

National machineries for gender equality: a CEDAW perspective

I would like to commend the organizers of this roundtable for this excellent initiative. This roundtable provides a great platform to discuss and analyze the capacity of national machineries for gender equality and to take stock of their efficiency and/or weaknesses. Though we live in economically challenging times, gender equality is not a bonus of good times. Equality rights are human rights — a basic principle that shapes the way we live, in good times and hard times. Gender equality is not only a human rights issue, but is also an essential component of sustainable development, social justice, peace, and security. These goals will only be achieved if the national machinery is strong and women are able to participate as equal partners, decision makers, and beneficiaries of the sustainable development of their societies. Governments must take responsibility for the choices they make between cutting costs today and missing out on the immediate and longer-term benefits of an investment in gender equality. I commend the Government of Belarus for being part of this important roundtable. Your presence and active participation is a strong signal not only for the people of Belarus and to the region but to the whole world.....that everywhere, the National framework on Gender Equality must confirm the Government's role as part of a broad-based partnership in society, consulting and acting in concert with individuals and with public, para-public and private institutions.

National mechanisms are more than specific agencies for the development of specific policies for the advancement of women. Their role is to affect all government policies and the advancement of women is seen in the light of the achievement of gender equality, which involves women and men and society as a whole. Such approach, that was adopted by the international community in the Platform for Action, in 1995, was further elaborated through the Beijing follow-up process and by regional intergovernmental organisations. In international terms, the more complex role of gender equality institutional mechanisms is defined as their catalytic role for the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming and for the monitoring of the implementation of the Platform for Action and of the CEDAW Convention.

Although, the question of national machineries has been addressed since the first UN Women's Conference in Mexico City in 1975, then at the Nairobi Conference on Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women with a clear message that **““Appropriate governmental machinery for monitoring and improving the status of women should be established where it is lacking. To be effective, this machinery should be established at a high level of government and should be ensured adequate resources, commitment and authority to advise on the impact on women of all government policies. Such machinery can play a vital role in enhancing the status of women, inter alia, through collaborative action with various**

ministries and other government agencies and with non-governmental organizations and indigenous women's societies and groups", the CEDAW Committee since its early days noted with concern the weaknesses in national machineries of States parties. At its seventh session in 1988, the Committee adopted General Recommendation No. 6 on "**Effective National Machinery and Publicity**" in which it recommended that States parties establish and/or strengthen effective national machinery, institutions and procedures, at a high level of Government, and with adequate resources, commitment and authority to:

(a) Advise on the impact on women of all government policies;

(b) Monitor the situation of women comprehensively;

The Platform for Action of the fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) built significantly on CEDAW General recommendation No 6 and included "**Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women**" as one of its twelve areas of concern. The Platform gives a definition of national machinery, lists some conditions for effective functioning of such machinery and suggests action to be taken by governments. Furthermore, the Platform provides a mandate for the national machinery for the advancement of women which includes, inter alia, "**to design, promote the implementation of, execute, monitor, evaluate, advocate and mobilize support for policies that promote the advancement of women**" (paragraph 196).

The Beijing Platform for Action makes it clear that in addressing the issue of mechanisms for promoting the advancement of women, Governments and others should promote an active and visible policy on mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively. The "Strategic objectives" spelt out include the need to:

- Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies;
- Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects;
- Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

During the examination of States parties reports under Article 18, the Committee almost always questions States Parties on their chosen methods for ensuring the advancement of women and invariably questions are raised on the national machinery, the authority and influence it has within the national hierarchy, its mandate, functions, resources, power and visibility, etc.

When it examines States parties' reports under Article 18, under Article 3 which is directed towards the full development and advancement of women, as a goal in its own right, the Committee seeks to evaluate the effective functioning of the institutional mechanism for gender equality. For the Committee, the basis of essential conditions and requirements for the effective functioning of such mechanisms relate to a number of factors, namely: the status, structure and location, scope of mandate and functions, legal basis, financial and human resources, political legitimacy, power, visibility and authority of these mechanisms, both at central and decentralised level in executive and legislative branches of Government.

- i) **Responsibility at the highest level in the Government-** The responsibility for promoting gender equality is a matter of the whole government. In terms of political level, Gender equality mechanisms should be under direct responsibility of the President, Prime Minister or Cabinet Minister and units or focal points should be set up within ministries or other government departments or within regional and local power structures, at the highest level of those departments and structures.
- ii) **Existence of a Central Governmental body for gender equality at national level-** The National machinery for the advancement of women and gender equality must be the central policy-coordinating unit inside government.
- iii) **Level of location of the Governmental body for gender equality in the Government hierarchy-** As regards status, structure and location, the great majority of institutional mechanisms for gender equality at national level take a form of departments, divisions, services, commissions, working groups etc. under a specific ministry or state secretariat. [The Committee always raises questions on the level of location of the central government body for the promotion of gender equality in the government hierarchy (i.e. in a Ministry or in the Prime Minister's Office). In case the body is located outside the government structures, the Committee inquires about its relation to the governmental structures.]
- iv) **Human resources and funding-** Gender equality institutional mechanisms should have the necessary funding and human resources. Adequate resources are a basic element for progress in gender equality. Sustainability of institutional mechanisms and regular implementation of their mandates require that funding by the State budget fully covers the core operational costs of institutional mechanisms – staff, maintenance of facilities and equipment, regular functioning of the institutions. While funding of these core operational costs is the sole responsibility of the state, funding for specific actions and projects can also be found from various sources. A government commitment can therefore be measured in terms of resource allocation for the gender equality

institutional mechanisms. The Committee has often expressed its concern where national machineries have insufficient decision-making power or financial and human resources and it has often sought clarification about the appropriateness of the level of funding. It has regularly recommended that sufficient funds be allocated in the State Party budget to ensure that the relevant mechanism has the power and authority to carry out its work. It has also asked about gender responsive budgeting and auditing and has commended their institution. The Committee has also made recommendations relating to the status, visibility and workload of those responsible for the advancement of women within national governments. It seeks to ensure that such tasks are assigned the appropriate priority and weight. Technical qualifications and expertise in gender equality matters are also essential factors and should constitute a basic requirement for the selection of staff for the national institutional mechanisms, together with a real and potential commitment to the cause of gender equality.

- v) **The mandate or functions of the central Governmental Equality Body at national level-** Another important condition for effective functioning is the existence of adequate mandate of the institutional mechanisms both at central and at decentralised level. The mandate of institutional mechanisms should have a clear legal basis with well-defined functions and responsibilities. These should necessarily include the dual-track approach to gender equality work. i.e. specific policies and actions, including temporary special measures, mainly addressing women and the demands of their situation, and promotion, monitoring, coordination and evaluation of the process of gender mainstreaming.
- vi) **Reporting to legislative bodies such as Parliament on the progress of gender equality efforts-** The Committee has often expressed its appreciation where there is a system of reporting regularly to the national/federal legislative bodies on the progress of gender equality efforts, such as an annual/biannual reporting process in some countries.
- vii) **Existence of an independent institution dealing with discrimination complaints and gender equality matters-** The Committee also raises questions about any independent institution for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women and girls, in place ((in accordance with the “Paris principles”)
- viii) **Other national bodies for the promotion of gender equality-** The Committee notes that in some countries specialised or thematic Commissions; Councils or Committees dealing with issues that are of a particular relevance for the objectives of gender

equality also exist. They operate most often in the areas of work and employment, of violence against women and/or domestic violence. Other differentiated equality mechanisms, like observatories or monitoring centres entrusted with the task of evaluating progress in different policy areas have also been in operation for some time. They are either attached to Government offices or under Government supervision.

- ix) **Decentralized Gender Equality institutional mechanisms-** There is a growing evidence of decentralisation of gender equality policy, both horizontally and vertically. Involvement of the different sectors and levels of government in gender equality work has been manifested either as a reinforcement of responsibilities of the central executive power or as a creation of new structures operating at regional and local level. Gender equality units or focal points have been set up within ministries or other government departments or within regional and local power structures.
- x) **Gender Equality Institutional mechanisms at Parliamentary level-** Institutional mechanisms at parliamentary level have also been created in an increasing number of countries. They exist in formal way, where committees and commissions or sub-commissions entrusted with the task to foster and monitor the application of the gender equality principle have been set up, and/or in a more informal way, where groups and networks of women parliamentarians have also been organised.
- xi) **The involvement of civil society actors in the governmental work for Gender equality-** The involvement civil society, namely of women's NGOs, NGOs dealing with women's rights or human rights, and social partners tends to gain more and more importance. They are recognised as essential partners in the social change that is the ultimate objective of gender equality policies. For the Committee, the success of the machinery depends largely on the support of civil society and this is clearly borne out in the concluding observations of the Committee and recommendations made to States parties . The main sources of support are the women's movement in all its various forms, such as women in political parties, especially those in decision-making positions, NGOs, women's associations and groups, grassroots movements, researchers on women's issues, and women professionals in, for example, the media. Through these actors, women have been able to articulate their interests and concerns and have placed women's issues on the national, regional and international agendas. Networking among all these bodies and institutions is a part of implementing equality policy. Networking helps to find channels of influence and mobilise resources through the administrative bureaucracy.

xii) **Gender mainstreaming-** The establishment of gender mainstreaming as a critical strategy in the Platform for Action in 1995 and the work on this strategy in regional intergovernmental organisations were an important breakthrough as they required attention to gender equality and empowerment of women in all sectors. At the intergovernmental level this meant, importantly, that promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women was no longer considered the exclusive responsibility of the intergovernmental bodies specifically entrusted to work on the status of women and gender equality. Other intergovernmental bodies were also responsible for taking gender perspectives into account in their work. Governments were required to give attention to gender perspectives in all sector areas. The Committee has particularly commended the use of gender mainstreaming of policies at all levels as a tool of securing women's equality, encouraged its introduction and recommended training in gender mainstreaming and sensitivity. It has commended gender mainstreaming in development strategies, including development aid and cooperation. It does not, however, unreservedly accept gender mainstreaming as satisfactory and has expressed concern about its effective implementation and impact. One concern is that the relevant body responsible for implementing gender mainstreaming may lack the requisite visibility, decision-making power or human and financial resources to be able to "effectively promote the advancement of women and gender equality across all branches and sectors of Government and at the national and local levels." Gender impact studies at the highest political levels are required to determine any differential impact of existing policies, practices and laws on women and men, as well as before the adoption of all potential new measures. Lack of coordination among government bodies tasked with the oversight of gender issues and a failure to allocate responsibility for performance may compromise gender mainstreaming activities. The Committee has often sought specific information on the impact of gender mainstreaming and recommended that States Parties implement measures for assessment.

Assessment of status of national machineries for gender equality

Although national machineries for the advancement of women have been established in almost all States parties to CEDAW, they are diverse in form and uneven in their effectiveness. In general, the findings of the Committee from examination of States parties' reports are quite mixed. On the one hand, over the years, the Committee has noted some progress: National machineries have been instituted or strengthened and recognised as the institutional base acting as "catalysts" for promoting gender equality, gender mainstreaming and monitoring of the implementation of the Platform for Action and the CEDAW Convention. In many countries,

the Committee has observed progress achieved in terms of the visibility, status, outreach and coordination of activities of these machineries. Gender mainstreaming has also been widely acknowledged as a strategy to enhance the impact of policies to promote gender equality, the goal of the strategy being to incorporate a gender perspective in all legislation policies, programmes and projects. These machineries, even with their limited financial resources, have made a significant contribution to the development of and dissemination of data disaggregated by sex and age, gender-sensitive research and documentation.

The Committee acknowledges positive aspects in its concluding observations and it does commend States parties for progress achieved. The Committee has commended a range of institutions including “women’s ministries, women’s departments within ministries or presidential offices or other entities with the requisite mandate to design specific programmes, monitor their implementation and evaluate their impact and outcomes. The Committee has commended States Parties for the adoption of equal opportunity laws, the establishment of institutions within local, regional and federal governments for advising on matters of concern to women, or coordinating, supporting, monitoring and advocating for women’s equality; the setting up of appropriate offices such as an equality ombudsperson, gender focal points, Women’s Liaison Officers (especially within rural areas), regional desk offices; the development and adoption of a national gender policy, strategy or plan of action, in particular in accordance with Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

On the other hand, the Committee observes that while much has been achieved at the policy and normative level, the situation is quite different when implementation on the ground is assessed. The very positive policy rhetoric has not translated into the necessary changes in practice. The reviews of implementation of the State parties obligations under the CEDAW convention, the Platform for Action, and the commitments made at the level of regional intergovernmental organisations reveal a huge gap between global and regional policies and norms and actions at national level.

The Committee has identified the following as being the most common obstacles include: inadequate financial and human resources and a lack of political will and commitment. These mechanisms are often marginalized in national governments structures; they are frequently hampered by unclear mandates, lack of adequate staff, training, sufficient resources and insufficient support from national political leadership. Whilst location at the highest level in the government and sufficient resources in terms of budget are necessary conditions for an effective functioning of the national machinery, professional capacity of the staff is also very crucial as it is linked with capacity and competence to influence development of all government policies. The Committee has also noted an insufficient understanding of gender

equality and gender mainstreaming among government structures, as well as prevailing gender stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes, competing government priorities, lack of data disaggregated by sex and age in many areas and insufficient applied methods for assessing progress, in addition to paucity of authority and insufficient links to civil society. The activities of the national machineries are often also hindered by structural and communication problems within and among government agencies. There is also a lack of gender equality and/or anti-discrimination legislation. While, the Committee does not really recommend any particular form of national machinery, it regularly expressed its concerns about the series of obstacles which national machineries continue to face.

Some examples of recommendations of the CEDAW Committee

Clear picture of national machinery

Turkmenistan- 53rd Session –October 2012- The Committee expressed concern that it did not obtain a clear picture of the national machinery for the advancement of women. While noting the existence of the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, the Women's Union and the Inter-agency Commission, the Committee was concerned about the fragmentation of the national machinery, the lack of information on its mandates, authority, human and financial resources and capacity to ensure that gender equality policies are properly developed and fully implemented throughout the work of all ministries and Government offices. The Committee was further concerned at the absence of a National Action Plan for implementation of the Convention. The Committee recommended (a) the establishment of one centralized national machinery for the advancement of women with a clearly defined mandate and responsibilities, with adequate human, financial and technical resources for it to coordinate and work effectively for the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming; (b) training on women's rights, to women and men working in the national machinery for the advancement of women; (c) adoption of a National Action Plan for the implementation of the Convention; (d) impact assessment mechanisms to be strengthened so as to ensure that its gender equality policies are properly monitored and evaluated and their implementation assessed.

Bulgaria – July 2012- Bulgaria -While acknowledging the establishment of an equal opportunities, anti-discrimination and social assistance department within the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and a national council on gender equality within the Council of Ministers, the Committee noted the lack of information provided on how the national machinery works for the protection of women's rights and, especially, on how it monitors the situation of women in all areas covered by the Convention. The Committee was also concerned that the national machinery lacks sufficient authority, visibility and adequate human and financial resources to effectively promote the implementation of the Convention. It was also concerned about the Department's limited capacity to effectively coordinate and cooperate

with women's non-governmental organizations. The Committee recommended that the State party expeditiously strengthen the national machinery by increasing its authority and visibility, by providing it with adequate human and financial resources to make it more effective and by enhancing its capacity to formulate, coordinate and monitor the elaboration and implementation of legislation and policy measures in the field of gender equality. The Committee also recommended that the State party strengthen its cooperation with women's non-governmental organizations in achieving the implementation of the Convention and in monitoring such implementation.

Weak national machinery

Belarus 2011- The Committee noted with concern that the National Council on Gender Policy, an interagency advisory and coordinating body composed of the heads of central government agencies, local executive and administrative authorities, National Assembly deputies and representatives of the Supreme Court and public and international organizations, was inactive between 2005 and 2008 and that the national machinery for the advancement of women remains weak, in the absence of a specialized body for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality. The concerns and recommendations are very country-specific. The Committee recommended that the Government of Belarus strengthen the capacity and financial and human resources of the National Council on Gender Policy, as well as of the Department of Population, Gender and Family Policy of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, to formulate, implement, provide advice on and coordinate and oversee the preparation and implementation of legislation and policy measures in the field of gender equality; the Committee also recommended that priority attention be given to women's rights and non-discrimination and to the enjoyment of gender equality, that the fourth national action plan on gender equality be finalized, its adoption be accelerated and to finance its implementation from the national budget.

Poor visibility and decision-making power

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia- 2103 -While acknowledging the establishment of the Sector on Equal Opportunities in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, a Government coordinator and the Inter-sectoral Advisory Group, the Committee noted that the lack of visibility, decision-making powers and coordination of State institutions indicate that low priority is accorded to the principle of gender equality within the State party. The Committee recommended a further strengthening of the national machinery by increasing the visibility and coordination of State institutions; providing them with adequate decision-making powers; and making them more effective by enhancing the availability and use of sex-disaggregated data and by strengthening their capacity to monitor the enactment and implementation of

legislation and policy measures in the field of gender equality.

Authority, visibility, adequate human and financial resources required to carry out the mandate

Ukraine 2010- While acknowledging the establishment of numerous structures and bodies aimed at strengthening the national mechanisms for the advancement of women, including the appointment of advisers and focal points on gender issues in the Ministries and at the oblast (regional) level, as well as the coordination role of the Ministry for Family, Youth and Sports, the Committee was concerned that the national machinery does not have sufficient authority, visibility or adequate human and financial resources to carry out its mandate and promote the advancement of women and gender equality effectively. It was also concerned about the Ministry's limited capacity to undertake effective coordination and cooperation with all gender equality structures at the national and local levels, as well as cooperation with women's organizations. The Committee recommended a strengthening of the national machinery by raising its authority and visibility, inter alia, by establishing it at a higher level of government and by providing it with adequate human and financial resources in order to make it more effective. This should, in particular, include capacity for improved coordination among the various gender equality structures at the national and local levels and for enhanced cooperation with civil society. The Committee also encouraged the formulation, in cooperation with women's organizations, and the adoption of a new national plan of action, which should provide a comprehensive approach to gender equality, with clear targets and benchmarks, taking into consideration the good practices and lessons learned from the previous State gender plan. The Committee also recommended the allocation of sufficient financial resources for the implementation of the Plan.

Bosnia Herzegovina- 2013- While welcoming the continued cooperation between the Gender Equality Agency and the Gender Centre of the Entities and the forthcoming adoption of a new Gender Action Plan (2013-2017), the Committee was concerned about the limited cooperation between existing gender equality bodies and relevant Ministries at all levels; insufficient gender mainstreaming within Ministries at all levels; the resulting weak implementation of the Gender Action Plan owing to, notably, unclear division of responsibilities among the competent bodies; and the insufficient inclusion of disadvantaged women in the formulation of policies and programmes. The Committee also reiterated its concern that the Gender Equality Agency is not sufficiently visible and that its position within one state-level ministry may create obstacles to its effectiveness in working with other ministries. While noting that the mandate of gender equality bodies' includes the submission of opinions prior to the adoption of new laws and regulations, the Committee was also concerned about the limited human, financial and technical resources of the national machinery to efficiently promote, coordinate, monitor and

evaluate national gender equality legislation and policies in the State party. In view of the implementation of the new Gender Action Plan, the Committee recommended the establishment of effective cooperation mechanisms between the gender equality bodies and the relevant ministries in order to increase gender mainstreaming in all areas and at all levels, including with regard to disadvantaged groups of women. The Committee also recommended a strengthening of the Gender Equality Agency by giving it greater visibility and authority vis-à-vis relevant ministries and the Council of Ministers. The Committee further recommended that the national machinery be provided with the necessary human, financial and technical resources to improve its effective functioning, in particular by including technical capacity-building activities and capacity for enhanced cooperation with civil society, as well as introduce effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms at all levels in the context of its system for gender mainstreaming, including sanctions for non-compliance.

Serbia-2013 - Notwithstanding the existence of an extensive national machinery, the Committee regretted that institutions and bodies for the advancement of women are understaffed and lack adequate resources and authority to influence government policy and decision-making. The Committee was concerned at the lack of systematic and continuous dialogue between the national machinery at all levels and relevant NGOs, in particular women's organisations and absence of consultations with them in designing and implementing gender equality and women's empowerment policies. The Committee recommended that the State party:

(a) Further strengthen the national machinery by providing them with adequate human, technical and financial resources, increasing their visibility and efficiency as well as by strengthening their capacity, especially at the local level, and ensure sufficient political support to enable them to carry their functions effectively;

(b) Ensure formal and informal dialogue and consultations between the national machinery and the relevant NGOs, in particular women's organisations and put in place a system of cooperation which shall respect the autonomy of women's organizations.

Need for adequate financial resources

Austria – 54th Session Feb 2013- While acknowledging the progress in the implementation of its sectoral action plans on gender equality, the Committee was concerned about the absence of a comprehensive gender equality national action plan. It noted that the State party has agreed to consider adopting a comprehensive human rights national action plan following the State party's review under the universal periodic review mechanism in 2011 and recommended that Austria fully integrate gender equality in a future comprehensive human rights national action plan, with the involvement and consultation of all sectors and levels of Government and relevant non-governmental organizations. While appreciating the near

doubling of the budget of the Minister of Women and the Civil Service, it remained concerned that these budgetary resources for the promotion of gender equality remain inadequate considering the scope of the Minister's activities and projects. It accordingly recommended an increase in the budgetary allocation to the Minister for Women and the Civil Service to ensure that the resources correspond to the mandate and enable implementation of its activities. It also stressed the need to ensure that the budget is reviewed annually.

Importance of gender mainstreaming

New Zealand-July 2012- The Committee was concerned that the State party had not taken sufficient measures to ensure that gender is mainstreamed into all national plans and government institutions and that it had not introduced a new national plan of action for women to replace the one which ended in 2009 and that the Ministry of Women's Affairs lacked adequate resources for its many tasks. The Committee requested the State party:

- (a) To mainstream gender in all national plans and government institutions;
- (b) To strengthen the existing national machinery by providing adequate authority, visibility and human and financial resources at all levels and enhancing coordination among existing mechanisms for the advancement of women and the promotion of gender equality by increasing the resources for the Ministry of Women's Affairs;
- (c) To conduct a comprehensive study on how to improve the situation of women in the State party and develop a national action plan for women accordingly.

Importance of collaboration with civil society

Chile (2012)- While commending the State party for its efforts to strengthen the financial resources of its national machinery (SERNAM), the Committee was concerned about its insufficient coordination with the Parliament and civil society and that disadvantaged women are not sufficiently included in SERNAM programmes, action plans and policies. The Committee recommended that the State party enhance its coordination with the National Congress and civil society and fully include all disadvantaged women in the design and implementation of public policies and programmes.

Hungary 2013- The Committee noted with concern the absence of partnerships with the various women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in implementing the Convention; the limited financial and human resources of the Department of Family Policy and the delay in the creation of the Council for Social Equality among Women and Men. The Committee recommended that the State party:

(a) Strengthen the cooperation with various women's NGOs in implementing and monitoring the implementation of the Convention, including by developing participatory mechanisms and holding wide consultations with women in adopting a new strategy on gender equality;

(b) Ensure the necessary financial, technical and human resources for the Department of Family Policy of the Ministry of Human Resources to discharge its mandate and to complete the establishment of the envisaged entities for the advancement of women in particular, the Council for Social Equality among Women and Men; and

(c) Formulate and adopt a new strategy on gender equality and its action plans.

Devolution context

PAKISTAN- 2013- The Committee was concerned that since the eighteenth amendment to the Constitution and the devolution of powers in the area of the advancement of women's rights from the national to the provincial levels, there have been governance challenges in the integration and coordination of policies aimed at the advancement of women. It was further concerned at the lack of capacity to put in place an efficient mechanism to ensure the adoption of legal and other measures to fully implement the Convention in a coherent and consistent manner at the provincial level, as well as the lack of capacity and resources of the Women Development Departments, which may prevent them from fulfilling their mandate as the provincial machineries for the advancement of women. The Committee expressed its concern about the paucity of information with respect to the human and financial resources available to the National Commission on the Status of Women to fulfil its broad mandate to monitor and safeguard women's rights and promote gender equality. The Committee underscored the responsibility of the federal Government in ensuring the full implementation of the Convention across its territory, including at the provincial level and recommended that the State party:

(a) Ensure that the devolution of powers does not adversely impact the advancement of women in all spheres of life, and that federal institutions such as the National Commission on the Status of Women are fully equipped to effectively coordinate and oversee the formulation and implementation of gender equality policies and programmes and the prioritization of women's rights in development strategies, in line with the Convention, across the territory of the State party;

(b) Institutionalize an inter-provincial coordination mechanism with adequate human and technical resources, and also ensure adequate financial resources for the Women Development Departments;

(c) Ensure that the National Commission on the Status of Women has adequate human, technical and financial resources to fulfil its mandate, including by establishing provincial commissions on the status of women and by ensuring that its recommendations on legislation,

policies and programmes are considered without delay by the relevant governmental body.

Afghanistan-July 2013 - While noting the establishment of the Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA) in 2004, the establishment of Provincial Directorates of MoWA in 22 provinces and the creation of Gender Units in several Ministries, the Committee was concerned at the scarce financial resources allocated through the national budget and the lack of qualified staff assigned to MoWA to fulfil its mandate. It was further concerned about MoWA's high dependency on external funding which may affect the sustainability of the achievements in the field of gender equality and women's rights in the context of the State party's transition. It was also concerned about the challenges which impede the full implementation of the National Action Plan for Women (NAPWA) such as the lack of resources and the lack of accountability at the ministerial level responsible for its implementation. The Committee recommended that the State party :

- (a) Ensure the sustainability of the Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA) by providing it with adequate human, technical and financial resources to fulfil its gender equality and women's rights mandate, in line with the principles of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework such as the one stating that international assistance, through national budgets, can improve national institutional capacities, development performance and accountability of the State party, to all its citizens;
- (b) Ensure the implementation of the National Action Plan for Women (NAPWA) through, inter alia, gender-responsive budgets, regular monitoring of its implementation with indicators set out in the NAPWA and accountability mechanisms; and
- (c) Establish a clear timeframe to consolidate and reinforce the national and local capacities of the national machinery for the advancement of women.

Conclusion

There is no one answer, no one action, no one player that can make equality happen. Gender equality is everybody's business. Equality is a health issue, not only for women, but for the whole nation. In a sense, gender equality is like a lifestyle change for the health of the nation. The changes you make today, and every day to come, will have lasting benefits. Government must be resolved to improve the status of women in by adopting strategies that advance gender equality, that help women attain economic autonomy and well-being and addressing having a solid national machinery in place is a critical part of its responsibility to sustain a society that values and treats all its members with dignity and respect. The persistence of gender inequality underlines the need for a long-term vision. These commitments are an

integral part of a policy toward the human development of the people and the sustainable development of the country. Attaining these goals in a world marked by fast-paced change is both a challenge and an opportunity.

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