

Check against delivery

**Statement of the Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women
to the eighth session of the General Assembly Open Working Group
on Sustainable Development Goals**

**“Promoting equality, including social equity, gender equality and
women’s empowerment”**

5 February 2014

Co-chairpersons of the Working Group

Fellow panelists

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and gentlemen

Let me start by saying how happy I am to be here with you today during this very important session of the Open Working Group focusing on equality in the sustainable development goals. As Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, I very much welcome this singular opportunity to share views based on experience working in the Committee as well as in the wider human rights treaty body system. Our common aim is to make as strong and effective as possible the post 2015+ development architecture.

As the international body charged with overseeing the implementation of the legal obligations in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 187 States Parties, the Committee is keenly aware of the nexus between development and the realization of women's rights. The near universal ratification of the CEDAW Convention, together with the vast experience of the Committee since its establishment in 1982 in relation to women and development garnered through its supervisory mandates, underlines the importance of the Committee's expertise in shaping the conceptual design of the post 2015 development agenda.

The Millennium Declaration, adopted just over 13 years ago, marked an unprecedented global consensus by Member States which presented a vision for achieving sustainable development. It also identified gender equality as an essential component for achieving the MDGs, affirming the need to combat violence against women as well as the importance of implementing the CEDAW Convention. However, the MDGs did not entirely embrace this full vision of gender equality, adopting only a narrow range of indicators to reflect a very narrow range of issues important for the elimination of discrimination against women. The international community now has the opportunity to embrace a new paradigm that builds on the gaps and lessons of the MDGs and truly aims to eliminate discrimination against women.

Ladies and gentlemen

International human rights law provides critical normative standards that are intrinsically linked to development such as those related to food, education, health, housing, non-discrimination, political participation and freedoms of expression and assembly. It also provides strong standards on equality and non-discrimination for all. The CEDAW Convention, for instance, prohibits any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the enjoyment and exercise of rights by women on an equal basis with men. The Committee has thus repeatedly articulated a vision of substantive equality

which takes account of the reality of women and girls' lives that is impacted both by historic discrimination as well as actual differences between females and males, and requires measures to address both direct and indirect discrimination.

The post 2015 framework should be grounded in this existing international human rights framework with a view to addressing all facets of the development challenge. The CEDAW Convention, along with the other international human rights treaties, establishes a normative framework built and voluntarily accepted by States, which sets with precision the minimum guarantees for the individual.

A human rights based approach to development ensures that rights are used as a means of promoting development. More specifically, sustainable development will continue to be a distant dream if women's rights are not prioritized. In addition, and more fundamentally, a human rights based approach ensures that the enjoyment of rights, including the rights related to gender equality, are the ultimate end of development.

Anchoring the post 2015 framework in human rights standards would affirm the position that that development is not a matter of policy choices for countries but rather, a matter of human rights obligations. This would suffuse the development agenda with the notions of accountability for those with obligations, and

empowerment for those with rights. These notions we know are among the most effective drivers of change.

It is also essential to reaffirm the indivisibility of human rights, recognizing that efforts to eliminate discrimination in access to health care for women, for example, will founder without respecting the right to freedom of expression of those claiming this right. Similarly seeking to improve the economic independence of women through schemes such as micro-credit, will have little real impact if women do not enjoy property or inheritance rights without discrimination.

Distinguished colleagues

The MDG 3 goal explicitly aimed to promote gender equality and empower women. However, progress in the realization of this goal has been tracked through three indicators, which represent narrow, albeit important, aspects of gender equality, namely, representation of women and girls in education, wage employment and participation in political bodies. Through its regular discussions with States Parties on the implementation of the CEDAW Convention, the Committee has been tracking the degree to which women and girls enjoy their rights.

From our experience, we know that traditional models of development based predominantly on economic growth, the expansion of the democratic space and peace

do not automatically lead to gender equality and the realization of women's rights and empowerment. Focusing only on the symptoms and manifestations of women's exclusion (e.g. lack of income, education or health), rather than their structural causes (e.g. discrimination, lack of access to justice and to resources, lack of representation), has often led to narrow, discretionary measures aimed at addressing short-term needs, which do not allow for the understanding of the real contribution of women to sustainable development. Moreover, recent studies estimate that over a third of women worldwide have suffered violence in their lifetime a staggering number, which has dire implications for women's enjoyment of their human rights, as well as their social, cultural and economic potential. The failures of the MDGs to include gender-based violence and to address discrimination against women in access to justice are major shortcomings which must be rectified.

It is clear that sustainable development is utterly unachievable if fifty percent of the population is neglected. We know that empowering women and girls not only enhances their ability to claim their rights, but also has powerful effects on social change and economic growth.

Ladies and gentlemen

The Committee's efforts have thus already helped to provide a strong framework for bridging the accountability mechanism gap of the MDGs and also bringing to the fore

relevant data from countries on women and development. In moving forward on this important agenda, permit me to make some specific suggestions.

1. The first would be to support a post-2015 **architecture** that is explicitly based on the promotion of all human rights, addressing people's desire the world over to be free from want but also free from fear.
2. Second, the post-2015 agenda could include a **goal** on gender equality and women's empowerment to underline the centrality of the rights of women and girls to future development gains, seeking not only formal equality, but also substantive equality. A specific consideration should be given to indicators that capture situations predominantly experienced by women and girls, related to gender based violence, sexual and reproductive health, maternity and family leave policies, and forced and child marriages.
3. Third, a commitment to gender equality and to the principle of equality and non-discrimination more broadly should be mainstreamed throughout all **goals**, to ensure that the new agenda does not exclude those facing discrimination, or worse, that it deepens existing inequalities. This can be achieved by ensuring that all **indicators are disaggregated by sex**, in order to give a clear and disaggregated view of progress over time. Together with discrimination on the basis of sex, all grounds of discrimination prohibited by

international human rights law must be addressed in this process, as women regularly face multiple forms of discrimination. This could significantly expand the possibility to capture not just the position of women, but the position of rural and urban women, women from minority groups (including indigenous women), women with disabilities, and girls.

4. Fourth, the **targets** agreed should be universal or 'zero' targets that are more ambitious than the MDG targets to ensure that no one is left behind, including women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination who are the least advantaged in most societies. Clear timelines should be set to ensure that steady progress is made to reach all groups and reduce the inequalities between different groups. For example, setting interim targets would go a long way to ensuring that steps are continually taken towards reaching everyone without discrimination.

5. Fifth and finally, **accountability** mechanisms will be essential for ensuring that progress is tracked and that states are accountable to their populations. Explicitly tying development objectives to universally agreed human rights obligations supports a shift in paradigm – from a discourse of charity and expediency to one of rights and legal obligations. With this approach comes the need for duty bearers to be held accountable for achievements. Whatever accountability mechanism is adopted, the CEDAW Committee (along with the other human rights treaty bodies) should have a critical role in ensuring

accountability for gender equality through its periodic review of State party reports, its inquiry procedure and its consideration of individual communications.

It would, therefore, be useful for example, if the new accountability framework could ensure the systematic **exchange of information** between the treaty bodies and any new accountability mechanism designed to monitor the new goals, targets and indicators.

Further, the recommendations of the human rights treaty bodies to individual States Parties form a sound basis on which to evaluate the key human rights challenges on the country's development path. Implementing these recommendations is not only the responsibility of the country itself, but also of the international community, including United Nations programmes, funds and agencies. At the same time, current proposals to strengthen the international human rights treaty bodies will allow the Committees to play this role more effectively.

Distinguished Co-chairpersons of the Working Group

With these five suggestions I will end my intervention. I thank you for your time and attention and I look forward to our discussion.
