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| **Statement by Ivana Rada Radačić, Chair of the UN Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice**  High-level interactive dialogue on “Accelerating implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: exchange of best practices in preparation for the Beijing+25 review and appraisal[[1]](#footnote-1)”  63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women |

Thank you Mister Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

It is with great honour that I take the floor on behalf of the Human Rights Council Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice.

Let me start with briefly explaining our mandate. The Working Group was established in 2010 and is one of the two special procedures of the Human Rights Council on women’s rights, with the broadest mandate. The work of the previous mandate holders has covered the topics of political and public, economic and social life, family and culture and health and safety, while we have recently focused on women deprived of liberty in the context of our agenda of re-asserting equality and challenging rollbacks. On each of these areas, a thematic report has been submitted to the Human Rights Council, informing its annual resolutions on the elimination of discrimination against women.

In addition to our annual thematic report, the Workin Group has conducted 16 country visits covering all regions, and our recommendations have had significant impact in a number of countries, resulting in constitutional and legal provisions and policies on gender equality.

Furthermore, the Working Group has contributed to eliminating discrimination through its communication procedure, which allows for not only individual complaints but also challenges to (draft) laws, policies and practices. The Group’s 200 plus communications, have tackled issues such as sexual and reproductive rights, attacks against women human rights defenders, access to land, discriminatory laws on nationality, marital status, adultery.

We have also contributed to advancing development of standards on important issues, such as criminalisation of women’s reproductive and sexual behaviour, through our position papers. Finally, through our convening capacity we have provided spaces for women’s human rights defenders at the international level to inform understanding of, and effective responses to gender discrimination.

Mister Chairperson,

Let me now move to sharing with you our observations about the achievements and the main challenges in the quest for the elimination of discrimination against women, which we have documented in our work.

In fewer than two decades since the Beijing conference, there has been significant progress on women’s rights at national, regional and international levels.

International commitment to fulfilling women’s right to political participation has grown substantially, and the global average for women’s political representation has doubled. Moreover, technology has enabled new forms of women’s political expression and engagement. Movements denouncing gender-based violence against women, such as #NiUnaMenos and #MeToo, have swept much of the globe, following decades of advocacy from women’s rights movements.

Significant progress has been made in closing the gender gap in education, and women have increasingly participated in the cultural and scientific lives of their communities and nations. Women’s labour force participation has increased significantly, and well as women’s entrepreneurships, particularly in small and medium-sized companies.

The right of women and girls to equality in the family has been recognized in international human rights law and guaranteed in most modern legal regimes. In some countries, progress has been made in challenging gender stereotypes and patriarchal family roles. A considerable number of countries has developed laws criminalizing domestic violence and providing protection for victims.

Moreover, women’s sexual and reproductive rights have been increasingly recognized in international standards. Maternal mortality has been almost halved over the past 20 years and women’s rights in childbirth have been put on the agenda of human rights.

Despite these achievements, discrimination against women and the impunity for the violations of women’s rights persist in both the private and public spheres, in times of conflict as in times of peace, and in all regions of the world. Women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination experience inequality particularly acute .

Not only is the advancement of women’s rights and full equality too slow and, uneven women’s hard-fought achievements now risk being reversed. Retrogressions have been occurring, often in the name of culture, religion and traditions, and threaten the hard-fought progress in achieving women’s equality. Recently, the concept of gender equality has been undermined through the discourse on gender ideology.

Mister Chairperson,

Our Working Group would like to call on international human rights bodies and United Nations entities to guard against the current backlash in order to ensure that the human rights framework is not undermined. The human rights community should make every effort to challenge misuse of culture, religion and State sovereignty as justifications for discrimination against women.

We would also like to call on the states to affirm their commitments to securing women’s rights, ensuring accountability mechanisms for elimination of discrimination against women and securing effective implementation of the Beijing commitments and the SGDs. Securing gender equality in law and in practice, which would enable women to participate fully in political, public, economic and social life, is a crucial factor for the success of sustainable development.

Mister Chairperson,

It has been more than 70 years since women’s right to equality was enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 40 years since the ground-breaking Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted, more than 25 years since the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action established that women’s rights are an indivisible part of human rights and almost 25 years since the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted. The Working Group calls for immediate action to secure gender equality.

The Working Group expresses its commitment to advancing women’s equality, in all areas of life, including family and sexual and reproductive behaviour where we are currently facing the most significant backlashes. We will continue assisting States and other stakeholders to find and maintain the political will necessary to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, to create an environment that is conducive to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, in accordance with Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, but also the cross-cutting principle of leaving no one behind.

Thank you for your kind attention.

1. <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/63/official-meetings/csw63acceleratingimplementationb25.pdf?la=en&vs=5122> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)