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Statement by Ms. Silvia Pimentel, Chairperson,

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women**

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-sixth session

27 February to 9 March 2012

27 February 2012

New York



Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues and Friends,

On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Commission on the Status of Women for the continued support to our work over the past years.

I note that the Committee's first session was held in New York in October 1982 and so we will be celebrating our anniversary this year – 30 years of working diligently for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, gender equality and empowerment of women. The Committee is organizing a celebratory event at its 57<sup>th</sup> session in New York and will also organize special events at national and regional levels to mark this milestone. We are pleased that the Republic of Turkey will host a CEDAW meeting on this occasion.

I have the honour to present to the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women the main outcomes of the forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Pursuant to its mandate under article 20 of the Convention, the Committee considered the reports of 16 States parties, including six initial reports, and adopted 16 concluding observations. During its current session, the Committee considered the reports of seven States parties and will adopt the related concluding observations by 2 March 2013. Most of the concerns raised by the Committee in these observations relate to, *inter alia*, trafficking and exploitation of prostitution; gender stereotyping; participation in politics and public life; access to education and health, including sexual and reproductive health, young disabilities and employment issues; access to justice; violence against women, including sexual violence; harmful practices; and specific issues concerning disadvantaged groups of women who suffer multiple forms of discrimination.

The Committee has streamlined its reporting procedure during the sessions of the Committee. Under the new procedure, the Committee identifies in its concluding observations two priority recommendations and requests States parties to submit follow-up reports on the implementation of these recommendations within two years. The Committee, having an in-depth assessment of this relatively new procedure, has found that the procedure is achieving its stated aim of acting as a tool of implementation of the Convention, which also enables the Committee to monitor progress between reporting cycles.

A wide range of representatives of United Nations entities, specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and independent human rights institutions attended the sessions and participated in informal meetings with the Committee. Information was also received from such entities prior to each session for the consideration by the Committee.

I would like to thank the States parties for their engagement and will to cooperate with our Committee. I take this opportunity to highlight the need for strong commitment of Governments to ensure that women and girls can realize their full potential and gender equality.

Chairperson,

To provide clarification and promote understanding of the Convention's substantive content and the specific nature of discrimination, to the constructive dialogues with the States parties and the resulting concluding observations, also elaborate general recommendations. Recommendations have been adopted by the Committee.

The Committee continues to elaborate the general recommendations on the economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution. It also started developing a general recommendation on harmful practices in connection with the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Committee is also in the process of organizing regional consultations in conjunction with UN Women and a general recommendation on the human rights of women in armed and post-conflict. In this context, it held a general discussion on this topic with key United Nations and civil society partners in New York during its 49<sup>th</sup> session. Another important general recommendation which is being elaborated relates to access to justice. The Working Group on access to justice has prepared a concept note. A day of general discussion on this topic will be held shortly in other substantive uniform and relevant standards for this draft general recommendation. The Committee moreover decided to elaborate two additional general recommendations on gender equality in the context of asylum, statelessness and natural disasters; and rural women. Statements relating to these two general recommendations were adopted by the Committee at its 50<sup>th</sup> session on gender equality for refugees and stateless persons, and on rural women.

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 to investigate, and prohibition of life notion of non-discrimination and substantive equality, and undermining the Convention, and the concept of intersecting forms of discrimination.

Chairperson,

During the 49<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> sessions, the Committee took action on seven communications under article 2 of the Optional Protocol, and pending views on four of them. The Committee also received five requests for inquiries under article 5 of the Optional Protocol indicating grave or systematic violations by a State party of rights set forth in the Convention. These are currently under review by the Committee.

The Committee's jurisprudence under the Optional Protocol is an emerging body of law 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 views being used increasingly in national 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 the leading decision of the Committee on addressing wrongful gender stereotyping in cases of violence against women involving violence against women have set a high bar in terms of the level of legislative protection and the practical implementation of the legal standards required, in addition to progress at the domestic level in terms of law, policy and practice. Another groundbreaking decision relates to maternal healthcare and the right to safe and healthy pregnancy and childbirth for all women without discrimination. The Committee's decision in this case focused on the State parties' due diligence obligations to take measures to ensure that the activities of private actors in regard to reproductive health and practices are appropriate, as well as intersecting forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation and socio-economic background.

### Chairperson, Chairperson.

The Committee's interaction with the human rights machinery is extremely important for its overall activity and the Committee has effectively from the cooperation of the States parties to effectively discharge its mandate. For this reason, it is also key that the Committee holds one session in New York to maintain synergies with all relevant partners in upholding women's rights. The Committee can work closely with various United Nations entities and specialized agencies concerning its work, including the provision of relevant country-specific information for purposes of the constructive dialogue that States parties will wish to respect to the general recommendations being elaborated by the Committee, for example.

The Committee had discussions with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Nadia Khayat, the Assistant Secretary-General of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Ivan Simonovic, and the Director of the Human Rights Treaty Division of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. [redacted] explaining to discuss issues relevant to its work, especially within the framework of the treaty body strengthening process.

The Committee also had a meeting with Mr. [redacted] Assistant Secretary-General for International Support and Strategic Partnerships of UN Women to discuss future cooperation. I would like to note that the Committee is cooperating with UN Women on two of its draft general recommendations. The Committee is strengthening its relations, as well as enhancing cooperation and synergy with UN Women. A joint medium and long-term plan of activities being developed for coordination between the Committee and UN Women.

Governmental and non-governmental stakeholders also participated in the day or general discussion on women in conflict and post-conflict situations, which was attended by nearly 300 people, in addition to UN programmes and entities as well as civil society organizations.

The Committee also a meeting with Mr. [redacted] and met with members of the Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and Practice to discuss mandates, best practices and areas of possible support and cooperation. Regular exchanges

with special mandate holders are of the utmost importance to the Committee in order to strengthen the existing linkages between the Committee and these entities.

The Committee also met with the Committee on the Rights of the Child with respect to the joint general recommendation on harmful practices and with the Human Rights Committee to discuss working methods and the work of the treaty bodies.

The Committee was extremely pleased to meet with the Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon in New York during his 40<sup>th</sup> session. The Secretary-General showed strong interest and expressed support for the Committee's work, including the draft general recommendation on the human rights of women in situations of conflict and violence, as well as on violence against women and sexual violence.

Moreover, some members of the Committee participated in events organized by Non-Governmental Organizations on the elimination of discrimination against women.

#### Chairperson

The Committee is also actively engaged in treaty body strengthening process. In addition to discussions on this topic when in session, the Committee members also participate in meetings intersessionally, including the 23<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of Chairpersons of the Inter-Committee Meeting and Dublin II. The series of meetings and statements on the treaty body strengthening process which began in January 2010 culminated in the "Dublin II" wrap-up meeting of 10-11 November 2011. Representatives of the convening organizations of all the consultations held to date attended this meeting, as did the Chairperson of seven treaty bodies, accompanied by several more treaty body members participating in the meeting. The meeting was held in Dublin, Ireland, marking the painstaking process of drawing together the results of this reflection process, providing a strategic synthesis of the proposals that had emerged, as well as presenting clear recommendations to all relevant stakeholders.

The Committee also established a Working Group on Working Methods for the purposes of implementing best practices and efficiency measures within the context of the treaty body strengthening process. In this regard, the Committee has taken decisions with respect to the establishment of task forces for the consideration of reports submitted by States parties and enhancing the role of the country rapporteurs. The criteria that inform these decisions are to increase the efficiency of the work undertaken with respect to the constructive dialogue, including focusing on priority issues and better time management. Notwithstanding such criteria, the Committee is committed to providing sufficient resources for its ever-increasing workload. Reports prepared by States parties for consideration follow up to concluding observations, individual communications, requests for inquiries, general recommendations and other activities.

#### Chairperson,

Through the year-long dialogue with the States parties and its follow-up initiative, the Committee has achieved progress in realizing the human rights of women, such as the advancement of women to the Convention and the increased attention paid by States parties to create legal frameworks that promote and protect women's rights, as well as national policy initiatives and human rights measures to bring about needed change on the ground to promote substantive gender equality.

Although much progress has been made and respect for women's rights has not been achieved in any country in the world, women continue to suffer profound and pervasive human rights violations, such as gender-based violence in the public and private spheres. In some parts of the world, recent developments raise serious concerns that achievements over the years made in the area of women's rights may now be threatened. In response to transitions taking place in the North Africa, the Committee addressed letters to the Governments of Egypt and Tunisia, and is preparing a letter for the Government of Libya, to highlight the importance of the participation of women in the process of democratization at all levels of decision-making, which is not only essential for their empowerment and rights, but for the advancement of society as a whole. I would also take this opportunity to express our concern about the situation of human rights, including the rights of women, in Syria.

Chairperson,

Allow me to reiterate the Committee's readiness to continue its cooperation with the Commission on the Status of Women in pursuing the goals that we share.

I also would like to recall that we will be celebrating our anniversary this year. I refer to my invitation to all of you to organize special events and activities to mark this milestone and to take this opportunity to enhance the visibility of the Convention, the Committee and, as a result, the human rights of women.

I wish you well in your important deliberations.

Thank you.