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Remarks by

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United Nations
Human Rights

OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

**Panel Discussion on “Promoting and Protecting Women’s
Rights in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations:
The Situation in French Speaking Africa”
Commemorating The Thirtieth Anniversary of The Committee
On The Elimination of Discrimination Against Women**

Thursday, 18 October 2012

Madam Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and joy for me to celebrate with you the thirtieth anniversary of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. I understand that it was exactly 30 years ago on this 18 October, that the Committee convened its first session. So, what perfect timing!

To all members of the CEDAW Committee, past and present, I commend you and thank you for all that you have done to advance women's rights and gender equality. Through your hard work over the past 30 years, you have advanced the human rights of women, including the right to political participation, equality before the law, equality in marriage and family life, and in the areas of health, education and employment. The Committee has placed women's rights high on the international agenda and empowered women to claim them. Indeed, it has become the authoritative voice of the rights of women and girls everywhere.

Madam Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would also like to join the Chair in extending a very warm welcome to his Excellency, Mr. Ridha Bouabib, Ambassador of the Permanent Observer Mission of the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF) in Geneva. I am grateful to the OIF for working with our Office to organize

this event today. OHCHR and the OIF have a close working relationship. Of the 58 field presences that OHCHR maintains worldwide, 24 are in countries that are Member or Observer States of the OIF. *En 1997, nos organisations ont signé un Accord-cadre de coopération sur des activités d'intérêt commun pour la promotion et la protection des droits humains en Afrique francophone. Je suis fière que le Haut-Commissariat aux droits de l'homme et l'OIF se soient engagés à intégrer une perspective du genre dans tous les projets communs conformément à la politique d'égalité de genre du Haut-Commissariat adoptée en septembre 2011. L'Accord entre le Haut-Commissariat et l'OIF est le premier document qui fait une référence directe à cette politique.*

I would also like to welcome Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura who was recently appointed by the Secretary-General as the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, as well as our other esteemed panellists for today's discussions that will focus on promoting and protecting women's rights in conflict and post-conflict in French-speaking Africa. The experts on today's panels bring a world of perspectives and experience to these discussions, and I know we all look forward to hearing from them. They come from different backgrounds, yet they share the same strong commitment to women's rights, women's equality and women's dignity.

Excellencies,

As you know, the struggle for women's equality has made major advances – but it is far from won. That is our challenge. And that is why

we need CEDAW to help women and men everywhere to understand that equality makes us all stronger.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights provides the secretariat support for the Committee's work, but we are also one of the principal beneficiaries of the Committee's output. Our growing network of gender advisers in our country and regional offices regularly draw from the work of CEDAW in advocating for women's rights, wherever they are. In giving advice to States that we support with a field presence, on legislative reform, for instance, the findings of the Committee are critical in our advocacy for progressive legislation.

I am aware that this year has been a particularly challenging one for the Committee, as it has been for us all. In the midst of declining resources and a growing workload, the Committee has not shied away from dealing with the most complex and controversial issues affecting women. They include what happens to women when subjected to sexual violence, harmful traditional or modern practices, and obstructed access to justice. The Committee's work in clarifying State obligations and setting concrete recommendations for action is essential for ensuring that women particularly those who suffer from the most heinous violations will be able to exercise their human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to stress a fundamental point. While protection and prosecution are first steps to address violence against

women, reparations are also essential. The concept of reparative or restorative justice has gained ground during the past few years. It is an approach to justice that focuses first and foremost on the needs of the victims, and considers the needs of the offenders and the involved community, instead of focusing exclusively on the punishment of the perpetrators. However, reparations must be gender sensitive and to take into account the experiences of women and girls.

It is in this context of reparations that, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo I heard first-hand from the survivors of brutal sexual violence of the effects of the crimes on their lives. Despite their heart-wrenching ordeals, most of the women I spoke to expressed their determination to rebuild their lives and support their children. To do so, they said, requires equal and genuine participation of women in all aspects of peace building. I know that the Committee will reflect on these points as it crafts its general recommendation on women in conflict and post-conflict situations. Indeed, I am aware that these issues were discussed during the regional consultations.

Allow me to conclude, Madame Chair, by expressing, on behalf of the High Commissioner and OHCHR as a whole, our best wishes and strong support for your continued work and leadership for the advancement of women's rights. You have - and always will have - our full support. *Merci pour votre attention, Madame la Présidente, et je souhaite un joyeux anniversaire au Comité à l'occasion de son trentième anniversaire !*
