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**Statement by
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VICE-CHAIRPERSON

**COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

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**Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and friends,**

As Vice-Chairperson of the CEDAW Committee, which is charged with overseeing the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, I am honoured to have been invited to address and engage in an interactive dialogue with the Third Committee of the General Assembly, pursuant to its resolution 66/131. We appreciate your commitment, which we observe in our everyday work. We know how crucial it is for millions of women who, thanks to this common involvement, know a better future and contribute to build a world founded on the rule of law, social justice and sustainable development. The rights of women, who are often the first victims of violence, conflicts and all forms of discrimination and at the same time the main drivers of a fair development, need to be considered as a crucial issue.

I am also delighted and proud to announce that this year – 2012 – marks the 30th anniversary of the CEDAW Committee. In a small conference room in Vienna in October of 1982, CEDAW experts addressed a series of procedural questions that had to be dealt with before the Committee could delve into substantive issues. From that modest beginning, CEDAW grew to provide a dynamic interpretation of the Convention and later its Optional Protocol. Now, this Committee stands as a strong and internationally respected voice for the rights of women and girls everywhere. To mark this occasion, the Committee held a very successful 30th anniversary event in New York in July supported by OHCHR and UN Women focusing on political participation of women, and is also having another event on 18 October supported by OHCHR and the International Organization of the Francophonie focusing on the human rights of women in armed conflict and post-conflict in French-speaking Africa. The Turkish Government is additionally hosting another 30th Anniversary Event and retreat for the Committee in November in Istanbul to advance a number of pending matters, including treaty-body strengthening and working methods as well as various general recommendations. The Committee is very grateful to the Turkish Government for this opportunity and for its generosity.

We all know that, despite the fact that some progress has been realized in national legislations and the global consensus reached on women's rights, we need to maintain our common struggle. Progress should never be taken for granted. It is crucial that we remain vigilant regarding important remaining challenges, such as underrepresentation of women in political and public life and marginalisation of women in post-conflict reconstruction efforts, as well as harmful practices, domestic violence, trafficking, and violence in conflict situations.

Our common challenge must aim at giving a new impetus to our joint cooperation for the concrete implementation of our Convention.

I would like to pay tribute to the dedicated women and men who serve and have served as members of the CEDAW Committee and, I would like to thank them for their passion and commitment to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. To date the Committee has reviewed over 400 country reports. Through its constructive dialogues with governments and its concluding observations, it has provided guidance on how to improve the situation of women in the countries concerned. Its general recommendations have helped to clarify and promote understanding of the rights protected by the Convention and the specific nature of discrimination against women. Moreover, the Committee's jurisprudence under the Optional Protocol is an emerging area of importance which has proved to be influential in the creation of international women's rights jurisprudence.

We are fully aware of the constant challenges that concern all of humanity, including women's access to justice, to education, to health, and to decision-making positions in the political sphere. The recognition and promotion of the rights of women in the world should be the active principle of the development of modern societies

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Status of the Convention and Optional Protocol

Turning to the status of the Convention and its Optional Protocol, I note that 187 States are party to the Convention. We encourage the remaining States to join the global process of ratification of the Convention. The Convention's Optional Protocol, which mandates the Committee to receive and consider petitions and inquiries into allegations of grave or systematic violations of the Convention, has now been accepted by 104 States parties. Cote d'Ivoire is the most recent State to have acceded to the Optional Protocol on 20 January 2012.

Reporting

The Committee has now considered or has scheduled for consideration all long-overdue reports, that is to say, reports that are 10 years or more overdue. The Committee considers, on average, 24 reports annually but has not recently been able to keep pace with the rate of submission. Currently, 43 reports are awaiting consideration by the Committee. The Committee is aware that timely consideration is a significant incentive for States parties to report in accordance with the terms of the Convention. Currently, under the Optional Protocol, the Committee is examining a number of individual communications and has 6 inquiries, including requests for inquiries, pending consideration. The Committee has also recently made two press releases on the human rights situation of women in Syria and on the need for a gender perspective in the text of the Arms Trade Treaty. This complex work of the Committee is requiring additional resources.

Resources

While recognising the remarkable quality of support provided by the Secretariat, the Committee is very concerned about the efforts undertaken to support the work of the Committee. It would like that this support be reinforced by appropriate resources to allow it to pursue its mission. In this context, I would like to draw your attention to the report of the Secretary-General on measures to improve further effectiveness, harmonization and reform of the treaty body system (A/66/344).

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Distinguished delegates,**

Treaty Body Strengthening/Meeting of Chairpersons

On behalf of the Committee, I welcome the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Navi Pillay, on strengthening the United Nations human rights treaty body system. This report is the culmination of a three year long consultation among all key stakeholders in which the CEDAW Committee has played an active role through its participation in the Dublin 2009 and 2011 meetings and in other related consultations, including those held with States in New York in April 2012. The report contains concrete proposals aimed at creating a more efficient and inclusive treaty bodies system of independent review and guidance on the implementation of international human rights standards. It addresses recommendations to treaty bodies, States parties, national human rights institutions, civil society and the United Nations entities.

In an effort to commence implementing the recommendations addressed to the treaty bodies in the High Commissioner's report, at its last meeting, held in Addis Ababa in June

2012, the Chairpersons endorsed guidelines on the independence and impartiality of treaty bodies' members and also strongly recommended its prompt adoption by all the Committees

For its part, the CEDAW Committee adopted a resolution at its 52nd session supporting in principle the Addis Ababa guidelines noting that the Committee would continue to discuss this issue. In this regard, you should be aware that the Committee has already undertaken measures to increase the efficiency of its work. The Committee continues to carefully review its working methods in light of the proposals contained in the High Commissioner's report and in the observations of the State parties. It is discussing such matters currently at its 53rd session taking place in Geneva. I am pleased to report that various proposals contained in the report reflect existing practices of the Committee, which prides itself on its efficient working methods. In addition, I underline that we are fully committed to continue reinforcing the constructive dialogue with State parties and the coordination regarding the promotion and implementation of the Convention.

Furthermore, in order to harmonize working methods in the context of the treaty body strengthening process, the CEDAW Committee will hold a second meeting with the Human Rights Committee during its 53rd session to discuss individual complaint mechanisms and proposals contained in the High Commissioner's report on treaty body strengthening.

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Partners

The Committee continues to engage with the States parties and to encourage the input and support of non-governmental organizations, the role of national human rights institutions in its work and in follow-up to its recommendations, the role of parliamentarians in implementation of the Convention and other actors, including the United Nations programmes, funds and specialized agencies. The Committee continues to benefit from information submitted on countries under consideration by the United Nations country teams and is especially grateful to the Inter-Agency Group on CEDAW Reporting (comprised of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, FAO and UN Women), as well as UNHCR, ILO, IOM and IPU for providing country-specific information. The Committee has established a permanent framework of dialogue with the representatives of UN agencies, as well as with NGOs and national human rights institutions.

The Committee has a special relation of cooperation with UN Women rooted in its traditional links with the gender-related entities brought together under this new institution. We are pleased to report that UN Women is very supportive of the Committee's work regarding the elaboration of a general recommendation on access to justice, the draft general recommendation on the human rights of women in conflict and post-conflict by supporting regional consultations to obtain further input on this subject, as well as other activities, including a very successful 30th anniversary event in New York held during our 52nd session, which attracted over 500 participants, including representatives of the permanent missions, senior United Nations officials and civil society.

The Committee also meets with relevant special mandate holders to strengthen coordination. During the past year, the Committee met with Ms Rashida Manjoo, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences and with the Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and Practice, and other special procedures. The Chair will also participate in the upcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The Chair of CEDAW addresses the Commission and presents a report on the activities of the Committee annually.

On 20 July 2012, the Committee has been informed by the High Commissioner that the Committee's July session would be moved from New York to Geneva. The Committee is concerned about the serious detrimental impact of this decision on its interactions with key women's rights actors in New York, such as the CSW, which, for example, in its next session in March 2013 will consider the issue of violence against women, with UN Women, a key partner which is increasingly building its work on CEDAW, and with other UN agencies. This is also the case for State parties having representation only in New York and for many NGOs based in New York and in the region. The High Commissioner's decision seemed to be solely based on budgetary issues. While the Committee is fully aware of the financial crisis, it has constantly demonstrated its readiness to enhance the efficiency and quality of its work while ensuring savings to the Organisation (e.g. summary records are requested only for open meetings of the Committee are not translated, shorter and more focused concluding observations, limitations on the number of questions in its lists of issues and pre-session working groups of 5 members instead of the entire Committee). The Committee is concerned that such a decision seems to have been taken on the basis of a shortfall of less than \$100,000 in the cost of servicing the Committee in New York. The Committee remains concerned about the severe consequences of this decision on the effectiveness of its work.

It should be noted that the Convention clearly provides for the Committee's involvement in such a decision (in accordance with its article 20 (2)). Furthermore, paragraph 16 of the General Assembly Resolution 62/218 of 22 December 2007 urged "the Committee to evaluate progress" and decided "to assess the situation with regard to the location of the sessions of the Committee after two years, also taking into account the wider context of treaty body reform"

As a result, the Committee insists that the matter should be taken up within the context of the on-going Treaty Body Strengthening Process, and the decision should be taken only after such an assessment has been carried out.

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General Recommendations and Jurisprudence

To provide clarification and promote understanding of the Convention's substantive content and the specific nature of discrimination against women, the Committee, in addition to the constructive dialogues with the States parties and the resulting concluding observations, also elaborates general recommendations according to its mandate. The Committee is currently finalizing the adoption of the draft general recommendation on the economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution. The Committee is also in the process of elaborating a general recommendation on the human rights of women in conflict and post conflict situations. In this context, it held four regional consultations on the topic with stakeholders, between March and May 2012, with the support of OHCHR and UN Women. The Committee continues to elaborate the general recommendation on harmful practices in conjunction with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and is expected to endorse at this session two concept notes – one on access to justice and the other on rural women. The Committee has also decided to elaborate general recommendations on gender equality in the context of asylum and statelessness, gender equality in the context of natural disasters and climate change, and on education. Much of the work relating to general recommendations is done outside of plenary and intersessionally.

The Committee's general recommendations are a rich resource of legal and policy guidance and have addressed a number of core issues, including the conceptualization of violence against women as a form of discrimination against women, the development under the Convention of the States parties' obligation of due diligence, the elaboration of the notion

of non-discrimination and substantive equality that underpins the Convention, and the concept of intersecting forms of discrimination.

The Committee's jurisprudence under the Optional Protocol is an emerging area of importance. The views of the Committee have been influential in the creation of an international women's human rights jurisprudence, with the Committee's jurisprudence being used increasingly in regional human rights courts, such as the European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. One recent case has been referred to as a landmark decision as it represents the first case on maternal mortality decided by a treaty body.

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Activities of Committee Members

Committee members have as usual been very active in promoting the Convention and women's issues through speaking at numerous United Nations and non-United Nations fora. These opportunities are vital to raise awareness of the Convention and pressing issues for women. During this year, CEDAW experts took part in numerous events and capacity building initiatives involving the United Nations, regional organizations, governments and civil society partners on the Convention and related substantive topics on women's rights and empowerment.

**Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and friends,**

The Committee has worked with competence and dedication to assist States parties in complying with and implementing their treaty obligations under the Convention to the fullest extent, both de jure and de facto, and to stimulate legal and policy reform, and provide individual relief for the protection of the human rights of women and their advancement. Despite significant progress, there remain enormous challenges to achieve non-discrimination and gender equality. In all of its work, the Committee has strived to emphasize the specificity of discrimination against women and the need to give high prominence to the promotion and protection of all women's rights. As a result, it has become recognized as a legitimate and internationally respected voice for the human rights of women and girls worldwide.

Finally, I would like to briefly outline the Committee's foremost wishes towards a fruitful collaboration with the Third Committee:

- To consolidate our links with you and reinforce the role of the CEDAW Committee within the UN System, in accordance with the statement of the Secretary-General last year, which acknowledge the increasing importance of women's rights in the mandate of the United Nations;
- To improve our coordination on the issue of implementation and visibility of the Convention, in particular with regard to development public policies,
- To bring our efforts together in the successful implementation of the treaty body strengthening process;
- To enable the Committee to develop and strengthen its activities towards improving women's rights, thanks to your continued support.

In this regard and towards contributing to these goals, the Committee wishes to seek your support in maintaining its New York session.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, on behalf of the Committee, I thank for your trust and for this opportunity