**Introductory statement**

**by**

**the President of the Human Rights Council**

**H.E. Laura Dupuy Lasserre**

**4th Intl NGO Forum for the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Women**

*Geneva, 05 September 2012*

President of the Session,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to participate in the 4th International NGO Forum on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Women.

Let me first thank OCAPROCE International for organizing this event, and especially Princess Micheline Makou Djouma.

This year’s focus on Asian women, together with the past sessions on Africa and Europe and the next on the Americas, will provide a comprehensive understanding of the situation of women throughout the world, by sharing experiences from the ground and identifying challenges, both at national and international levels, that hinder progress in the full enjoyment of women’s rights.

The global financial, economic, food and climate crisis have seriously affected human rights worldwide, and in particular women who are victims of multiple forms of discrimination. The international community cannot turn a blind eye to feminized poverty and exclusion.

I wish you therefore great success in this endeavour of raising awareness, in order to act accordingly and in conformity with international human rights standards.

**HRC WORK IN FAVOUR OF WOMEN**

As you know, women’s rights and gender issues have been at the top of the agenda of the Human Rights Council, as well as for the Uruguayan Presidency, pointing out at several existing gaps.

Since its establishment, the Council has taken several initiatives in order to effectively contribute to the realization of women’s rights and gender equality.

For instance, through its resolution 6/30, the Council requested that its mechanisms systematically integrate a gender perspective into their work. The Council holds an annual discussion on this issue and on September 20th, the Council will discuss the issue of economic, social and cultural rights of women and the empowerment of women.

Through interactive dialogues with various Special Rapporteurs, including on violence against women and on trafficking of persons, especially women and children, as well as through its thematic resolutions, such as those on maternal mortality and the right to education, the Council has been continuously addressing the issue of women’s rights and equality of opportunities.

The newly established Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice which presented its first report in our June session, constitutes a new tool of universal scope contributing to the removal of obstacles to the full enjoyment of women’s rights. Indeed, the Working Group intends to focus on States’ obligation to eliminate discrimination against women in economic and social life, especially in view of the international crisis.

Moreover, the Universal Periodic Review, which is valued as having great potential to promote and protect human rights in every corner of the world, has proven very useful to foster a national reflection and dialogue and follow-up on what is sometimes seen as delicate or invisible issues, such as the discrimination of women and girls.

**GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS**

Though women’s rights are human rights, there are still numerous obstacles for their full realization.

Gender equality and empowerment of women is one of the Millennium Development Goals, but a lot remains to be done to reach them by 2015. We cannot forget that all MDGs are interrelated.

Despite the obligations that come since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the renewed and clear political commitment in the Vienna Summit of 1993 as well as in Beijing in 1995 and afterwards, socioeconomic and cultural factors are often invoked to hamper the effective and full implementation of universally recognized human rights of women.

The limited access to education and health, including maternal health, will jeopardize the development of many countries and their future generations; being access to quality affordable education one of the keys to achieve the MDGs.

At the same time, the lack of economic means, women’s difficulty in getting equal access to decent jobs, land and property, credits or new technologies, plus domestic violence, exploitation and harmful traditional practices are other scourges that cannot be silenced. Moreover, one has to underline the particularly vulnerable situation of women in armed.

The negotiations that will soon start in New York over the Sustainable Development Goals after the Summit of Rio plus 20, of last June, are aimed to cover the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development, and this includes human rights and specifically women’s rights, as agreed in the outcome document “The Future We Want”. They should contribute to the full implementation of the outcomes of all major summits in the economic, social and environmental fields.

Efforts at the international level, including the normative framework, must be translated into concrete measures at national level. In this regard, national plans of action on equality of opportunities, integrating the gender perspective and targeting vulnerable groups, as well as poverty reduction plans and strategies play a fundamental role. In addition, macroeconomic and other public policies should integrate a gender perspective, and gender equality should be a stated objective of all these measures. Women shall be able to participate on an equal footing in the design of these policies.

**ASIAN FOCUS**

This year’s focus on the Asian continent, characterized by its cultural diversity, is an excellent opportunity for us to learn about national and regional initiatives on women’s rights and their empowerment and on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The establishment in 2009 of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights was a significant advancement in placing human rights at the centre of the region’s agenda. The on-going drafting process of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration is a clear step in this direction. This Intergovernmental Body, together with the ASEAN Committee on Women and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, may be also a forum to further discuss and foster women’s rights in this sub-region.

It would be also interesting to take a look at the initiatives launched by Arab women organizations and by Arab women parliamentarians and leaders. Regarding the political transitions in the Arab World, Michelle Bachelet, UN Women Executive Director, stated a few months ago that: “*women were at the forefront of these movements, leading protests, marches and social media campaigns to change the status quo. And women should be at the forefront now in meaningful political participation so they can help chart the future of their countries*”. The Arab Human Rights Committee, which was established by the Arab Charter on H.R. of 2004, should help in promoting women’s rights.

Last but not least, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) established in 2012 the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC), composed of 18 experts from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and will focus on women and children rights as a priority.

**CONCLUSION**

To conclude, I hope these two days will help identify the progress made in the real advancement of economic, social and cultural rights of women in Asia, and to propose measures that would help overcome the obstacles and challenges still faced in their full realization.

I wish you again very fruitful discussions. Thank you.