

**STATEMENT BY MS. KANG KYUNG-WHA,
DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL
ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

Istanbul, 1 November 2012

Madam Fatma Sahin, Minister of Family and Social Policies,
Excellencies, Distinguished members of the Committee,
Honoured guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honor and pleasure to be here with you to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Age thirty is a momentous milestone in the life of an individual, of personal and professional maturity and consolidation as well as anticipation of life's greater demands and challenges ahead. So too for CEDAW. At age thirty, CEDAW stands tall upon its accomplishments of the past three decades as the leading force for the protection and promotion of women's rights around the world and an integral part of the United Nations human rights architecture. It is also bracing itself for what the next decade in a world of fast-paced changes may bring its way.

I wish to begin by sincerely thanking the Government of Turkey, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, and in particular, Minister Fatma Sahin, for generously hosting this gathering. It is fitting that Istanbul, which stands at the historic crossroad of civilizations, where thoughtful minds have aspired to nurture harmony and universality, should be the backdrop of our commemoration of 30 years of CEDAW. For the universal aspirations of women around the world, in different culture and countries, have converged around the Committee to make it an authoritative and recognized voice for the advancement of women's rights and gender equality.

Of course, this would not have happened without the dedication of the experts who have served as Committee members. So, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and compliments to the past and present members of the Committee. Through your hard work, you have advanced the human rights of women in many areas, 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. It is safe to say that any discussion on women's rights would not be full without a reference to the work of CEDAW. Indeed, earlier this week, while opening an event to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which focused on protecting women from enforced disappearances and its impact, I expressed the hope for collaboration and synergy between the WGEID and CEDAW. Wherever we speak on women's rights, the HC and I make sure that our message fully reflects and benefits from the related deliberations and outputs of CEDAW.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From a modest beginning, with its first session held in Vienna on 18-22 October, 1982, the CEDAW Committee has worked incessantly to give a dynamic and enriching interpretation of the Convention, and later, its Optional Protocol. Over the years, 187 countries have become party to the Convention, hundreds of reports have been reviewed and numerous reservations have been withdrawn. The reporting procedure, as epitomized in the Committee's dialogue with representatives of states, has generated countless concluding observations that have triggered change, large and small, on the ground.

The Committee has also elaborated general recommendations on specific issues, not addressed to a particular State party, but to all. To date, 28 general recommendations have been adopted by the Committee, providing clarification and promoting understanding of the Convention's substantive content and the specific nature of discrimination against women. These general recommendations are a rich source of legal and policy guidance on a number of core issues with regard to the rights of women and girls. Several new general recommendations are currently being elaborated, and will be discussed in the first interactive panel this morning.

The accumulation of jurisprudence on individual cases under the Optional Protocol is an emerging area of importance. Indeed, we are already seeing some regional and national courts taking guidance from the jurisprudence of the Committee. I look forward to the discussion on the Optional Protocol which will take place this afternoon during the second interactive panel.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

While we reflect upon the three decades of CEDAW's contributions to enhancing the rights of women and girls, we must also redouble our commitment to addressing the persistent barriers and abuses that still keep countless women and girls locked in lives of discrimination and indignity, such as violence against women in all contexts, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, forced or early marriage, trafficking in women and exploitation of prostitution, to name a few. But we must balance our aspirations and pace our work in tune with the overriding tenor of the times.

The difficulties that CEDAW faces in addressing critical issues at this time of financial constraints cannot be underestimated. This is a challenge for all treaty bodies, indeed for the whole UN human rights architecture. Our Office, as the secretariat of CEDAW, is doing our utmost to make the most of our limited and shrinking resources to provide the best support to the Committee, as part of our larger obligation and role as the support structure for all of the UN human rights mechanisms.

The resource constraints come at a particularly awkward moment, when the demands and expectations coming from governments and people for human rights assistance are

literally exploding. For the treaty bodies, this gap between the needed work and the available resources dates further back, long predating the current global financial crisis. Indeed, it can be said that the seeds of the gap were already planted at the start when the treaty bodies began to function within the UN system, with consistent advocacy for more ratifications and adoption of new treaties without systematic ways to anticipate or plan for the increasing workload or secure the needed resources. Thus, it has always been a catch up game, where the growth of the treaty body system over the decades, which in itself is a great success, has been met only partially afterwards, or not at all in terms of the needed resources.

It is in this context that the High Commissioner for Human Rights launched an initiative in late 2009 to take stock of the current state of the functioning of the treaty bodies, seen against the treaty commitments, and to generate bold ideas to strengthen the treaty body system. As you know, the HC's report that presents all the good recommendations that arose from the two-and-a-half years of consultations with all stakeholders is now before the General Assembly. I very much hope the member states will take this matter very seriously, and address the challenge at a fundamental level, rather than with ad hoc piecemeal solutions. What is at stake is the integrity and credibility of the whole treaty body system. And without a well functioning treaty body system that constantly nurtures the normative foundation, the entire UN human rights architecture would become impoverished.

For the treaty body strengthening process to succeed, all stakeholders must do their part. Individual treaty bodies must look beyond their immediate horizon to the larger scheme of things and contribute to the building of a coherent and more efficient and effective system. States parties must fulfil their responsibilities to the treaty bodies they have created, by complying with the reporting and implementation obligations and by adequately resourcing the treaty bodies. The presumption of all stakeholders in the treaty bodies has been for far too long that full compliance was unrealistic. In essence, the HC has challenged this presumption, and made it clear that full compliance is not only a legal obligation but also a reality that can be obtained. It is incumbent upon all of us to do our share to achieve that reality. In the meantime, the Committee will need to carefully consider how it will advance, on which priority issues, in light of the sobering financial reality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

An anniversary is an occasion to rejoice, but also to step back and consider both the challenges and opportunities ahead. On its 30th Anniversary, the Committee has the opportunity reflect on its past and present functioning, to chart a course that is responsive to the exigencies of the times, and to position itself at the core of the mainstream of the treaty system.

By hosting this event, the Government of Turkey has reiterated its commitment to women's rights. Turkey was one of the early ratifiers of the CEDAW Convention and has withdrawn all of the substantive reservations that it lodged upon first becoming party. It is also a party to the Optional Protocol, accepting not only the individual complaints procedure but the inquiry procedure as well. The fact that Turkish women have made use of the

Optional Protocol illustrates awareness within civil society regarding CEDAW. The new national law on the prevention of violence against women is, I understand, the fruit of hard work by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies under the leadership of Minister Sahin, as well as some 237 women's organizations. I would like to commend the women of Turkey for this achievement and their unwavering efforts to preserve the universality of human rights for all.

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who founded the Turkish Republic 89 years ago, spoke of his vision for a modern Turkey. He said that "if henceforth the women do not share in the social life of the nation, we shall never attain our full development." These words still ring true today, for all people everywhere. The struggle for women's equality is still far from won. Indeed, in some countries, hard-won advances are at risk of being lost. I believe it is in this spirit of an ongoing mission that the Government of Turkey has hosted us today, given us the opportunity to take stock of where we stand today, and also the extra space for the Committee to advance on its various initiatives. Much work awaits the CEDAW Committee in its fourth decade and beyond. Thus, in closing, on behalf of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, allow me to express our deepest appreciation to our hosts, and to reaffirm our commitment to supporting and working with the Committee in its endeavours to usher in a world free of discrimination and violence against women and girls.

Thank you.
