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**Statement
Chaloka

of the

Special**



**by Mr.
Beyani,
Chairperson
Coordination
Committee of
Procedures**

**HALF-DAY ANNUAL PLENARY PANEL DISCUSSION ON
THE INTEGRATION OF A GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

Panel

**“Civil society’s contribution to the integration of a gender perspective in the work of the
Human Rights Council and its mechanisms”**

Room XX - Palais des Nations, Geneva

12 September 2013, 10:00-13:00

Mr. Chairperson, distinguished delegates, and fellow panelists,

I am delighted to participate in this panel as Chairperson of the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures and share this podium with distinguished experts on women's rights and gender integration.

I believe we should give credit to the Human Rights Council. It has been instrumental in securing the recognition of the need to integrate the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system and gender perspectives into its work. It has taken numerous actions over the years in this regard.

At the time of the Council's establishment, the Institution Building Package (5/1) included the gender perspective as one of the principles of its programme of work. The full integration of gender perspective was also among the principles of the newly established Universal Periodic Review. The Package also gave prominent role to gender balance as a primary consideration in the selection and appointment of mandate-holders including special procedures mandate-holders.

Through resolution 6/30, the Human Rights Council reaffirmed its commitment to integrate the human rights of women as well as a gender perspective in its work and that of its mechanisms. It reiterated its request to all special procedures to regularly and systematically integrate a gender perspective into the implementation of their mandates, including to examine the multiple forms of discrimination against women and girls, and to include in their reports information on the qualitative analysis of the human rights of women and girls. It is important to recall that women are not a homogenous group and integrating a gender perspective allows for the issues that confront individual women and men, such as disability, national or ethnic origin, and other characteristics also to be taken into account.

In addition the Council has systematically requested in resolutions establishing or renewing mechanisms that the human rights of women and a gender perspective be systematically taken into account. In this regard, if we look, for example, at the resolutions concerning

special procedures mechanisms the majority of these now contain requests to integrate the human rights of women and/or gender perspectives in the work of such mechanisms.

I do not have to recall how valuable the contribution of civil society has been to the work of special procedures mandate-holders through the countless inputs they have regularly made to thematic reports, country visits and submission on cases. I am also happy to note that special procedures mechanisms have started to progressively cooperate with civil society actors in integrating the human rights of women and a gender perspective into their work.

There are currently 36 thematic special procedures mandates. Two of these mandates are solely devoted to women's rights, namely the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, and the Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practice, whereas one mandate has an explicit specific focus on women's rights, namely that of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking, especially women and children.

Since 2009 more than half of the other 33 thematic mandates have increasingly put into practice the call of the Human Rights Council to conduct qualitative analysis of the human rights of women and girls and have undertaken studies on the women's human rights and gender aspects of their mandates, also soliciting and integrating contributions from civil society.

I would like to share a few examples which are in no way exhaustive, on how mandate holders have worked with civil society actors in integrating the human rights of women and a gender perspective in their work.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders dedicated several reports to and specifically looked at the numerous additional challenges and the unique risks encountered by women defenders and those activists working on women's rights or gender issues. The Special Rapporteur defined as one of the core methods of work the contact with human rights defenders and civil society actors themselves by integrating information from

defenders, including allegations of human rights violations committed against them. She further stresses that attending national, regional and international human rights events regularly provides opportunities for contact with defenders from around the world. The next distinguished panellists representing the International Coalition of Human Rights Defenders may have interesting insights to share from the civil society perspective in this regard.

The Special Rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty has used her mandate to explore the broad and far-reaching effects of inequality and discrimination in all its forms as a factor that significantly contributes to perpetuating poverty. She noted that civil society has been particularly instrumental in bridging the gap between decision makers and women and girls affected by poverty, by making sure that voices and views of these women and girls are heard and taken into account.

The Independent Expert on the effects of foreign and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights focused one of his reports on the disproportionately negative effects of debt experienced by women and how economic reform policies have contributed to the impoverishment and marginalization of women.. In preparation of his report the Independent Expert benefitted from inputs received from several women's rights organizations.

As far as my mandate is concerned, I decided to make the gender dimensions of internal displacement a specific thematic priority. Last June I presented to the Council a report on the situation of internally displaced women, examining progress and outstanding challenges related to their protection. In the preparation of this and other reports I convened expert workshops and events where civil society actors have been invited; their inputs have always been rich and valuable. While on country visits, I also endeavour to meet with women IDPs and women's organisations to solicit and learn from their views.

These reports demonstrate that adopting a framework within which the indivisibility of all human rights is promoted is of paramount importance to the protection of women's human rights and the promotion of equality between women and men. The principles of

non-discrimination and equality are crucial and form the basis of all core human rights treaties. The denial of one set of human rights has negative effects on other rights and the realization of all human rights therefore requires holistic and integrated approaches.

Another example is that of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing which has endeavoured to maintain an indivisibility approach throughout her work. This meant exploring linkages between women's rights and adequate housing as well as the broader effects such links have on the rights of women to food, water, health, work, property, freedom of movement and security of the person as well as protection against inhuman and degrading treatment. In doing so, the Special Rapporteur engaged in close cooperation with civil society organizations working on women's human rights, rather than reaching out solely to organizations focused on housing rights. In this regard, the Special Rapporteur noted the key role played by women's organizations in promoting collaborative efforts between local governments and civil society to improve housing conditions.

Some special procedures mandate holders, through their thematic and country-based work, have even gone further and dared to break the silence on issues that have direct relevance to protecting women's rights but are excluded from political and social conversations due largely to traditions and social expectations. For example, the Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation examined the taboos and culture of silence surrounding women's hygiene that are particularly prevalent as many cultural groups find it difficult to discuss women's sanitation needs. In doing so, she organized a public consultation that included numerous civil society actors and whose discussions informed the report she wrote on this subject.

Some mandates have also taken upon themselves to develop the interpretation of standards as these are applied to women's rights and in light of gender perspectives. The Working Group on Involuntary and Enforced Disappearances, for example, adopted in 2012 a general comment on women affected by enforced disappearances to explain and facilitate the full implementation of the provisions of the Declaration from a gender perspective. In the development of this general comment the Working Group organized a commemorative event

to explore good practices and challenges to protect women from enforced disappearance and its impact. This event gathered different stakeholders including civil society actors.

As the High Commissioner mentioned earlier, it is noteworthy that there has been a progressive and positive trend towards the inclusion of women's rights and gender integration within the work of all special procedures mechanisms since the creation of the Human Rights Council. Such practices are certainly commendable and should be acknowledged particularly this year when we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. This was a turning point for women's rights. Not only did the Declaration and Programme of Action strongly affirm that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, but the Vienna Conference provided momentum for the development of standards on women's rights and the establishment of human rights mechanisms including the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, its causes and consequences.

Mr. Chairperson,

I feel to say that special procedures mandate-holders are on the right track in working towards fulfilling the request of the Human Rights Council to integrate the human rights of women and gender perspectives into their work. Many have been bold in this as they have not just identified women and discriminated groups as victims and "vulnerable" but went further and analysed the relationship between the violations suffered by them and their subordinate status in public and private life.

Yet much more could be done and a number of challenges remain for special procedures mandate-holders to preserve and promote the upward trend in terms of the attention paid to women's human rights and gender perspectives.

The "culture of silence" and risk of stigmatization that surround several aspects of women's rights and gender-based discrimination make the work of mandate holders particularly challenging in terms of collecting information, particularly during country visits. In addition

information and disaggregated data on women's rights and gender-based discrimination available at the country level often have gaps. Mandate holders are therefore unable to present analysis that takes into account the interplays of all characteristics including sex and gender.

It is also critical for mandate holders to expand their sources of information including during country visits as specific analysis is necessary to evaluate national policies, strategies and institutions. In addition all remedial measures should take into account the needs and barriers faced by women and men in securing their human rights. This is where collaboration with civil society actors at the local, national and regional level becomes decisive.

I am confident that mandate holders, with the support of the Council and civil society partners, will continue to make consistent and genuine efforts to examine the underlying structural inequalities that perpetuate discrimination based on sex and gender within the context of their mandate. Given the diversity of the mandates, the subjects covered as well as the high level of expertise available within the special procedures system, there is immense opportunity to identify and explore multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, to provide acute qualitative analysis on violations of women's rights as well as in-depth knowledge of actual situations confronted by women all over the world.