



Statement by Ms. Nicole Améline, Chairperson of Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) at the Fifty-seventh session of the
Commission on the Status of Women

4 March 2013

Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to address you today in my capacity as new Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. On behalf of all CEDAW members, I would like to emphasize the importance that we attach to the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women which is dedicated to the important issue of violence against women.

Significant achievements have been made in the quest for equal opportunities for men and women, thanks also to the efforts undertaken by States in all regions of the world. This progress is a direct result of the obligations that you have accepted by becoming party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Combatting violence against women forms part of the *raison d'être* of CEDAW and constitutes a cross-cutting theme in its recommendations and its case law under the Optional Protocol. In 1992, the Committee adopted its landmark general recommendation No. 19 on violence

against women, which continues to guide its work, including its constructive dialogues with States parties, until the present day. In general recommendation No. 19, the Committee stated that “gender-based violence, which impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms under general international law or under human rights conventions, is discrimination within the meaning of article 1 of the Convention”. The Committee considers that the Convention is a living instrument and welcomes input and ideas from States and other actors which inform and further enrich the concept of violence against women. The Committee welcomes and is prepared to participate in the discussion of a Global Implementation Plan on violence against women.

With regard to individual communications, the Committee has adopted Views on four cases during the last year, including cases involving violence against women. The Views of the Committee are increasingly influential in the creation of international women's rights jurisprudence and are being used in regional human rights courts, such as the European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

Despite the progress achieved in the promotion and protection of women's rights, women and girls continue to face discrimination in all spheres of public, economic and social life and are often the primary victims of conflicts, political and economic instability, poverty and climate change. Accordingly, the Convention not only requires States parties to protect women from violence and discrimination. It also aims at a shift of paradigm, by overcoming deep-rooted stereotypes and by empowering women to emancipate themselves and to take on leadership roles in peace, democratization and development processes.

CEDAW is strongly committed to achieve this goal. We consider that our Convention constitutes the main reference for women's rights and that it provides a comprehensive framework that provides guidance for constitutional and legislative reform. In addition, the recommendations that CEDAW addresses to States parties in its concluding observations on periodic State reports provide an operational tool for the implementation of the rights and principles set forth in the Convention.

Madam Chairperson,

The Convention is a milestone in the advancement of women's rights. It is at the same time a women's human rights instrument, a women's development instrument and a women's empowerment instrument. It establishes clear commitments and obligations for its 187 States parties to adopt appropriate measures for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Beyond merely affirming the principle of non-discrimination, the Convention also calls for women's empowerment and for proactive measures to achieve substantive equality of women and men.

In monitoring the implementation of the Convention, the Committee provides guidance to States parties in strengthening their legal framework to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. In this regard, it is important to strengthen the means of the Committee, as well as its visibility, especially here in New York. In this connection, I reiterate our strong attachment to continue holding one annual session in New York. CEDAW considers it essential to reinforce its cooperation with States parties, UN entities and NGOs, with a special focus on the elaboration and implementation of development strategies and policies that are based on a women's rights perspective. In particular, it is time to deepen the link between the work of CEDAW and CSW on the implementation of the Convention and to develop an encouraging implementation mechanism at the CSW.

At this point, I would like to thank very warmly UN Women for its continuous and effective support to our Committee, in particular for the elaboration of our general recommendations. It is our wish is to renew our structural links with UN Women and to organize an event on "Women's rights and Development" with all relevant stakeholders.

Madam Chairperson,

Our committee has undertaken significant efforts to improve its working methods. For example, at its 54th session held in February this year, the Committee has incorporated the guidelines on independence and impartiality of treaty body experts which were adopted at the 24th Meeting of Chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies in June 2012 in Addis Ababa.

CEDAW also welcomes the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on strengthening the United Nations human rights treaty body system, and I should like to note that a

number of the proposals made in the report are already being applied by CEDAW and have been integrated in its working methods.

At its 54th session, the Committee has decided to reduce the length of its concluding observations by shortening the standard paragraphs contained therein. It has also decided to webcast its dialogues with States parties on a trial basis to make the work of CEDAW more accessible to national actors and rights holders.

But we must also be self-critical in the assessment of our working methods. CEDAW continues to face a significant backlog of State reports. Currently, a report submitted to the Committee waits between two and three years before it can be considered. The Committee therefore needs to find ways and means to further simplify and increase the efficiency of its reporting procedure.

By the same token, the Committee has resolved to request an extension of the annual meeting time and membership of its Optional Protocol Working Group so as to allow it to deal with inquiries, in addition to individual communications. The Committee has received a number of submissions containing information that might be of relevance for its inquiry procedure under article 8 of the Optional Protocol. It is currently working on 6 inquiries, including at the pre-admissibility stage. Currently, such inquiries are handled by CEDAW experts outside the official meeting time.

The Committee is aware of the financial implications of these requests which come in difficult times. I equally want to note that any requests made by the Committee are without prejudice to the intergovernmental process of the General Assembly on strengthening and enhancing effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system.

At the same time, there is a certain contradiction between the difficulty to make the human rights treaty body system work and proposals for new human rights instruments, such as the current discussion on a new treaty on violence against women. In our view, such a treaty would contribute to the proliferation of the human rights treaty body system and could fragmentize the normative

framework on violence against women. In its regular work, CEDAW comprehensively covers all forms of discrimination against women, including violence against women.

Madam Chairperson,

Allow me to recall that the Committee has reviewed more than 400 reports and adopted 29 general recommendations, the most recent one being its general recommendation on the economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution.

I would like also to pay tribute to the dedicated women and men who serve as members of CEDAW. I would like to thank them as well as the CEDAW Secretariat which lends strong support to our work.

In addition, the Committee is in the process of elaborating further general recommendations on topics such as women in conflict prevention, gender equality in the context of asylum and statelessness, harmful practices (jointly with the CRC), access to justice, rural women, gender equality in the context of climate change and natural disasters, and women's and girls' right to education.

Not satisfied to wait for the submission of a case or report in the face of troubling developments, the Committee issued statements in 2012 on the situation of women and girls in Northern Mali and on the protection of girls' rights to education in connection with the brutal attack on Malala Yousufzai in Pakistan.

Before concluding, let me emphasize that the Committee's interaction with the other treaty bodies and the human rights machinery is extremely important for its overall work. Similarly, the Committee continues to encourage input and support from NGOs, national human rights institutions and other actors, including the United Nations and its specialized agencies. In addition to NGOs such as IWRAW-Asia Pacific and national human rights institutions, the Committee is grateful to United Nations country teams, particularly to the Interagency Group on CEDAW reporting (comprising UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, FAO and UN Women). It is also grateful to UNHCR, ILO, IOM, and IPU for their support.

In concluding, I would like to recall that 2012 has marked the 30th anniversary of the CEDAW Committee. To mark this occasion, several events were organized during our session in NY in collaboration with UN Women, in Geneva with support from the Organisation de la Francophonie, and in Istanbul thanks to the generosity of the Turkish Government.

Let me assure you that CEDAW attaches great importance to its cooperation with all its partners present today, in a renewed perspective and with a view to promoting and protecting the rights of women.

Thank you.
