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Opening address by Ms. Navanethem Pillay  
High Commissioner for Human Rights



Forty-fifth session of the Committee on the Elimination  
of Discrimination against Women  
18 January-5 February 2010

18 January 2010  
Palais des Nations, Room XVI, 10:00 am

Madam Chairperson,  
Distinguished members of the Committee,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to Geneva on the occasion of the forty-fifth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Let me seize this opportunity to convey to you my best wishes for the New Year. Your continued success is essential to improve the lives of women and girls around the world and achieve substantive equality between all women and men.

Allow me to bring to your attention a number of recent developments of interest to you that have taken place since your last session in July last year.

As you all know, 2009 marked the 30th anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of the CEDAW Convention and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its Optional Protocol. A series of events took place at national and regional levels to commemorate this anniversary throughout the year. The regional events were organized by OHCHR, UNIFEM and the United Nations regional commissions in the context of the fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. These celebrations culminated in a global event held on 3 December at United Nations Headquarters in New York which the Secretary-General, your Chairperson and myself attended.

On this occasion, I highlighted that the greatest strength of the Convention has been its capacity to empower individual women to recognize their human rights and claim them.

As you know, the United Nations Security Council resolution 1888 on women, peace and security, which was unanimously adopted on 30 September 2009 builds on the principles and obligations of previous Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and

1820 (2008) and expands the areas of action. It introduces several measures which demonstrate the commitment of the Security Council to effectively address the matter of sexual violence in conflict. The resolution requests the Secretary-General inter alia to appoint a Special Representative to lead, coordinate, and advocate efforts to end conflict-related sexual violence against women and children, and to identify and deploy a “team of experts” to situations of particular concern to assist governments in preventing conflict-related sexual violence and addressing impunity.

In respect of the allegations of mass rapes in Guinea following the events which took place in the Conakry stadium on 28 September 2009, the Secretary-General appointed three Commissioners to lead a Commission of Inquiry which included Ms. Pramila Patten, member of your Committee. Let me take this opportunity to commend her outstanding work and commitment which very much contributed to the success of the inquiry conducted under particularly difficult circumstances. The Secretary-General has transmitted the report of the Commission of Inquiry to the Government of Guinea, the Security Council, the Commission of the African Union, and the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

You may also be pleased to know that on 14 September 2009, the General Assembly adopted resolution 63/311, in which it supported the establishment of a new entity to deal with the rights of women. Four United Nations agencies, namely the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues (OSAGI) and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) will be consolidated into a composite entity, taking into account the existing mandates, tasked to promote the rights and well-being of women worldwide and gender equality. While the modalities governing the functioning of this entity are yet to be determined, we trust that it will improve coherence within the United Nations system and further strengthen the work of the Organization on women’s rights.

Regionally, in 2007, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) filed a case against Mexico before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for the disappearance and murders of three of the many women who have been attacked and killed in Ciudad Juárez. On 10 December 2009, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued an opinion finding Mexico in violation of regional human rights conventions.. The Court ordered Mexico to comply with a broad set of remedial measures including a national memorial, renewed investigations and reparations of over \$200,000 each to the families in the suit.

Dear Colleagues,

In relation to harmonisation of working methods, members of the different treaty bodies met here in Geneva for the tenth Inter-Committee Meeting at the end of November. I am sure that your Chairperson, who also chaired the Inter-Committee Meeting, as well as Ms. Pimentel and Ms. Zerdani who represented your Committee will provide you with further information, and that you will be interested in discussing and considering the recommendations and points of agreement identified during the meeting. The eleventh Inter-Committee meeting will take place at the end of June, focusing on the theme of lists of issues and targeted reports, taking into account the application of the common core document and the treaty specific reporting guidelines. Moreover, as suggested at the tenth meeting, one of the two annual ICM meetings will be transformed into a working group tasked to focus initially on strengthening follow-up. Thereafter, the working group could focus on other topics identified by the Inter-Committee Meeting. As usual, these points of agreement will need to be endorsed by the next Chairpersons Meeting in July this year. I understand that you will meet tomorrow with Mr. Ibrahim Salama, Director of our Human Rights Treaties Division, who will further brief you on these important developments. I am sure that this discussion will be very fruitful as I am aware that you will be adopting a methodology with respect to your follow-up procedure at this session.

On the broader level of strengthening the treaty body system, I encouraged all relevant stakeholders, in my statement at the 12<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, to initiate a process of reflection on how to streamline and strengthen the treaty body system to achieve better coherence and effectiveness. In this connection, I would like to draw your attention to an informal meeting of a number of former and current treaty bodies experts which took place in Dublin last November, organized by the University of Nottingham. The primary objective was to reflect on the future of the treaty bodies and propose a possible framework for strengthening the treaty body system. The Statement which was adopted at the end of the meeting has been circulated by the organizers to all treaty bodies and it is hoped that it would find your support. I would like to re-emphasize however, that this is the beginning of a process of reflection which I believe will offer numerous opportunities for members to participate and express their views in their individual capacity or as members of treaty bodies.

I am also confident that you will continue to strengthen your relationship with the special procedures mandate holders, in particular the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences. I am aware that your Chairperson extended an invitation to the new Special Rapporteur, Ms. Rashida Manjoo, to meet with you during this session. Ms. Manjoo was not able to come to Geneva this time, but I know that the Secretariat is seeking to organize another meeting at your next session in Geneva, in October 2010.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In March 2010, the Commission on the Status of Women will undertake a fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Emphasis will be placed on the sharing of experiences and good practices, with a view to overcoming remaining obstacles and new challenges, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals. I trust that the Women's Rights and Gender Unit will

provide you with more details on the involvement of my Office in this process during your meeting tomorrow.

Let me conclude by wishing you a very successful and productive session, and assure you of the full support of my Office and your secretariat to assist you in fulfilling your mandate.

Thank you