

Human Rights Council
9th session
12 September 2008

**Human Rights Watch
Amnesty International**

Oral statement

Item 8: Annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective

Mr. President,

I am making this statement on behalf of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

The Council has rightly committed to an integration of the gender perspective into all of its work and processes, and to an annual evaluation of this process. While gender integration is much talked of in many parts of the UN system, there are few opportunities for transparent, explicit, and open evaluation of this essential process. We congratulate the Council on taking this additional step. The recommendations and conclusions from this session and that held during the 6th session should inform both the work of the Special Procedures and the manner in which the Council engages with them.

We agree with many of the previous speakers that effective gender integration is about both content (what are we talking about) and about format (who are talking and what are they saying). As the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has noted, "Policies developed and decisions made by men alone reflect only part of human experience and potential." (1) Such policies and decisions are less likely to take account of gendered consequences, and the economic and social factors that affect women's lives. In this regard, we support fully the recommendations made by the panelist representing civil society on the issues of country visits, communications, dialogue, and capacity building, and agree with his critical reflections on the overarching methodology of gender integration.

Mr. President,

We would like to highlight one issue regarding gender integration that, while mentioned in passing by some of the panelists, cannot be overstated.

It is clear from our research and experience that sex or gender inequality is a problem experienced primarily by women. It is also clear that the systems and assumptions which cause women's inequality in the enjoyment of their human rights are often invisible because they are deeply embedded in social relations, both public and private, within all States. Acknowledging this systemic and entrenched discrimination is an essential step in

gender integration and requires conscious and explicit deliberations even in the choice of themes to be taken up by the Special Procedures. In this sense, the Council must be aware that when it chooses to set up Special Procedures on human rights issues that affect men and boys more frequently than women and girls (or vice versa), that choice is not gender neutral. It is a gendered choice and should be evaluated and explained as such. Where enforced disappearances or extrajudicial executions occur with frequency, for example, men are often more likely than women to be targeted for those abuses—largely because men have been more visibly present in public and political life. Those who are left behind to struggle for justice are often, but by no means exclusively, women. The gendered aspects of these violations and who they victimize does not, of course, make them less important. It is, however, important for the Council and for its Special Procedures explicitly to acknowledge the different impact of human rights violations on men and women, and to analyze their root causes (including discrimination based on sex or gender).

Equally, the Council should evaluate the gendered choices it makes after these procedures are established. As we have seen today, this evaluation (where it happens) generally happens only where the work of the Special Procedures has focused on human rights issues that affect women and girls exclusively or predominantly. Rarely will the Council question the failure of one of its Special Procedures in exploring women's particular vulnerability to, for example, social and economic deprivation in conflict and post-conflict situations, and where economic sanctions are imposed. Rarely will it question the traditional, historical, religious or cultural attitudes that are used to justify and perpetuate discrimination against women in the delivery of the specific human rights issues explored by its Procedures. These omissions have been most pronounced in country-specific mandates, where otherwise well-researched and thoroughly analyzed reports will make only fleeting reference to the differential impact of conflict or hardship on women.

Mr. President, this needs to change. The Council should see the work of its Special Procedures as an opportunity to learn about all aspects of the themes explored, including their differential impact on women and men. We look forward to a more explicit analysis and engagement with those aspects of the Procedure's work in this respect.

Finally, Mr. President, civil society has on several occasions brought to the Council's attention protection gaps within the Special Procedures system. In this regard, the suggestion has been made that there is a real need for a Special Procedure to explore and combat laws that discriminate against women. We very much support this suggestion and believe such a procedure would contribute substantively to the gender integration of the work of the Council and its Special Procedures.

ⁱ CEDAW General Recommendation 23: Political and Public Life, para. 13.

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NGOs &
NHRI's

STATEMENT TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 9TH SESSION
PANEL ON WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

Delivered by
Conchita Poncini (IFUW), President, Geneva NGO Committee on the Status of Women, 12 September 2008

Thank you Mr. President

The Women's and Girls' Caucus facilitated by the three centres in Geneva, New York and Vienna of the NGO Committees on the Status of Women of CONGO, where some 50 women (and a few men) participating at the DPI Conference last week to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights in Paris, made this summary statement:

We urge

1. that women's rights and gender equality and discrimination be addressed, using the insistence on substantive equality of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women);
2. strengthening the interconnection between human rights mechanisms and the Commission on the Status of Women;
3. expanded opportunities and financial resources to promote human rights education for women and girls;
4. that all human rights principles and instruments apply a life span perspective for women and girls of all ages;
5. increasing awareness and use of human rights complaints mechanisms and implementation of monitoring procedures

In addition, the 16 undersigned NGOs of the Geneva NGO CSW request the Council, when preparing commemorative events of the UDHR, that Eleanor Roosevelt be spot-lighted as the First Chair of the Commission on Human Rights, who led the 17-member drafting group in successfully completing the Declaration as it stands.

We fully support the statement of the new High Commissioner for Human Rights, where she asked that we look at human rights as a whole and not one right against another. This is particularly true of women and girls whose rights are violated just because they are female. We strongly endorse what she said, that no effort should be spared to "persuade countries to repeal laws and practices that continue to reduce women and girls to second-class citizens despite international standards and despite the specific commitments that have been made to throw out these laws and customs."

Lastly, we ask for a regular impact assessment on the implementation of Resolution A/HRC/6/L32 on Integrating the human rights of women and mainstreaming a gender equality perspective throughout the United Nations system and in this respect to ask the Advisory Committee to undertake the task of evaluation including providing gender-disaggregated indicators and benchmarks that would holistically look at economic, social and cultural rights as indivisible, interdependent and interrelated with civil and political rights and to assess how women's right to development and their empowerment over their life span are being incorporated in law and practice. We are encouraged to learn that the UNCT has established a Scorecard Performance Indicators for Gender Equality, an accountability framework for assessing the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming by the UN Country Team's (UNCT) and be used as model for other UN bodies and government entities. . .

SIGNATURES RECEIVED:

1. INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN
2. ZONTA INTERNATIONAL
3. WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM
4. WOMEN'S FEDERATION FOR WORLD PEACE INTERNATIONAL
5. FEMMES AFRICA SOLIDARITE
6. INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR THE PREVENTION OF ELDER ABUSE
7. INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN
8. INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN
9. WORLD STUDENTS CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
10. WOMEN'S WORLD SUMMIT FOUNDATION
11. WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL ZIONIST ORGANISATION
12. WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION WORLDWIDE
13. FEDERATION OF AMERICAN WOMEN CLUBS OVERSEAS
14. INTER-AFRICAN COMMITTEE
15. INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GERONTOLOGY AND GERIATRICS
16. GENERAL BOARD OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

