­­ARMENIA

**June 24, 2021**

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

**Discussion on Indigenous Women and Girls**

**Delivered by Ms. Zoya Stepanyan, First Secretary**

At the outset, Armenia would like to extend its appreciation to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for organizing today’s general discussion.

Armenia was among the countries who co-sponsored and fully supported the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and we welcome the focus of the Committee on addressing specific and multifaceted barriers faced by indigenous women and girls.

Needless to say, the immense challenges that indigenous people have to tackle raised exponentially as a result of pandemic and created additional vulnerabilities for human rights protection as well as for health, well being and sustainability of indigenous communities worldwide.

 Against the background of climate change and environmental degradation, strong connection of indigenous people to nature, their efforts of preservation of biodiversity and natural resources should be nurtured and appreciated. In this regard the economic rights and empowerment of indigenous women, access to finances, enhancement of financial literacy and capacity building, targeted assistance to green and sustainable agriculture as well as creative sectors gain special significance.

Armenia is strongly convinced that immense cultural heritage, traditions, ancestral knowledge and wisdom of indigenous people must be protected as fundamental, indispensable part of civilization. We also emphasize the need to protect the endangered indigenous languages. We are fully cognizant that indigenous women and especially girls still face complex barriers and dilemmas to access the education and we hope that the general recommendation will provide strong and operational guidelines in this regard.

In various parts of the world we still witness persistent polices of intentional targeting of cultural and religious heritage, distraction of places of worship and burial sites, often time aimed at erasure of memory of indigenous population. In this context, Armenia welcomes the focus of the Committee on detrimental effects of armed conflicts on indigenous population in general, and specific exposure of indigenous women and girls. The use of incendiary weapons, the gross human rights violations, including sexual violence and war crimes are often time instrumentalized to spread fear among indigenous population, cause forced displacement and make the land uninhabitable.

Last, but not least we would like to take this opportunity to encourage genuine dialogue with indigenous women and their organisations. They are the right holders in this discussion and their leadership and agency should be at the center of any effort to find long term and sustainable solutions anchored on full respect to all human rights of indigenous populations.

I thank you.