting process. In addition, technical assistance is provided to support the Committee in developing general recommendations, which offer States parties clear guidance on their obligations under the Convention.

Twenty-five years after its adoption, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has assumed even greater importance as the UN system strives to take a rights-based approach to development, humanitarian and peace-building activities, and to help nations achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Today a central organizing principle of the United Nations is the recognition that no enduring solution to society's most pressing problems can be found without the full participation and empowerment of the world's women and girls, and the Convention provides a template to achieve those goals.

Human rights have been in the hearts of many people throughout history. The creation of the United Nations allowed for the dream of human rights to be translated into binding legal obligations. States have made great progress in ensuring that women and men, girls and boys truly enjoy their rights, but much more remains to be done. Today, on CEDAW's anniversary, we pledge to take even greater action to ensure that the next 25 years mark greater progress in the struggle to end all forms of discrimination against women.

Thank you.