Thank you Madam Chair for opening this meeting and Orest Novosad for providing introductory remarks. I am extremely grateful to Orest for his support for the Working Group which we have enjoyed from the beginning of this project.

As the Chair of the Working Group I would like to express my utmost gratitude to the State Parties who have been instrumental in the development of the draft GR. I understand how busy you are in this exceptional virtual world and I am thus very grateful that you found time in your busy schedules to attend this event.

The process of developing the draft GR began in December of 2018. During these many months we have organized eight regional expert meetings which will be addressed later by the members of the Working Group.

We are very pleased and grateful to have received around 200 written submissions for the first draft of the GR from States Parties, civil society, specialized agencies and other stakeholders. The concept of the GR is that of a soft law document which is to serve as a non-binding best practices guide in order to facilitate the combatting of trafficking in W&Gs.

In our work on the GR we are guided by our unique expertise acquired through our extensive practice of constructive dialogues with States Parties and examination of their reports to the Committee. The understanding of national implementation of CEDAW Convention obligations is crucial to producing a practical document to be utilized by States Parties and other stakeholders in practice.

In this context, the reflection received from States Parties is absolutely necessary to develop a tool which will be implemented in the domestic legal frameworks. Furthermore, providing States Parties with an opportunity to express their views on the draft not only allows us to improve it but also to make it ‘implementable’. The WG and the CEDAW Committee are moreover encouraged that the stakeholders implicated in the implementation of the GR view this document as relevant and important. We would like to once again express our appreciation for the very useful and practical points raised by the States Parties.

While it is not possible to give justice during this meeting to the hundreds of comments received, I should nevertheless like to address some clusters of issues which were highlighted by the States Parties.

1. **International responsibility**

Some States Parties have raised the issue of international responsibility of States in the context of trafficking in W&Gs. The draft suggests, in paragraph 15, that States Parties’ obligations in respect of trafficking are reinforced by international criminal law. We agree with some States Parties that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court concerns individual criminal liability and does not establish any obligation of due diligence to prevent trafficking. We thus welcome the suggestion that the draft should include individual criminal liability for the act of trafficking in women and girls.

At the same time, however, we would like to note that the International Law Commission’s rules of State responsibility address the international responsibility of States. Although the rules do not make a distinction between criminal and other types of international responsibility, both are covered.

1. **Migration**

Another point which we would like to briefly note relates to migration. Paragraph 49 addresses the lack of safe and legal routes to migration as a factor contributing to an increased risk of trafficking in W&Gs. The Working Group and the CEDAW committee recognize the sovereign power of States to develop their migration policies. Therefore, the draft GR does not imply the creation of new legal routes to migration but emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient legal routes within those legal regimes where they are lacking and highlighting the significance of such legal routes in combating trafficking.

On the point of asylum, we welcome the support of States Parties in recognizing that trafficking in persons may establish or strengthen grounds for asylum. At the same time, we acknowledge the limited competence of the CEDAW committee in relation to the development of asylum law and we therefore do not designate trafficking as an independent ground for asylum which would imply that all victims’ applications for asylum should be accepted. Rather, as a human rights treaty body we call States Parties to treat situations of trafficking in W&Gs with heightened diligence when it comes to evaluating applications for asylum, especially in relation to non-refoulment.

1. **Specialized tribunals**

Another issue which was raised by a number of States Parties and which relates to the establishment of specialized tribunals. The draft GR foresees the establishment of specialized tribunals to effectively prosecute and adequately punish traffickers.

We take note that the judicial systems are at the heart of State sovereignty and it is necessary to ensure their independence. It has been suggested that the establishment of specialized tribunals must be left to the discretion of the judicial branch of each State Party. We agree that the prerogative to decide on the necessity of such specialized bodies rests with the judicial branch of each State Party. We will therefore ensure that the revised GR reflects the independence and competence of the State’s judiciary to decide on the necessity to establish specialized tribunals in the context of the GR.

1. **Extraterritoriality**

On the question of the exercise state jurisdiction extraterritorialy, Paragraph 16 of the draft GR states that a due diligence obligation of States Parties to suppress all forms of trafficking in women and girls extends, inter alia, to the acts or omissions of national corporations operating extraterritorially. We do acknowledge that States are not generally required under international human rights law to regulate the extraterritorial activities of businesses domiciled in their territory, as is reflected under Principle 2 of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Nevertheless, States are at the same time not prohibited from regulating the extraterritorial activities of national companies and the Guiding Principles invite human rights treaty bodies to recommend States do so. The purpose of paragraph 16 of the draft GR is to provide such a recommendation.

In this context, we take note that the exercise of extraterritorial activities is subject to an existence of a recognized jurisdictional basis and we will reflect this in our call for the States Parties to exercise their due diligence extraterritorially.

1. **Demand side**

Finally, It is evident that there is a split in the debate between countries who are pro-sex work and abolitionist. This divide is not limited to only few interested parties but is persistent among State Parties, civil society and specialized agencies at large. We take this fragmentation of approaches into consideration in our work on the draft GR.

We should like to emphasize, however, that the draft GR covers the demand side for all forms of trafficking, including organ trafficking as well as trade in cells and tissues and other forms of trafficking.

Some of the other issues raised by the States Parties include addressing trafficking in supply chain, combating corruption in order to reduce the risk of trafficking, the use of digital instruments by trafficking which is especially significant in the midst of COVID-19.