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Human Rights Council 24th Session

**ANNUAL DISCUSSION ON INTEGRATION OF A GENDER
PERSPECTIVE**

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



Opening Statement by

Ms. Navi Pillay

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Geneva, 12 September 2013

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the sixth Human Rights Council annual plenary panel on the integration of a gender perspective into all its work and mechanisms. Today's theme is the vital contribution of civil society to this process.

Resolution 6/30 of this Council reaffirms the important role that women's groups, human rights defenders and non-governmental organizations play in promoting and protecting the human rights of women. This resolution "urges all stakeholders to take into full account both the rights of women and a gender perspective in the Universal Periodic Review". The panel will help us assess our progress.

We are privileged to have a panel of eminent experts representing Member States, Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, and representatives of civil society. I look forward to them sharing with us the strategies, challenges and good practices of civil society to protect and promote women's human rights and gender equality in the work of this Council.

Five years have passed since the Council's "institution building package" of 2007 brought a focus on the full integration of a gender perspective into special procedures work and UPR. I am pleased to see gender integration progressively becoming a nearly systematic feature in the work of mandate holders, with about half of the 33 Special Procedures having dedicated thematic reports to the gender dimensions of their mandate.

The Council has made equally impressive progress with the integration of a gender perspective in considerations and recommendations into the UPR mechanism. Out of 23,479 recommendations made during the first 13 sessions, 4,070 recommendations, representing 17% of the total, were on women's human rights and gender issues. Considering the wide range of UPR thematic areas, 17% is a significant figure. Violence against women, in which domestic violence and female genital mutilation appear as the most recurrent themes, account for about one-third of the total.

Research by my Office also shows a gradual increase in resolutions related to women's rights and gender issues over the last three Sessions of this Council, with four being adopted over the 23rd Session alone.

However, during the 23rd Session almost half of the resolutions were general, recommending that States "integrate a gender perspective" without more explicit reference that would allow to measure progress and accountability in the follow-up.

We have observed a greater participation by women representatives of member States. The gender split between women and men taking the floor at the 14th Council Session in 2010 was 71% men to 29% women, whereas at the 23rd Session last June it was 68% men to 32% women.

Where there is a real positive trend is in the panels: during the 23rd Session of this Council. In terms of number of interventions during panels, 52% were made by women delegates compared to 48% made by men.

Excellencies,

I do hope you all agree with me that civil society can make a decisive difference in integrating a gender perspective in the work of the HRC. It is civil society actors themselves who provide the crucial link between policy and action to integrate a gender perspective into the work of the Council and its mechanisms.

It is they who deliver the oral and written statements about the vast variety of women's rights situations on the ground. It is they who organize the parallel events at events like this one and others around the world, and who advocate in person for women's rights before Member States and other relevant stakeholders.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The panel will be moderated by Ms. Gumbonzvanda, Secretary General of the World Young Women's Christian Association, whom many of you know for her active role in coordinating civil society work on women and children's human rights, including at the Human Rights Council.

We will hear Australia's experience through the voice of its Ambassador for women and girls, Ms Penny Williams. Australia is one example of a state steadfastly incorporating gender equality issues into their UPR submissions.

Mr Chaloka Beyani, Chair of the coordination committee of the special procedures mechanisms, will talk to us about the progressive and positive trend towards the inclusion of women's human rights and a gender perspective into the work of all special procedures since the creation of this Council in 2006.

Ms Mozn Hassan, who has been fearlessly advocating to protect and give a voice to women human rights defenders in the Middle East, and Ms Neha Sood, has contributed to bringing human rights issues related to gender and sexuality in tracking States' human rights records through the UPR. Both represent NGOs who regularly engage with the Council and its mechanisms in pushing forward critical women's rights and gender issues on the human rights agenda.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Civil society plays an important role to hold States accountable for their commitments in the UPR process. They bring new trends and emerging themes to the attention of this Council. At regional and global levels, they are among this Council's most valuable partners in keeping a close watch on the implementation of your resolutions, the recommendations of Special Procedures and the UPR.

And finally, by first hand familiarity with the lives of rights-holders on the ground and their flexibility of action, civil society actors have the capacity to transform matters where it counts most, at local levels.

Our friends, partners and allies in civil society need our help. Too often, women human rights defenders are targeted, often even physically attacked, when perceived as challenging socio-cultural norms and traditions related to their status as women. Some civil society organizations are also male-dominated, reflecting the same gender inequalities in their representation and decision-making that we can find in many other structures of society.

We also see far too much occupational segregation in human rights jobs in civil society organizations, with many more women working in traditional fields like child welfare or economic, social and cultural rights than in equally relevant fields such as torture, rule of law or other civil and political rights.

We should widen still further the diversity and participation of newly accredited CSOs in gender work, bearing in mind that there are still too few that are specialized in political participation or gender integration.

I also encourage the promotion of gender equality within the civil society movement itself, with increased participation and leadership of women in NGO management and leadership and further involvement of women-oriented NGOs in the field of civil and political rights.

Excellencies,

It is the Member States, that share the important responsibility for integrating a gender perspective into the work of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, but my Office is fully committed to supporting you in this task. In this regard, the OHCHR has adopted a Gender Equality Strategic Plan (2012-13) that spells out concrete action for systematizing the integration of a gender perspective in the structure and work of the OHCHR and strengthen the position of civil society actors and NGOs within the HRC framework.

I am heartened by the steady progress already made by civil society actors to infuse this Council's work with women's human rights and gender issues. We can do better by close cooperation between member States and civil society.

Thank you.