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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
51st Session



Opening Address by

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

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the fifty-first session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on behalf of the High Commissioner and extend to all of you my very best wishes for the New Year. With all of the work and challenges lined up for the new year, 2012 already feels no longer “new”. Let us join efforts to make the most of its promises and momentum for human rights and women’s rights, in particular.

Treaty Bodies

The treaty body strengthening process has reached a decisive stage. The series of meetings and statements on the treaty body strengthening process, which began in Dublin in November 2009, culminated in the “Dublin II” wrap-up meeting of 10 to 11 November 2011. Representatives of the convening organizations of all the consultations held to date attended this meeting, as did the Chairpersons of seven treaty bodies and several more treaty body members participating in their personal capacity.

The Committee was ably represented by your Chair, Ms. Silvia Pimentel. Participants at the Dublin meeting participated in a painstaking exercise drawing together the results of this long reflection process, providing a strategic synthesis of the proposals that had emerged, as well as presenting clear recommendations to all relevant stakeholders. The Outcome Document was shared with you electronically prior to the session and is now available in your binders. Concrete

recommendations are addressed to treaty bodies, States and OHCHR, respectively. At their most recent session just concluded one week ago, the Committee on the Rights of the Child as a whole endorsed the outcome document

Since the reflection process began, we have been confronted – now with greater frequency and interest – with the question of what will come next. While the issues might seem complex, the High Commissioner’s response is simple. There are recommendations for all stakeholders. All should do their part to reflect on what is expected of them and on what they can and wish to implement. Many recommendations cannot stand on their own but depend on others being implemented. I understand that all treaty body experts were invited to engage in a closed online discussion about various proposals. A more in-depth exchange on this topic is foreseen with my colleagues from the Human Rights Treaties Division during the session.

On another milestone development for the treaty-body system, the much anticipated tenth human rights monitoring body was created. The ten inaugural members of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances were elected on 31 May 2011 and held their first session in Geneva from 8 to 11 November 2011.

The High Commissioner and the Human Rights Mechanisms

As we advocate for women’s rights and gender equality worldwide, the High Commissioner is deeply committed to putting those principles into practice in her own Office. In September 2011, she signed the OHCHR Gender Equality Policy, which outlines a joint vision, strategic priorities and processes for integrating gender perspectives throughout the Office, both in regard to the work it undertakes and its own internal management processes. A strategic plan is

currently being prepared with a set of target and performance indicators translating the policy into concrete actions, including the support provided to this Committee. Recommended actions include making gender expertise available during the process of elaborating general comments and recommendations and multi-stakeholder cooperation at country level in the framework of CEDAW implementation and reporting.

The High Commissioner led a landmark discussion on human rights at the meeting of the United Nations Chief Executives Board in New York. Her presentation was an appeal for the United Nations system and the international community to hear the calls of the so-called “Arab Spring” and the current movements of civil society from Madrid to New York, to adopt a new development paradigm framed by human rights, to work more closely and meaningfully with civil society, and to engage in a more principled fashion with governments.

The High Commissioner also submitted to the Human Rights Council her report on discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity (A/HRC/19/41 dated 17 November 2011), pursuant to its resolution 17/19. The report concludes that based upon the information presented, a pattern of human rights violations emerges that demands a response. Governments and inter-governmental bodies have often overlooked violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The mandate of the Human Rights Council requires it to address this gap: the Council should promote “universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner.” The High Commissioner furthermore

recommended that Member States, *inter alia*, investigate all reported killings and other serious incidents of violence perpetrated against individuals because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity; take measures to prevent torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity; repeal laws used to criminalize individuals for homosexual conduct; and enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation.

The Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing has submitted her report on women and the right to adequate housing, which will be considered at the nineteenth session of the Human Rights Council. The report considers recent legal and policy advancements in the area of women's right to adequate housing, including issues related to inheritance, land and property, as well as strategies for overcoming persistent gaps in the implementation of those laws and policies. The report also includes specific recommendations on adopting a gender sensitive understanding of the right to adequate housing.

Human Rights Council

Turning to the Human Rights Council, the Council continues to closely follow the human rights situations in a number of States. It has established several international commissions of inquiry to respond to urgent crises. Most recently, at its Special Session on the human rights situation in Syria, the Council established a mandate of a Special Rapporteur as a result of the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria.

The Fourth Session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues was held on 29 and 30 November 2011 in Geneva and focused on concrete steps aimed at guaranteeing the rights of minority women, including, for example, the

right to education, effective political participation, and effective participation in economic, social and cultural life. I had the pleasure of participating in a side event at the Forum and can attest to the rich discussion which took place. The Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Ms. Rita Izsák, submitted a note to the Human Rights Council on guaranteeing the rights of minority women. In it, she affirmed that addressing the exclusion of minority women and promoting the enjoyment of their rights rest on three pillars of human rights and minority legal protection: (1) the right to non-discrimination and the obligation to combat both direct and indirect discrimination to ensure the enjoyment of a range of rights; (2) the right to effective participation in decision-making; and (3) the need for temporary special measures to address the effects of long-standing and entrenched discrimination on certain minority groups and minority women.

Security Council

Turning to the Security Council, Security Council issues its second Cross-Cutting Report on Women, Peace and Security on 27 January. It is recalled that the first report examined the first ten years that women, peace and security was on the Security Council's agenda. Resolution 1325, passed in 2000, recognized that civilians, especially women and children, make-up the vast majority of people adversely affected by armed conflict and calling for mainstreaming a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations. This report assesses the influence of resolution 1325, and subsequent related resolutions, on the work of the Council. As part of this analysis it reviews recent developments in the Democratic Republic of Congo, particularly mass rape in the Walikale region, and considers the Council's response as one example of its engagement with

women, peace and security issues. I understand that this report was transmitted to you electronically prior to the session.

I wish you a very successful and productive 51st session and open the floor for any questions or comments from the Members.
