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Chair: Mr. Mac-Donald. (Suriname)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 28: Advancement of women

(a) Advancement of women (A/67/38 and 227; A/C.3/67/L.2)

(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/67/185 and 347)

1. **Ms. Puri** (Assistant Secretary-General for Intergovernmental Support and Strategic Partnerships, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)) said that it was a time of great promise and opportunity for women and girls around the world, but also one of disappointment given the persistent challenges and slow progress towards the full realization of women's rights and empowerment. There were more women in leadership roles in politics and business, there was parity in primary school enrolment, better maternal health and family planning, and a rise in the number of countries with legislation to prevent and respond to violence against women. There had been progress since the Committee's landmark resolution on women and political participation; 33 countries had reached the goal of 30 per cent of women in parliament and in Senegal the number had doubled as a result of gender parity law.

2. Those developments notwithstanding, and despite the strong intergovernmental normative basis established through the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, there was a need to strengthen gender equality standards, including through the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. A mere one third of General Assembly resolutions during the 66th session had included a gender perspective; more had to be done for gender perspectives to be systematically reflected in the work of United Nations bodies and for greater gender mainstreaming in all aspects of General Assembly resolutions, particularly in areas such as disarmament, international security issues and legal matters. Gender equality and women's empowerment was integral to the work of the United Nations and should be reflected in the outcomes of discussions on peace and security, social and economic development, human rights and even environmental issues. It was not enough to simply

include a token reference to women and girls; the importance of the issue must be substantively and meaningfully emphasized as key beneficiary and enabler of all such endeavours. UN-Women was actively engaged in supporting Member States through substantive input and advocacy. The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development reaffirmed the centrality of gender equality and reflected the importance of consultation between all stakeholders. As Member States considered the development of Sustainable Development Goals and the Development Agenda beyond 2015, it was important to keep gender equality and women's empowerment at the forefront.

3. The pervasiveness of violence against women remained a global problem. The recent shooting of fourteen-year-old Malala Yousufzai of Pakistan had made her a symbol of the fight for the rights of all women and girls. As many as 7 in 10 women worldwide reported having experienced physical and/or sexual violence: from sexual harassment to rape and honour killing, with the most pervasive form of violence being intimate partner violence, which was hidden under a cloak of silence and impunity and often resulted in death. Violence against women was the most severe expression of discrimination and disempowerment of women and girls, weakening democracy, peace and security, sustainable development, social cohesion and national economies; some countries estimated the annual cost of such violence to be \$33 billion. The elimination of such violence must therefore be part of any target and indicator on gender equality and women's empowerment in the development framework beyond 2015.

4. Prevention was key, as was creating a virtuous cycle by changing the mindsets and stereotypes at the root of violence. A comprehensive prevention strategy must be based on ensuring women's access to economic opportunities, equal participation in public and political life and safe environments for women and girls and on repealing laws and practices that perpetuated discrimination. Member States had taken a number of actions, including the enactment of laws, to prevent and respond to violence; those needed to be replicated, scaled up and made more comprehensive and accessible. There was a need for a coordinated systematic approach, political commitment, comprehensive laws and multisectoral national action plans that were funded, implemented, and monitored.

There was also an urgent need for more awareness-raising campaigns, education, engaging all stakeholders, including religious and community leaders, to inculcate respectful, violence-free gender relations.

5. With regard to trafficking — one of the fastest growing, lucrative and high-impact crimes, with more than half of all victims of forced labour and 98 per cent of all victims of sexual exploitation being female — the human rights issue must be simultaneously framed within a sustainable development agenda that promoted employment and decent work. Prevention and response were particularly complex and required concerted governmental and intergovernmental action and agreements at regional and global levels. Specialized and gender-sensitive approaches and strategies were critical, as was a holistic approach linking prevention and response and addressing the root causes of the problem.

6. Ending violence against women was a priority for UN-Women. To that end, it coordinated the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, provided standard-setting services in 74 countries and worked with UNICEF and UN-Habitat to support the Safe Cities programme. In addition to coordinating the Secretary-General's campaign, UNiTE to End Violence against Women UN-Women had also implemented a number of programmes to support Governments in the fight against trafficking. She urged Member States to continue and increase the political and financial support that had made those critical programmes possible.

7. As a primary standard-setting organization, the United Nations had a particular responsibility to lead by example and demonstrate gender parity. There had been progress at leadership levels, with women occupying 29 per cent of top posts, particularly at the level of Under-Secretaries-General, in a reflection of the Secretary-General's personal commitment to promoting women. However, the overall representation of women in the UN System had grown only marginally from 39.9 per cent to 40.7 per cent and the representation of women remained uneven, spanning from a high of approximately 60 per cent at the P-2 grade to a low of 27 per cent at the D-2 grade. Women's representation in traditionally male-dominated fields, such as political affairs or peacekeeping must be increased with the help of strong measures to break gender stereotypes.

8. In accordance with article 4 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, special measures must be put in place and implemented where they existed. Women's representation at the highest level did not necessarily result in increases at lower levels. Therefore, approaches and policies must be developed, implemented and monitored to ensure that gender parity was attained and sustained over time. An enabling environment and facilitative organizational culture were critical and the System-wide Action Plan on gender equality and women's empowerment would ensure accountability on the part of senior managers with regard to the equal representation of women and gender mainstreaming. Most important, consistent vigilance from Member States was necessary and she urged them to strengthen the global agenda for gender equality and for women and girls through action in multilateral forums, United Nations resolutions and political and financial support, as 98 per cent of the UN-Women budget was funded by voluntary contributions.

9. **Ms. Ameline** (Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) said that the Committee had reviewed over 400 country reports, providing guidance on how to improve the situation of women through its constructive dialogues with governments and its concluding observations. Its general recommendations had helped to clarify and promote understanding of the rights under the Convention, and its increasing jurisprudence under the Optional Protocol had proved to be influential in the creation of international jurisprudence on women's rights. She noted that 187 States were party to the Convention and called upon those which had not yet done so to ratify the Convention. The Optional Protocol to the Convention had been accepted by 104 States parties.

10. The Committee had considered or scheduled for consideration all reports that were 10 years or more overdue. While the Committee considered 24 reports per year, recently it had been unable to keep pace with the number of submissions, with 43 reports currently awaiting consideration. Under the Optional Protocol, the Committee was examining a number of individual communications and 6 inquiries, including requests for inquiries, were pending consideration. The Committee was aware that timely consideration was a significant incentive for States parties to report in accordance with

the terms of the Convention. While recognizing the remarkable quality of support provided by the Secretariat, the Committee was very concerned about the efforts undertaken to support the work of the Committee and would like that support to be matched by resources commensurate with its complex mission.

11. The Committee welcomed the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on strengthening the United Nations human rights treaty body system. At its 52nd session, it had expressed support for the Addis Ababa guidelines on the independence and impartiality of treaty body members and had taken measures to increase the efficiency of its working methods in light of the proposals contained in the High Commissioner's report and the observations of the States parties. It remained fully committed to reinforcing constructive dialogue with States parties and coordination to promote and implement the Convention.

12. The Committee continued to engage with States parties and non-governmental organizations, national human rights institutions and parliamentarians to secure input and support for its work. It was especially grateful to other international bodies for providing country-specific information. In addition to the permanent framework of dialogue with the representatives of United Nations agencies, the Committee had established special cooperation with UN-Women, relating, inter alia, to the elaboration of a general recommendation on access to justice, and had also met with relevant special mandate holders to strengthen coordination.

13. The Committee was concerned about the serious detrimental impact that the imposed decision to move its July 2013 session from New York to Geneva would have on its interactions with key women's rights actors in New York, such as the Commission on the Status of Women. The decision, seemingly based on a shortfall of less than \$100,000 for the servicing of the Committee in New York, might have severe consequences on the effectiveness of its work. Article 20, paragraph 2, of the Convention clearly provided for the Committee's involvement in such a decision and the Committee insisted that the matter should be resolved in the context of the ongoing treaty body strengthening process.

14. Though significant challenges remained, the Committee had worked with competence and dedication to assist States parties in complying with

and implementing their treaty obligations under the Convention, to stimulate legal and policy reform, and to provide individual relief for the protection of the human rights and advancement of women, and had gained recognition as a legitimate and internationally respected voice.

15. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women aimed to maintain fruitful collaboration with the Third Committee and to strengthen its own role within the United Nations system; improve coordination on the implementation and visibility of the Convention; and to contribute to the treaty body strengthening process.

16. **Mr. Hisajima** (Japan) expressed the hope that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women would further strengthen its engagement with Member States through constructive dialogue and raise awareness in the international community on the issue of gender-sensitive disaster management. His Government welcomed the structural changes in the Committee, particularly the conversion of the task force on gender equality into a working group on gender equality in the context of asylum, statelessness and natural disasters. Japan also commended the Committee's efforts to strengthen relationships with other relevant organizations and suggested that collaboration with such entities, particularly those with field presence, might be useful for implementing the Committee's recommendations. He asked how the Committee intended to develop further its relationships with relevant organizations.

17. **Ms. Kaljulate** (Observer for the European Union), noting the progress achieved by the Committee through its country reviews and 28 general recommendations, said that the European Union had appreciated the recent opportunity for informal dialogue with the Committee on issues of mutual interest. She asked the Vice-Chair of the Committee to elaborate on the steps it was taking to incorporate the recommendations contained in the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on strengthening the treaty body system. One example of the Committee's close working relationship with UN-Women had been the support provided for regional consultations on the general recommendation on women in conflict and post-conflict situations and it would be interesting to hear the Vice-Chair's views on whether and how similar collaboration with other bodies could benefit work on other general recommendations. The European

Union reiterated its call to all countries to sign, ratify and fully implement the Convention and its Optional Protocol in order to attain the long overdue goal of universal ratification.

18. **Mr. Ponkivar** (Slovenia) said that the importance his country attached to women's rights in internal and foreign policy was illustrated by its recent launch of a website for public servants to learn more about and test their knowledge on gender equality and the integration of gender perspective into policies. He enquired as to the Committee's cooperation with the Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practice that had been established in 2010. Furthermore, he asked what forms of discrimination against women had predominated in recent years and in what areas there was improvement or regression.

19. **Ms. Murillo** (Costa Rica) asked the Vice-Chair of the Committee to elaborate further on the decision to relocate the July 2013 session to Geneva and on the Committee's concerns in that regard.

20. **Ms. Ameline** (Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) said that the Committee was considering a new general recommendation on persons displaced as a result of climate change. It would be important to follow the same procedure that had been used in the drafting of the general recommendation on women in conflict, which had entailed including regional stakeholders in consultations. The cooperation of UN-Women had been instrumental in bringing about a successful outcome in that instance.

21. The Committee had established a Working Group on working methods with the aim of improving the Committee's efficiency and management of time and resources. The Committee and the Working Group were fully committed to the treaty body reform process, which provided an opportunity to streamline the Committee's procedures and enhance coordination with other treaty bodies, United Nations agencies and other international and regional organizations.

22. **Ms. Puri** (Assistant Secretary-General for Intergovernmental Support and Strategic Partnerships, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)) said that close cooperation existed between UN-Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in promoting the five functions of UN-Women and practical implementation of the

Convention. The partnership ensured linkage between the normative and the operational: the Committee was a major forum for ensuring compliance by Member States with their commitments, while UN-Women pursued the same objectives through its field presence and system-wide coordination. The Committee also served as a knowledge hub, building up knowledge through its reporting and general recommendations and compiling best practices to be replicated and scaled up.

23. **Ms. Bakajka** (Democratic Republic of the Congo), recalling that her country would submit its sixth report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2013, appealed for assistance in establishing a link between Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and capacity-building for women in peacebuilding. Although the Democratic Republic of the Congo was deeply engaged in the peace process, problems persisted in the western part of the country, causing suffering among women and children. She asked whether the Committee and UN-Women could take measures to help the country to strengthen mechanisms for implementing the Convention.

24. **Ms. Ameline** (Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) said that while there was general awareness of and concern over the role of women in conflict, the urgent task was to find ways to translate such concern into specific actions. The Committee was preparing a general recommendation on the topic, in cooperation with UN-Women.

25. **Ms. Puri** (Assistant Secretary-General for Intergovernmental Support and Strategic Partnerships, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)) said that UN-Women attached great importance to enhancing the role of women in peace and security, especially in post-conflict countries and, through its field presence, advised on how women could benefit from and be part of peacebuilding and peacemaking. She reconfirmed the commitment of UN-Women to working with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in the conflict-ridden areas of the country.

26. **Mr. Benmehidi** (Algeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, reaffirmed support for the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly as the guiding policy

framework for the achievement of women's development and gender equality, the full realization of their rights and the socio-economic empowerment of women and girls. Despite continued progress, many women and girls around the world were still victim to numerous forms of discrimination and did not have equal opportunities. The myriad of remaining challenges and obstacles, such as poverty and gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS, unemployment and the lack of access to social services, needed to be effectively addressed. It was particularly important to address the compounding effects of both communicable and non-communicable diseases on women's ability to realize their rights and achieve their fullest potential.

27. The Group also remained concerned about the persistence of the main impediments to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and recognized the need to step up action to address those important issues at the national and international levels. It called upon international organizations and developed countries to support national programmes for women and girls, including those with disabilities, migrants, and rural and indigenous women and girls. In that respect, UN-Women had an important role to play in promoting better system-wide coordination.

28. It was also vital to identify and tackle emerging threats and challenges affecting women and girls. Gender-responsive budgeting initiatives were essential to remove gender gaps in policies, plans and budgets.

29. The Group of 77 and China was deeply concerned about the suffering of women and girls living under foreign occupation and was also firmly committed to ending violence against women in all its forms. Consequently, it emphasized the need to implement concrete actions at all levels to prevent and eradicate that scourge.

30. Women's empowerment and full participation in all spheres of society, were fundamental for equality, development and peace. Further efforts were needed to promote the increased participation of women in politics and in other decision-making positions. Member States must recognize that gender equality and the empowerment of women were *sine qua non* for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and must give priority to further mainstreaming the gender perspective into the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies. It was also important to

enhance international cooperation and global partnership for achieving gender equality and the economic empowerment of women as income generators and vital development agents.

31. **Ms. Albrechtsen** (Deputy Executive Director (Management), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)), introducing the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula" (A/67/258), said that every day 800 women died from complications of pregnancy and for every woman who died, 20 or more had complications leading to injury or disablement. One of the most serious injuries of childbearing was obstetric fistula — a hole in the birth canal, caused by prolonged, obstructed labour due to lack of timely and adequate medical care. The condition resulted in most cases in stillbirth or death of the infant within the first week and devastating injury to the woman that often led to her being excluded from community life and abandoned by her husband.

32. While the condition had been virtually eliminated in industrialized nations, it was estimated that 2 to 3.5 million women and girls were still living with obstetric fistula in the developing world, with about 50,000 to 100,000 new cases each year. Victims were usually poor, illiterate women and girls with limited access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health care. The persistence of obstetric fistula reflected not only health inequities and health-care system constraints, but also broader economic and socio-cultural challenges facing women and girls. Poverty, gender inequality, lack of schooling, child marriage and early childbearing impeded opportunities for women and girls, and the absence of preventive care violated their basic human rights, including the right to health.

33. Since 2010, greater attention had been focused on maternal and newborn health and progress had been made in addressing obstetric fistula owing to more effective interventions, enhanced data collection and analysis, advocacy, partnerships and stronger political and financial commitments. Effective inter-agency partnerships helped to promote maternal, newborn and child health and played an important role in supporting the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health and the Investing in Midwifery Programme, jointly executed by UNFPA and the International Confederation of Midwives. In 2003, UNFPA and other key actors had launched the first global Campaign to End Fistula. Although the Campaign had produced

tangible results in the ten years of its existence, the challenge of putting an end to obstetric fistula required intensified national, regional and international efforts to bolster health systems, gender and socio-economic equality and human rights.

34. The factors that led women and girls to develop obstetric fistula were the same that caused maternal morbidity and mortality. Both were almost entirely preventable with universal and equitable access to high quality reproductive health care. UNFPA called on all relevant stakeholders to step up funding to improve maternal health, eliminate obstetric fistula, and guarantee universal access to reproductive health by 2015. Making the health and rights of women and girls a priority could make every pregnancy wanted, every childbirth safe and eliminate obstetric fistula everywhere.

35. **Ms. Mbala Eyenga** (Cameroon), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, which aligned itself with the Group of 77 and China, said that in the same spirit in which the founders of the United Nations had proclaimed their faith in human rights, Africa continued to champion gender equality and women's empowerment through many ground-breaking initiatives and commitments, having declared 2010 to 2020 the "African Women's Decade" and adopted gender-parity principles in all spheres. Most African countries had endorsed such important initiatives as the Solemn Declaration on Gender in Africa, the African Union Gender Policy and the Africa-wide Campaign on Violence against Women; significant progress had been made in increasing political participation of women and promoting their economic empowerment through micro-credit programmes. Particular attention was given to maternal health with the launching in 2010 of the Campaign for Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality (CARMMA).

36. Rural women played a significant role in society: accounting for the greater part of the agricultural labour force and performing the most unpaid care work, they made a vital contribution to family and community well-being, to local and national economies, and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Yet they remained largely overlooked and were disproportionately affected by the ongoing financial, economic, food and energy crises and by climate change, poverty and unequal access to social services.

37. In that regard, the Group of African States was disappointed that the Commission on the Status of Women had failed at its most recent session to adopt agreed conclusions on the important priority theme of rural women. It hoped that, in future, mutual respect and tolerance for cultural diversity, different backgrounds and ethical values would be maintained and that the contribution of such diversity to development and the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms would be given due recognition.

38. Many African countries had already passed legislation to punish all forms of violence against women. However, such violence remained pervasive. Further preventive efforts were needed in the ongoing campaign to eliminate the scourge of violence against women on the African continent, for regardless of the form violence took, the result was the same: women or girls were denied their human rights and their health and lives were threatened. Child marriage jeopardized the health of young girls, often resulting in early childbearing, which in turn put them at higher risks of maternal mortality, injury and disability, and of severe consequences such as obstetric fistula. Female genital mutilation continued to be widely practised, posing a serious threat to the psychological, sexual and reproductive health of women and girls, and it was imperative to strengthen efforts towards its elimination, in line with the decision adopted by African Heads of State and Government in July 2011.

39. Ending violence against women and girls required holistic and multisectoral approaches. Although States were the main actors, the task was a shared societal responsibility; traditional and religious leaders could play a decisive role. It was crucial to strengthen collaboration with them and leverage their influence to raise awareness about the detrimental impact of harmful practices on women and girls and to support a process of social change that could lead to the elimination of such practices.

40. **Mr. Abu Bakar** (Malaysia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) was the primary mechanism for coordinating and monitoring implementation of ASEAN priorities and cooperation on women's issues at the regional level. Since the adoption of the ASEAN Charter in 2007, ASEAN had continued to make significant progress in promoting and protecting human rights and encouraging the advancement of women across the

region. The ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) had been established in 2010 to assist member countries in implementing their commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. To that end ACWC had recently held consultations with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children on a rights-based approach to initiatives designed to prevent and address all forms of violence against women and children. In addition, ACWC had established its work plan for the period 2012-2016 and agreed on a number of projects and activities to be implemented in 2012-2014, including the publication of ASEAN best practices in eliminating violence against women and children, the development of a regional network of social services agencies working to empower victims of violence against women and children, the launch of a public campaign against gender-based violence, activities to strengthen the economic rights of women and the development of an ASEAN progress report on women's advancement and gender equality.

41. Intergovernmental processes, including high-level events, provided valuable opportunities to strengthen global norms and policies on gender equality and the empowerment of women. In addition, further efforts should be made to mainstream the gender perspective into all areas of the work of intergovernmental bodies.

42. As part of its efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets relating to the advancement of women, ASEAN had adopted a joint declaration on the attainment of the MDGs in 2009, which had established a monitoring and evaluation system and outlined five key focus areas: advocacy and linkages; knowledge; resources; expertise; and regional cooperation and regional public goods. In 2011, a regional workshop involving senior officials had been held to establish the format and content of the ASEAN Roadmap for the attainment of the MDGs. ASEAN had also held a multisectoral workshop in July 2012 involving policymakers from ASEAN member States and representatives of United Nations agencies to discuss ways to tackle the disparities in development between and within ASEAN countries. Lastly, a regional assessment would be carried out in 2012 to determine the progress that ASEAN member States had

made in achieving the MDGs since the previous regional assessment in 2008.

43. **Mr. Talbot** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women were priorities for CARICOM and that its member countries continued to strive to achieve internationally agreed development goals such as those relating to poverty alleviation, the elimination of gender-based violence, the improvement of education and training opportunities for women and girls, and the promotion of women's participation in decision-making positions. With regard to violence against women, the laws and national plans adopted and the prevention activities and awareness-raising campaigns developed in over 100 countries had had a cumulatively limited impact, which pointed to a systemic failure in their implementation. In the Caribbean, more effective legal frameworks were needed to ensure gender equality and protect women's human rights, and all sectors of the community needed to be involved in challenging the gender stereotypes and social norms that perpetuated violence against women.

44. CARICOM had implemented several initiatives at the regional level, including the launch of a campaign on gender-based violence designed to promote positive attitudes and a more gender-sensitive community. In 2012, three young women from CARICOM had participated in the first Global UNiTE Youth Forum and a CARICOM national had been appointed to the UN-Women Global Civil Society Advisory Group. In addition, the first in a series of Orange Days had been launched in 2012 as part of the Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign and activities would be carried out during every month leading up to the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2013.

45. At the national level, Caribbean countries had developed and enhanced their legislative and monitoring frameworks to address gender-based violence. With the support of UN-Women, a standardized court-based violence intervention programme for the Caribbean had been introduced in several Caribbean countries to encourage men to accept their role in ending violence against women. In addition, a transformational leadership programme had been established to empower Caribbean young women.

46. In the area of education, most Caribbean countries had achieved the MDG of universal primary education and girls now outperformed boys at the secondary and tertiary levels. However, the health of women and girls remained a source of great concern and CARICOM was working to address the disproportionate vulnerability of young women to HIV/AIDS and non-communicable diseases. Rural women in particular were at greater risk of poverty and had inadequate access to social services and basic health services, and CARICOM was committed to working with all partners to enhance social and economic opportunities for that group, which accounted for a quarter of the world's population.

47. Lastly, eliminating discrimination against women was as important as eradicating gender-based violence and CARICOM therefore urged the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to reconsider its decision to hold all future sessions in Geneva, since that would pose significant challenges for many small States that were without representation in Geneva.

48. **Ms. Chilenje Nkhoma** (Malawi), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that an entire chapter of the Community's 2008 Protocol on Gender and Development was devoted to violence against women and girls and that one of its 28 targets was to halve the current level of gender-based violence by 2015. The Protocol called on SADC member States to enact and enforce legislation and adopt policies and programmes to prohibit all forms of gender-based violence, provide comprehensive testing, treatment and care for victims of sexual assault, combat human trafficking and prevent sexual harassment. Most SADC countries had passed domestic violence laws and established national action plans on gender-based violence. In addition, several had enacted or were in the process of enacting legislation on human trafficking and many had adopted laws on the comprehensive treatment of survivors of gender-based violence, as well as on sexual assault and sexual harassment. Despite that progress, there were gaps between policy and implementation, which SADC was working to overcome in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and private-sector stakeholders by establishing specialized legal services and shelter facilities for the victims of gender-based violence.

49. Education was a vital tool to bring an end to violence against women and girls by giving them economic independence and SADC therefore urged UN-Women to continue its consultations with all stakeholders to find ways to prepare women for leadership through special training and higher-level education. The media also played a key role in combating gender-based violence and SADC was taking steps to train and sensitize the media, especially during the upcoming 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign.

50. Lastly, in Malawi specifically, women's representation in parliament was increasing with each election and the country had recently elected its first female President. In 2006, Malawi had enacted legislation prohibiting domestic violence and the Government was also implementing various national programmes to combat gender-based violence and violence against children, such as the National Response Gender-Based Violence Programme.

51. **Ms. Chahín** (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that priority should be given to gender equality and women's empowerment as a prerequisite for achieving the MDGs and in order to consistently promote the gender agenda. CELAC was committed to mainstreaming gender in public policies and its member States were working with international and regional partners, including civil society and non-governmental organizations, to promote women's participation in government decision-making and increase their representation in public office, including at the highest levels. To that end they had adopted measures to improve their legal and regulatory frameworks and eliminate discrimination against women.

52. However, international dialogue, consensus and cooperation at all levels must also be strengthened to address the challenges faced by all women and girls, but especially migrant, rural and indigenous women, women with disabilities and women of African descent. CELAC was particularly concerned about the levels of violence against women and trafficking in women and girls, the feminization of poverty and HIV/AIDS, and the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases and its impact on female caregivers. CELAC countries were working to overcome those challenges and promote the advancement and economic empowerment of women on the basis of the Brasilia

Consensus adopted in 2010. With regard to violence against women, the region had played a pioneering role in developing instruments and mechanisms at the regional and international levels designed to eradicate that scourge. CELAC was also committed to preventing human trafficking and called on Member States to establish and strengthen focal points responsible for coordinating the efforts made by countries of origin, transit and destination to combat that crime.

53. Women were more likely to be in situations of hunger and poverty, especially rural and indigenous women and migrant women. CELAC therefore urged the international community to step up their efforts to empower and protect the human rights of those vulnerable groups so that they could fulfill their role as vital agents of development. Priority should be given to measures designed to ensure that all women and men had adequate food and housing, as well as access to health care, education and decent work. Lastly, CELAC called for increased cooperation from Member States to assist developing countries in developing national initiatives designed to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

54. **Mr. Khalil** (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Group of Arab States, said that improving the economic, social and legal status of women was essential to achieve development in all spheres and meet the goals on poverty, unemployment and illiteracy established at the first and second Arab Economic and Social Development Summits held in 2009 and 2011. The Arab Women's Organization was working to strengthen cooperation between Arab States and coordinate their efforts, policies and plans designed to strengthen the role of women in society, raise public awareness of the numerous challenges faced by women and mainstream gender issues in overall development plans.

55. Women continued to encounter numerous obstacles in employment and participation and did not enjoy equal access to health care. Older women and women with disabilities were particularly vulnerable to violence and discrimination and Member States should intensify their efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of gender-based violence. Education and training was crucial to women's empowerment, since it would give them the knowledge and skills required to contribute fully in society. For example, improving women's access to information and communication technology

would enable them to participate in various aspects of life and would help to break down negative stereotypes and enhance the overall positive role of women in society.

56. The Group condemned the increasing difficulties faced by women in the occupied Arab territories in Palestine, the Syrian Golan and the Shebaa Farms in Lebanon and called on UN-Women to appoint a focal point to address the situation of women living under foreign occupation. The Group also urged the international community to provide Palestinian women living under occupation with all the support necessary to enjoy their human rights, including their right to live in their own independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital.

57. **Mr. Vrailas** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the countries of the stabilization and association process and potential candidate countries Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that women in decision-making positions should be the norm rather than the exception and that women and female perspectives should be represented at all high-level international discussions on security, development, human rights and the environment. Gender equality was a fundamental right enshrined in the treaties of the European Union and guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and a large corpus of European legislation was devoted to gender equality in various spheres.

58. Recent gender initiatives included the Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015 adopted by the European Commission, the European Pact for gender equality for the period 2011-2020 adopted by the Council of the European Union and the European Union Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2012. In addition, the European Union Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development for 2010-2015 established a basis for the systematic inclusion of gender equality in the European Union's political dialogues with partner countries and for the involvement of civil society, especially women's organizations, in both partner countries and the European Union. The European Union had recently

intensified its cooperation with UN-Women by signing a memorandum of understanding in which it undertook to promote women's leadership and political participation, improve their access to economic empowerment and combat gender-based violence.

59. Women's involvement in peace processes as mediators and peacemakers remained regrettably low and the European Union's Concept on strengthening its mediation and dialogue capacities had therefore set the policy goal of increasing the representation of women in that area and ensuring adequate resources to facilitate their involvement. In 2008, the European Union had adopted a comprehensive approach to its implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) and around half of all European Union member States had adopted national actions plans to strengthen implementation of resolution 1325 (2000).

60. Lastly, under the European Union action plan for justice policies for the period 2010-2014, the European Union provided protection for victims of violent crime, including genital mutilation, as well as financial support to civil society, universities and local authorities to combat violence and offer victim support. The European Union was also working to implement its own guidelines on combating violence and discrimination against women and girls and was keen to raise awareness of harmful traditional practices such as genital mutilation.

61. **Ms. Strachwitz** (Liechtenstein), said that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had been invaluable in safeguarding women's rights and urged those Member States which had not yet ratified it to do so as soon as possible. Physical violence against women was prevalent throughout the world but crimes of violence, especially rape, often went unpunished. Gender-based violence was rarely reported because the perpetrator was usually known to the victim and the problem of under-reporting was creating a culture of impunity and systematic lack of accountability. States should take steps to raise awareness, build trust in national judicial systems and ensure that those systems were effective and accessible, and train officials to provide victims with the necessary support. It was the primary responsibility of States to ensure that those who violated women's human rights were held accountable. Liechtenstein had recently strengthened its legislation on sexual crimes by broadening the list of acts that

resulted in automatic prosecution regardless of victim consent. In addition, the Government had launched a public campaign to raise awareness of domestic violence.

62. Sexual violence in situations of armed conflict not only destroyed the dignity and physical integrity of the victim but also tore at the social fabric of the community. To build sustainable peace, sexual violence should be addressed throughout all stages of conflict resolution processes and its prohibition should be included in the provisions of ceasefire agreements, since the issue was likely to be ignored in later efforts to create and maintain peace if it was not addressed in the early stages of mediation. Sexual violence had been recognized as a war crime and crime against humanity in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

63. Besides being a clear violation of women's human rights, gender-based violence had a direct impact on development by hampering productivity, reducing human capital, undermining economic growth and hindering women's full participation in all aspects of society. Member States should step up efforts to protect and promote the rights of women to participate on equal terms in all phases of political transition and decision-making and to guarantee their right to express their views and assemble freely. Lastly, the United Nations should place particular emphasis on the inclusion of poor and disadvantaged women and those with disabilities in democratic processes and should lead by example in gender equality.

64. **Ms. Fahmy** (Egypt) said that discrimination and violence against women and girls was a universal phenomenon, but it was even more prevalent in situations of armed conflict and foreign occupation. Socioeconomic and gender inequalities, particularly in education and employment, were especially persistent among rural and older women and those with disabilities. In particular, Egypt was deeply concerned about the grave situation of women and girls in the occupied Arab territories in Lebanon, Palestine and Syria, and the severe impact of the ongoing Israeli occupation. It was regrettable that the reports submitted under agenda item 28 did not refer to the dire socioeconomic and humanitarian conditions in those areas. Egypt therefore welcomed the inclusion of women's issues among the priorities of the United Nations, and the support that Egyptian women had received from the UN-Women office in Cairo in

promoting their political participation and economic empowerment.

65. Egyptian women had exercised their legal right to vote at the democratic elections held in 2011 and 2012. In addition, the National Council for Women had been re-established in 2012 and was working to eliminate discrimination and violence against women, combat trafficking of women and girls, promote women's political participation and economic empowerment and eradicate poverty, all with special emphasis on women with disabilities, older women, rural women and those living in female-headed households. In April 2011, a decree had been issued to amend the Egyptian penal code in order to toughen the penalty for crimes of rape, abduction and all forms of sexual harassment, and the Council had set up a hotline to enable victims to report sexual harassment and obtain legal aid. Furthermore, a proposal was to be submitted to the parliament to amend the penal code to prohibit any form of discrimination against women. The Council had also developed a comprehensive strategy to enhance women's political participation, which involved the media, political parties and civil society. A new training centre for women's political development had been established to encourage their participation in public and political life and to raise awareness of their political rights. The Council was also taking steps to ensure access by women, especially those in rural areas, to finance and microfinance, and to expand medical services and improve health and sanitation facilities for women in remote areas, older women and those with disabilities. Lastly, the Council was working with the National Coordinating Committee to Combat and Prevent Trafficking in Persons to implement the national action plan on trafficking in persons through awareness-raising programmes and women's economic empowerment.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.