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INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Key policy initiatives on financing for gender equality
and the empowerment of women**

Written statement*

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

THE EXPERIENCES AND EFFORTS OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates and participants,

It is my honour and privilege, as the Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, to contribute to the panel of the CSW on ‘Key policy initiatives on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women.’ I will focus on the Committee’s experience and efforts to secure increased attention to financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women to accelerate, or strengthen the full implementation of the Convention.

General remarks

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women contains human rights standards for women and girls in the civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and any other area. This comprehensive scope underlines the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights. The Convention aims at the universal enjoyment of these rights by all women, in all parts of the world, in public and in private life.

While the Convention itself does not explicitly refer to the question of financing required for the achievement of Convention goals and the implementation of its provisions, it is clear that the Convention as the legal binding instrument contains international obligations for States parties to fully finance its implementation. It is also in line with the Article 2 of the Convention that contains an obligation to States to condemn discrimination against women in all its forms and to pursue a policy of eliminating discrimination against women “**by all appropriate means**”. Financing the implementation of the Convention is required and forms part of the “appropriate means”, called for the Article 2 of the Convention. The Committee is in the process of elaborating a general recommendation on article 2 of the Convention.

The Convention also requires States parties to ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the “practical realization” of the principle of equality of men and women (art. 2). With ratification or accession, all 185 States parties to the Convention have accepted this obligation.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is mandated to monitor implementation of the Convention by States parties. In the course of its work, the Committee regularly assesses the challenges which States parties continue to face in fully complying with their treaty obligations. The Committee provides guidance and recommendations to reporting States in its concluding observations on specific steps required to accelerate implementation and to enhance compliance with Convention obligations.

At the same time, the CEDAW Committee has dealt with the question of financing for Convention implementation extensively in its consideration of States parties reports. In doing so, the Committee has addressed overall aspects of policy, and has also covered issues pertaining to specific articles of the Convention. While it has had the opportunity to note positive aspects in a number of instances, there have been significantly more instances where the Committee was concerned about lack of, or insufficient resources and financing devoted to Convention implementation.

Of particular and regular concern to the Committee has been the situation of States parties' national machineries for the advancement of women. The Committee considers that such an institutional mechanism is crucial for effective promotion of gender equality which requires for its effectiveness adequate human and financial resources, as well as power, authority and appropriate location within Government so as to be able to influence decision-making at the highest level, and across sectors.

Last year, the Committee celebrated 25 years of its work. During these 25 years, the Committee held 39 sessions, during which it examined 401 reports, submitted by 154 States parties. The last two years (2006-2007) have been especially productive: The Committee held a total of six sessions, three of which took place in parallel chambers, and it considered the reports of 69 States parties. This was an unprecedented number of States, and today I will highlight the issues raised and recommendations made by the Committee with respect to the topic of this panel, based on an analysis of the Committee's concluding comments adopted in these past two years.

Let me start by highlighting the positive aspects identified by the Committee.

During the consideration of the reports of 69 States parties in 2006/07, the Committee found opportunity to commend some 13 States parties in the area of financing for gender equality.

In several instances, the Committee welcomed the strengthening of national machineries for the advancement of women through increases in financial resources for such mechanisms.

The Committee has also positively noted the introduction of gender-sensitive budget policies, and the expansion of the gender budgeting approach to all ministries. It has also welcomed the conduct of gender assessments of budgets.

The Committee has noted the introduction of a women's component in the national budget which earmarked a specific percentage of planned development expenditure in all sectors for women. It has welcomed the integration of gender dimensions into development cooperation programmes.

In addition to enhanced funding for national machineries and initiatives to strengthen gender sensitivity of budgets, the Committee also commended a number of States for allocating, or increasing resources to pursue particular goals. For example, the Committee was pleased

about the provision of public funding, or of financial incentives for political parties to increase the number of women candidates, including in proportion to the number of women elected.

Financial assistance to victims of violence, lowering of school fees for girls, increases in State budgets to improve maternal health, establishment of dedicated funds to improve women's access to microcredit facilities, were among the specific instances of financing which the Committee welcomed.

Let me now move to the principal areas of concern identified by the Committee and related guidance provided by the Committee to States parties.

On many occasions, the Committee found **national machineries** for the advancement of women to be insufficiently resourced, especially in terms of budget, staffing and technical capacity. Such under-resourcing has been found in regard to Governmental mechanisms, such as gender equality ministries, bureaux or offices, as well as other gender equality mechanisms such as gender equality ombuds or commissioners. This was a case for 43 out of 69 States examined. In a number of instances, the Committee drew attention to severe under-resourcing, and has been concerned about lack of progress in States parties between reporting cycles.

In all instances, the Committee has drawn States attention to the fact that effective implementation of mandates and responsibilities by institutional mechanisms is not cost-free, and called upon States parties to provide adequate financial resources for machineries, to effectively coordinate the Government's efforts to promote gender equality, the full implementation of the Convention, elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, the enjoyment by women of their human rights, as well as for awareness-raising initiatives. The Committee has underlined that special commissions or designated officials cannot achieve the desired results if they are not provided with the necessary means. The Committee has urged States to address such situations as a matter of priority.

A second general and frequent issue of concern voiced by the Committee relates to resources and funding for implementation of **national action plans for the advancement of women** or gender equality. Reports of the State parties on the implementation of the Convention should also contain information on the implementation of the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action as they relate to specific articles of the Convention. There is a significant synergy between the substantive content of the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action and they are therefore mutually reinforcing. The Convention comprises legally binding obligations and sets out women's right to equality in civil, political, economic, social, cultural or any other field. The Platform, through its 12 critical areas of concern, provides a policy and programmatic agenda that can be used for the implementation of the Convention.

While welcoming the existence of such plans and policies, including those targeting particular groups of women, as well as of laws, the Committee has made it clear that their effective implementation, enforcement and/or monitoring requires financing, and has urged States parties to take steps towards this end.

Before moving on to particular sectoral areas, let me highlight certain other aspects of relevance for securing the necessary financing for Convention implementation. These include in particular States parties' macro-economic frameworks which significantly influence the manner in which Convention provisions are implemented, depending on the priorities that are being pursued. The Committee has discussed with a number of States parties the links between the practical realization of equality of men and women and such frameworks, and has urged them to integrate implementation of women's human rights into, and to monitor the effects of macroeconomic policies on gender equality in general and Convention implementation in particular. It has requested States to include gender perspectives in all economic policies, and to take corrective measures to prevent negative results for women. The Committee has also been concerned about the potential impact of free trade agreements on the socio-economic conditions of women and asked States parties to adopt compensatory measures in accordance with women's human rights. More generally, the Committee has requested States parties to make gender equality an explicit component of national development plans and policies, particularly those aimed at poverty alleviation/eradication and sustainable development. It has also asked States parties to place emphasis on women's human rights in all development cooperation programmes with international organizations and bilateral donors. In all of these areas, the Committee has been guided by the need to ensure that elimination of discrimination against women and women's full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms is dealt with as a priority obligation of all States.

Let me now review a number of sectoral areas, where the Committee has frequently found shortcomings. I will highlight the areas of violence against women, health, education, and the labour market.

The Committee has continuously been concerned about inadequate resources for addressing all forms of violence against women. This included lack of necessary resources for implementation of national action plans. In a number of States parties, support services for victims were found to be insufficiently funded, in particular for effective functioning of a safe crisis and intervention centres in sufficient numbers, shelters for women victims of violence, hotlines and similar services. Free legal aid for victims of violence remained unavailable in a number of instances, and NGOs providing services received inadequate public funding. The Committee has highlighted the particular needs of victims of sexual violence during conflict, in regard to rehabilitation, psychological recovery and social integration, as well as social provisions such as health insurance and housing.

Another area of frequent concern has been financing for women's health, where the Committee has found significant gaps in regard to women's health as well as their reproductive health, including family planning and obstetric services. In many instances, these concerns were especially pronounced in regard to the situation of women in rural areas, and minority women. In addition to requesting States to enhance allocation of resources to this area in their national budgets, the Committee also encouraged States parties to seek financial support from the international community.

Financing has also been one of the measures the Committee has focused on towards enhancing compliance with the Convention in regard to girls' and women's education. The

Committee repeatedly urged States parties to address the obstacles which prevent girls from attending school or continuing their education by investing further resources to increase educational opportunities and especially female literacy, including for equal participation at secondary and tertiary levels.

The Convention comprehensively covers women's rights in the field of employment. Also in this area, the Committee identified financing shortcomings, and addressed a number of recommendations to States parties to realize equal opportunities in the labour market. For example, the Committee pointed out that labour inspectorates that enforce labour laws and equality protections require sufficient budgetary resources for their effective functioning.

The Committee has also recommended steps to tackle the persistent pay gap between women and men, and the horizontal labour market segregation, by, for example, raising salaries, or providing additional wage increases in female-dominated sectors of public employment. The Committee has also recommended the creation of financial incentives, for example through the tax system, to encourage the involvement of men in domestic and care responsibilities. Maternity leave with pay or comparable social benefits was likewise urged as an appropriate measure to strengthen compliance with the Convention. The Committee has also encouraged States parties to provide access for women to credit in general, including micro-credit.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Committee considers financing as one of the appropriate means necessary for the full and effective implementation of the Convention. It has extensively pointed out gaps in States parties' attention to this issue, and has highlighted ways in which compliance can, and should be strengthened. While the Committee has frequently welcomed the existence of action plans, policies and laws, it has also highlighted that a lack of funding for such plans renders them ineffective. Therefore, it has urged States to identify and allocate the necessary resources in the many areas covered by the Convention. It has done so by requesting States to allocate dedicated resources, but also to strengthen integration of the Convention and of gender equality into macro-economic frameworks, and national development plans and policies. It has welcomed the use of gender sensitive budgeting procedures. The Committee has encouraged States to seek the support of the international community, but also of innovative sources of funding for the promotion of gender equality, including partnerships with the private sector.

The Committee has also made it clear that promotion of gender equality requires strong and dedicated institutional mechanisms, and adequate funding for such mechanisms is seen as a prerequisite for their effective implementation of their mandates.

Let me conclude: State parties to the Convention have an international legal obligation to pursue by all appropriate means including adequate financing, the full implementation of the Convention and concluding observations of the CEDAW Committee.