

Check against delivery

“53rd SESSION  
OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION  
AGAINST WOMEN”



Statement by Ms. Navi Pillay  
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GENEVA, 1 OCTOBER 2012

Madam Chairperson,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the **fifty-third session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women**. I would like to warmly congratulate the members who were re-elected to their seats at the last meeting of States parties in June, namely: Ms. Nicole Ameline, Ms. Barbara Bailey, Mr. Niklas Bruun, Ms. Silvia Pimentel and Ms. Xiaoqiao Zou. I also congratulate the newly elected members who will join the Committee at its next session in February 2013. I wish to express my deep appreciation to the outgoing members of the Committee and to wish you every success in your new endeavours in the future: Ms. Magalys Arocha Dominguez, Ms. Violet Tsisiga Awori, Ms. Indira Jaising, Ms. Soledad Murillo de la Vega, Ms. Victoria Popescu, and Ms. Zohra Rasekh.

## **30th Anniversary of CEDAW**

Allow me to congratulate the Committee as it celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. Over the 30 years, the Committee has established itself as an authoritative standard-setting body and a source of interpretation and guidance on how to implement women's rights.

To celebrate the progress made by the Committee and map out its work ahead OHCHR, at your request, issued a publication at the 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the Committee entitled '30 Years Working for Women's Rights'. The publication will also serve as a resource tool for States and other stakeholders to assist them in understanding the role and working methods of the Committee.

I would like to thank the International Organization of the Francophonie for their support in making this publication available in French and for co-organizing its launch, which will take place on 18 October. I would also wish to recognize the generosity of the Turkish

Government in hosting a 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary event in November in Istanbul to mark the occasion.

## **Treaty Bodies**

Madam Chairperson,

As you know, the **treaty body strengthening process** culminated with the release of my report on enhancing the treaty body system in June. I understand that the report and the guidelines stemming from the annual meeting of Chairpersons in Addis Ababa last June were discussed at your last session, with the Chairs recommending that each treaty body carefully review the recommendations addressed to them in my report and compare them with their current working methods, so as to determine the necessary steps to ensure their implementation. This is to be undertaken in coordination with the other treaty bodies, and the Chairs are to be informed on a biannual basis on progress made.

This Committee has played an active role in the treaty body strengthening process, with some of its working methods recognized as good practices in the report. The Committee's detailed examination on the implementation of a number of recommendations in the report will also highlight your commitment to States involved in the intergovernmental consultations.

The process is taking place in an **increasingly difficult global economic environment**. Voluntary contributions to the United Nations, including OHCHR, have begun to decline. While mandated activities of the Office should be fully financed by the regular budget approved by the General Assembly, they are chronically under-resourced. To maintain the necessary level of assistance required by the treaty bodies, we have been obliged to use voluntary contributions, or extra-budgetary resources.

The effect of the financial crisis has compelled us to implement a 7.5 percent cut across the board of all extra-budgetary resources this year. For the Treaties Division, which relies on these funds to finance

approximately one-third of its staff, these cuts directly impact its ability to service the treaty bodies. Let me assure you that we have been exploring all options to use our limited resources to help the treaty bodies maintain their pace of work, without sacrificing quality. It was against this background that the decision was made to move the Committee's July session to Geneva. I look to the understanding and active collaboration of the Committee in this regard.

But I must be frank: the worst is yet to come. We are currently preparing for next year's rounds of cuts, and preliminary indications point to a shortfall in extra-budgetary funds which will be at least as great as this year's.

While the Office will continue to do its utmost to provide the best possible servicing to the treaty bodies, the Committees will also need to review their working methods and priorities. The resources needed to do justice to the number of general recommendations under development, which now stands at 8, and activities, including days of general discussion and regional consultations, are simply not

available. Some Committees are for example limiting themselves to working on only one or two general comments at a time, and I would urge you to consider using a similar approach. I note that States have also called on the treaty bodies to better justify their use of resources, and to consider the resource implications of expansive tendencies to request more information or embark on new activities.

Ultimately, there has to be a global sustainable solution to the recurrent problems faced by treaty bodies and their chronic under-resourcing- precisely the premise upon which I launched the treaty body strengthening initiative.

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Moving now to activities within OHCHR, we recently adopted a **Gender Equality Strategic Plan for 2012-2013**. It envisages a number of actions to assist treaty bodies in mainstreaming a gender

perspective into their working methods and outputs, for example by reviewing existing internal treaty body guidelines and checklists to systematically reflect a gender perspective. Best practices are being compiled and a session on gender integration methodologies will be included in the induction training of treaty body experts from the coming year.

To further gender equality on the ground, OHCHR recently joined with UN Women and UNDP to implement a **program on women's access to justice**, designed to foster gender-sensitive service delivery, unbiased judicial decision-making, and constitutional and legal reform, thereby boosting women's capacity to claim their rights.

## **Human Rights Council**

In my address to the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, I underscored concerns regarding human rights and women's rights

violations relating to a number of country situations, including the on-going conflict in Syria.

I also presented a **report on technical guidance on the application of a human rights based approach to the implementation of policies and programs to reduce preventable maternal mortality and morbidity**. The report offers practical guidance for the operationalization of human rights in this critical area, and draws heavily from the work of the treaty bodies, particularly CEDAW, with references to the Convention, general recommendations on violence against women, female circumcision and the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention, as well as the decision of the Committee on *Alyne da Silva Pimentel Texeira v. Brazil* under the Optional Protocol. The Committee might suggest the guidance as a useful additional tool for States parties in its concluding observations.

## **Special Procedures**

I am also pleased to note references to the need to respect and protect women's rights by various Special Procedures mandate holders.

In her 2012 report to the Human Rights Council, the **Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo**, underscored that States should adopt a holistic approach to addressing gender related killings of women.

**Mr. Chaloka Beyani, the Independent Expert on the human rights of internally displaced persons**, expressed concern for the estimated 1.5 million people, including many women and children that have been internally displaced by the armed conflict in **Syria**. Following a visit to **Cote d'Ivoire**, Mr. Beyani highlighted the importance of meeting the special needs of particularly vulnerable

internally displaced persons, such as single female-headed households.

I am also pleased to note that Tunisia has accepted a visit of the **Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practice** in November.

I would finally like to note that the Secretary-General recently appointed **Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura of Sierra Leone as his Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict**, whom I am pleased to see will be participating in the Committee's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event on 18 October.

Madam Chairperson,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

I wish you successful deliberations and a productive session. Thank you for your attention and best wishes on your 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.