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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 3 October 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Marschik (Austria)
later: Ms. Banaken Elel (Vice-Chair)..... (Cameroon)
later: Mr. Marschik (Austria)
later: Ms. Banaken Elel (Vice-Chair)..... (Cameroon)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 25 Advancement of women (continued)

(a) Advancement of women (continued) (A/78/220 and A/78/256)

(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (continued) (A/78/206 and A/78/216)

1. **Ms. Nusseibeh** (United Arab Emirates) gave a statement also on behalf of Afghanistan, Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Cabo Verde, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Kuwait, Latvia, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, the Marshall Islands, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, New Zealand, Norway, Palau, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, the State of Palestine, Sweden, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Uruguay, Yemen and the European Union.

2. Women and girls in Afghanistan were subject to the most severe forms of discrimination, oppression and violence in the world. Drastic restrictions of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including their access to education and employment, freedom of movement, and full, equal and meaningful participation in public life, could amount to gender persecution. The arbitrary decisions and edicts of the Taliban were incompatible with the principles of proportionality and non-discrimination. They heightened the risks of gender-based violence, further compounded the ongoing economic crisis and undermined an already strained health system by denying women and girls access to critical and routine health services. Moreover, restrictions on women's access to public places were inflicting both physical and mental harm.

3. The Taliban should immediately reverse the policies and practices, decrees and other pronouncements that abused the human rights and freedoms of women and girls and should respect, protect and fulfil their human rights, including those enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and in the Convention

on the Rights of the Child, to which Afghanistan was a party. The principle of freedom of religion or belief should never be misused to discriminate against women and girls, who should be allowed to exercise their rights and contribute to the social and economic development of Afghan society in accordance with international human rights law and the teachings of Islam, which empowered women, safeguarded their rights and affirmed their dignity.

4. The States deplored the denial of girls' and women's right to education beyond the primary level, which deepened entrenched gender inequalities, as well as the restriction of women's participation in the workforce. Women-led organizations had been targeted and women had been prohibited from working for non-governmental organizations and the United Nations, thereby hindering the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance. They recalled Security Council resolution 2681 (2023), which condemned the decision of the Taliban to prohibit Afghan women from working for the United Nations as a violation of human rights and humanitarian principles.

5. The Taliban should restore the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of all women and girls in public and political life, facilitate an inclusive and representative political process that enabled all Afghans, in particular women and girls, to participate in the economy and future of Afghanistan, and ensure accountability and trauma-informed, victim- and survivor-centred justice. The countries would stand firmly with the women and girls of Afghanistan until their dignity had been restored.

6. **Mr. Wallace** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality was dramatically off track. A combination of political will, investment, financial support and international cooperation was essential to realize significant progress. The efforts of the CARICOM member States remained focused on equal pay for equal work, equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, gender-responsive universal health coverage, equal participation in decision-making, ending sexual harassment and violence against women and girls, and improving educational opportunities.

7. Most of the world's poor were women. The CARICOM member States emphasized education and training for women and girls, as it played a key role in the eradication of poverty and discriminatory policies and practices. As a result, more girls were completing secondary or tertiary school and going on to become effective leaders, entrepreneurs and agents of change.

The member States also prioritized women's and girls' access to health care and social protection.

8. The CARICOM countries welcomed the significant improvement in the status of women in the United Nations system, particularly in the professional and higher grade categories. The United Nations should set a positive example for the rest of the world.

9. Women had established themselves as dependable partners in the development process and made crucial contributions to inclusive economic growth and poverty eradication in the region. While the CARICOM member States had not achieved gender parity, women were better represented in decision-making, particularly in the political sphere.

10. Investment in women-led and women-focused sustainable solutions was critical. The CARICOM countries recognized the value of women's participation in natural resource management and in the design and implementation of early warning systems. Women were disproportionately affected by the climate disasters to which the region was prone, and they had demonstrated tremendous leadership in contributing to climate responses and advocating for environmental protection.

11. The CARICOM countries were deeply concerned about the dramatic increase in online harassment, which had economic, physical and psychological consequences and severely hindered women's and girls' empowerment, advancement and full participation in society. Combating violence against women and girls required legislative and administrative measures, mobilization of resources, advocacy and community outreach. The CARICOM member States were working consistently to ensure support and access to justice for victims, to strengthen family support structures and to discourage negative social norms and gender stereotypes. They recognized the critical importance of engaging men and boys in their efforts.

12. The multiple factors hindering gender equality must be addressed systematically and collaboratively through specific, measurable actions. The CARICOM countries continued to seek support in building their capacity to collect credible data and information on which to base policies and plans. In their view, special measures and quotas for more targeted investment in women and girls were necessary to make real progress towards gender equality.

13. **Mr. Vichankaiyakij** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the member States remained committed to enabling women and girls to reach their full potential through gender-

responsive implementation of ASEAN Community Vision 2025. In July 2023, ASEAN had organized a regional conference on gender mainstreaming to give impetus to the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025, and in September 2023, the member States had adopted the ASEAN Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development. ASEAN had a gender-responsive regional disaster management framework and a regional plan of action on women and peace and security. In the legal sphere, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children had joined forces with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights to promote the gender-responsive treatment of women prisoners.

14. Within the United Nations, ASEAN was collaborating with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to combat violence against women and to build national capacity in the collection and analysis of gender data. ASEAN had also worked with UN-Women to develop the ASEAN Gender Outlook, which would support evidence-based policymaking. The seventh Sustainable Development Goal symposium convened by ASEAN, China and the United Nations Development Programme would take place in November 2023.

15. **Ms. González López** (El Salvador), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Central American Integration System (SICA), said that, over the past 10 years, those States had adopted or reformed criminal code provisions, national policies and multiyear plans to promote gender equality. They had also strengthened the role of national gender equality mechanisms. Their commitment to women's equality, empowerment and inclusion in all spheres was evident in the SICA Regional Policy on Gender Equality and Equity and in decisions and measures to promote equality and equity at all levels and in every sector. The SICA member States reaffirmed the importance of full, accelerated and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcomes of its implementation reviews and the related regional documents.

16. Violence in all its forms and dimensions limited women's and girls' realization of their full potential, full exercise of their human rights, and full and equitable participation in society. The exclusion of women and girls from digital technology education and digital innovation further hindered gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by restricting their participation in the different spheres of society. At the same time, digitalization exposed them to trafficking in persons, sexual slavery, harassment, and physical, sexual and psychological violence. Public policies,

actions and programmes to prevent, detect, follow up on and eradicate violence against women should emphasize the right to a life free from violence, and national and regional responses to all forms of violence against women should be strengthened, with an emphasis on combating impunity and ensuring access to justice and effective protection and prevention at all levels.

17. Combating the rise in adolescent pregnancies was a regional priority. The member States also attached great importance to the full, equitable and meaningful participation of women in public life, including in decision-making at all levels. Fifty per cent of decision-making positions should be filled by women.

18. To combat the persistent wage gap between men and women and the occupational segregation of women, it was essential to give rural women, Indigenous women, Afrodescendent women and women with disabilities access to training that enabled them to secure equitable, competitive employment. In view of the gendered impact of climate change, a gender perspective should be incorporated into disaster risk prevention and management as well as disaster response. The SICA countries underlined the role of Indigenous women as guardians of cultural values and defenders of the earth and sustainable development.

19. Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment required renewed commitment, improved policies and rigorous implementation of those policies. It was also necessary to increase funding from all sources, including official development assistance.

20. **Mr. Oehri** (Liechtenstein) said that the recent crises had disproportionately affected women and girls, further accentuating gender disparities. At the current rate, it would take almost three centuries to attain gender equality. Yet pressing challenges such as climate change and armed conflict could not be addressed effectively if half of the global population did not enjoy equal rights and opportunities. It was essential that Member States redouble their efforts to advance gender equality, both as a fundamental human right and as a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable future.

21. Women remained severely underrepresented in leadership positions, including in the General Assembly. Among the most active agents of change at the grassroots level, they routinely faced discriminatory practices that excluded them from the legislative process. When elected to public office, they faced online abuse, harassment and even violence.

22. Liechtenstein had long made the empowerment of women and girls a foreign policy priority. States must

do more to uphold the rights of women to engage on equal terms throughout all phases of political transition, to guarantee their right to speak and to assemble freely, and to protect them from intimidation and violence. In Myanmar, following the military coup, women struggled to access basic health care and to secure sufficient income. In Afghanistan, women and girls faced ever-growing restrictions, including severe restriction of their right to education.

23. It was essential to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction. In an increasingly polarized, conflict-torn world, women played an undervalued but crucial role in the restoration and maintenance of international peace and security.

24. **Ms. White** (United Kingdom) said that women and girls must be at the heart of global efforts to build a fairer, freer, safer, wealthier and greener world. In 2023, the United Kingdom had launched a new international strategy that put women and girls front and centre in all their diversity. While much progress had been made in promoting and protecting their rights, increased ambition was imperative. Multiple global crises, from conflict to climate change, disproportionately impacted women and girls, and concerted efforts to roll back their rights were undermining hard-won progress towards gender equality.

25. The United Kingdom had committed to ensuring that 80 per cent of its bilateral aid programmes focused on gender equality by 2030, and it challenged other States to do likewise. United Kingdom aid emphasized educating girls; empowering women and girls, including by championing their health rights, and ending gender-based violence. Education was a gateway to other human rights, and empowering women economically, politically and through reproductive autonomy was integral to development. To end gender-based violence, the United Kingdom supported grassroots movements to end female genital mutilation and had launched the International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict.

26. **Ms. Umulisa** (Rwanda) said that, despite progress in advancing women's rights, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis had magnified gender disparities in food security, social protection and access to digital technologies, particularly in rural areas. Women remained severely underrepresented in national parliaments, and they continued to face sexual and gender-based violence. Rwanda had the highest percentage of women legislators in the world. It continued to invest in strategies to address the root causes of inequality,

including by enacting comprehensive laws to combat violence against women and providing integrated services for victims of gender-based violence. Her Government remained committed to leveraging technology for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and it engaged actively in relevant multilateral platforms such as the Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality.

27. **Ms. Mogaka** (Kenya) said that gender equality was essential for sustainable development and social cohesion. Despite progress, its attainment continued to be impeded by discrimination, violence, the gendered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and unequal access to education, health care, land ownership, justice and economic and political participation. To address those challenges, Kenya had taken significant steps to mainstream gender perspectives in its Constitution, laws, policies and development initiatives. It continued to advocate against sexual and gender-based violence at the national, regional and international levels, and against harmful cultural practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.

28. At home, Kenya was investing in initiatives to promote equal access to education for all. It prioritized information and communications technology, innovation and digitalization as means of transformative change, and it had improved its capacity to use evidence-based data for gender advocacy, programming and policy. A women's enterprise fund had already disbursed more than \$200 million to women-led businesses and women entrepreneurs and had enabled over 2 million women to train in business and basic information and communications technology skills. In the political sphere, the success of women candidates in the 2022 general elections had inspired a new generation of women to enter elective politics.

29. As a leader in addressing the climate crisis, including at the inaugural Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi in September 2023, Kenya strongly promoted women as agents of change and their participation in climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Government continued to work with local communities to promote inclusion and build resilience.

30. **Mr. Tieman** (New Zealand) said that his country had a proud legacy of empowering women and girls to lead independent and self-determining lives. New Zealand was deeply concerned at the growing global pushback against sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as the increase in sexual and gender-based violence. Armed conflicts, widespread violence, climate change and natural disasters were leading to egregious

human rights violations that exacerbated gender inequalities.

31. States must strengthen the protection of women and girls, particularly women human rights defenders, in humanitarian emergencies and conflict and post-conflict settings. They must also do more to provide safe, accessible and quality reproductive and maternal health services. In addition, they must recognize the compounding effects of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on women who were members of vulnerable groups or lived in rural or remote communities. New Zealand called on States to continue to champion the rights of gender-diverse women and girls through decriminalization and by including them fully in society and combating discriminatory attitudes. It remained concerned at all forms of violence and discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation or gender identity, including digital harm, online harassment and violence against human rights defenders.

32. **Ms. Ludwig** (Germany) said that integrating the perspectives, needs, knowledge and skills of women and girls into policies, legislation and programmes was indispensable for a just society, enabled more sustainable growth and strengthened democracy. States must redouble their efforts to ensure that women and girls had equal representation in all areas of life, enjoyed the same rights and access to resources as men and boys, and lived lives free from violence.

33. To ensure the systematic consideration of gender in national legislation and policymaking, her Government was developing a gender equality check that would be applied to all future federal laws and important policies. Internationally, it had joined a group of 17 other countries in adopting a political declaration on feminist approaches to foreign policy during the high-level week of the current session of the General Assembly. Germany supported a range of initiatives to empower women in peace and security, and it urged Member States to work more diligently to ensure that resolutions on women and peace and security made a tangible difference on the ground.

34. Her Government's feminist foreign and development policies extended to all marginalized groups. As co-Chair of the Equal Rights Coalition, Germany was involved in efforts to end violence and discrimination against queer persons in more than 30 countries, with a focus on groups subject to multidimensional discrimination.

35. There was growing global pushback against women's and girls' rights, especially their sexual and reproductive health rights, as well as against the rights

of gender-diverse persons. The international community must defend and build on hard-won achievements, including by safeguarding, supporting and funding the indispensable work of women's rights organizations, human rights defenders and women's movements.

36. **Ms. Zoghbi** (Lebanon) said that the outlook for women and girls grew dimmer each year. Halfway to 2030, no Sustainable Development Goal 5 indicator was at or near the target. Women remained underrepresented in almost every sphere of public life, even if they were finally gaining recognition in the field of sports. During the general debate of the high-level week of the current session of the General Assembly, only 1 in 9 speakers had been women, and there had never been a woman Secretary-General.

37. Around the world, violence against women and girls continued unabated. In Lebanon, the National Commission for Lebanese Women was working with UN-Women and civil society organizations to address and prevent it. Encouragingly, the Lebanese National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security was beginning to produce results. Her delegation looked forward to the upcoming Summit of the Future, which should have Goal 5 at its heart. It was impossible to build a better future without engaging with, listening to and empowering half of humanity.

38. **Mr. Arbeiter** (Canada) said that achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals depended on the empowerment of women in all spheres. Respect for the human rights of women and girls was not negotiable. Canada would remain a strong, unwavering voice for women and girls, in all their diversity, across the globe. It stood united with the other members of the cross-regional group calling on the Taliban to reverse its edicts. Human rights were a compass for achieving a more just world.

39. Despite progress, women and girls continued to see their rights and freedoms restricted, to be subject to violence and abuse, and to be forcibly marginalized, displaced and disappeared. In countries with authoritarian regimes, women urging respect for their basic rights faced repression and violence.

40. The current backlash against women's rights was global. His Government was keenly aware of the challenges in Canada itself and would persevere in its feminist policy. Internationally, Canada would continue to protect and promote the fundamental rights of women and girls. It would work to end violence against them, to strengthen their bodily autonomy and to defend their rights to reproductive and sexual health. Canada recognized the essential role of women's rights

organizations and women's rights defenders and was a major donor to those organizations.

41. **Ms. Escobar Vargas** (Mexico), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the Mexican national development plan stressed the importance of leaving no one behind, particularly women and girls. In September, the highest court of Mexico had decriminalized abortion, and that very day, as co-Chair of the Generation Equality Forum, Mexico had unveiled a new commitment to eliminate gender violence in the context of digital and emerging technologies.

42. Women and girls continued to confront broad challenges arising from historical and structural inequalities in the context of predominantly patriarchal societies. According to the World Economic Forum, it would take more than 130 years to close the global gender gap. Moreover, violations of the rights of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, were on the rise. Despite divisions and hesitancy on gender-related issues, multilateralism and the General Assembly in particular offered a path towards social well-being and a sustainable world. A few days earlier, in the plenary meeting, Mexico had renewed its commitment to a feminist foreign policy. Feminist foreign policies were an important means of questioning and defying entrenched systems of oppression and inequality.

43. **Ms. Rodríguez Mancía** (Guatemala) said that gender discrimination remained an obstacle to women's full development and to fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Guatemala considered gender equality to be a fundamental right, the exercise of which provided the best opportunity to overcome some of the most pressing challenges, from the economic crisis and lack of health care to climate change, violence against women and conflicts. Discrimination against women impeded access to justice and, therefore, the building of peaceful and inclusive societies governed by the rule of law.

44. In its commitment to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, Guatemala had launched a number of policies and plans designed in a participatory manner to meet national and international commitments and ensure the right of women and girls to a violence-free life and full development. Her country firmly believed in fully involving women in decision-making at all levels and looked forward to general recommendation 40 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 2024.

45. Migration affected men and women differently. Women and girls were exposed to multiple threats in their pursuit of better opportunities, which undermined

their human rights and fundamental liberties. Accordingly, a comprehensive and coordinated response to migration was necessary to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration flows while respecting migrants' human rights, especially those of the most vulnerable groups, such as women and girls.

46. To meet its international human rights obligations, Guatemala had submitted its tenth national periodic report on implementation of the Convention, which was to be considered by the Committee at its next session. The delegation of Guatemala would include representatives of the three branches of government. Committed to promoting and protecting women's rights nationally, regionally and globally, it had submitted its candidacy to the Human Rights Council for the period 2025–2027.

47. **Ms. Diloknawarit** (Thailand) said that gender biases and stereotypes remained a key challenge for women and girls and urged countries to work together to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5 and ensure that no one was left behind.

48. Thailand recognized the role of women in politics and public decision-making, and its constitution required political parties to take gender equality into account when preparing candidate lists. One in five representatives in the parliament were women, which reflected an increase on past figures. In addition, a code of conduct prohibited all forms of sexual harassment against women members.

49. Women's economic participation should be promoted to secure jobs for women and create a society where they could lead and thrive in economic activities. In Thailand, women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises accounted for 40 per cent of all small and medium-sized enterprises, which themselves accounted for approximately 35 per cent of gross domestic product. Memorandums of understanding had also been signed between UN-Women and Thai entities promoting small and medium-sized enterprises.

50. Given the growing influence that technology was exerting on people's lives, Thailand strongly supported women's voices in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Promoting careers in those fields constituted one of the pillars of the women's development plan. Thailand also continued to commemorate Girls in ICT Day. It was also honoured to serve as the Vice President of the United Nations Women Executive Board Bureau for 2023.

51. **Ms. Chong** (Singapore), said that inequalities had worsened at the halfway mark for the deadline to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development, with disproportionate effects on women. Against that backdrop, Singapore reaffirmed its support for the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Commission on the Status of Women.

52. As a small city-State with no natural resources, Singapore understood that its most valued resource was its people. Women's rights were protected robustly in the law. In its belief that policies to advance gender equality and women's empowerment must start when people were young, Singapore ensured that all children had equal access to education. Over half of residents aged 25 years and older with university degrees were women, and the female literacy rate stood at 96.4 per cent in 2021. Women had made significant inroads in male-dominated professions, accounting for 41 per cent of technology professionals – well above the 28 per cent global average.

53. To find sustainable solutions to support and empower women, following multi-stakeholder consultations, the Government had published a white paper in 2022 that included 25 actions plans for implementation over 10 years. Many of those actions plans had been achieved or were on track to be achieved. Policies had been put in place for greater tax relief for working mothers and more financial aid for caregivers. New guidelines for flexible work arrangements were set to be introduced in 2024.

54. Efforts had also been made to protect women from online and offline harm. To better protect the mostly women victims of family violence, a bill had been passed to amend the Women's Charter, making it clear that "family violence" covered physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse. Work had also begun on legislation against workplace discrimination to protect women who were pregnant, on maternity leave, breastfeeding, or intending to have children.

55. Singapore was humbled and honoured to be listed as the top Asian country for gender equality and ranked seventh worldwide for gender equality in the Human Development Report 2021/2022. However, there was still work to be done to build a fairer and more inclusive society.

56. *Ms. Banaken Elel, Vice-Chair (Cameroon) took the Chair.*

57. **Mr. Passmoor** (South Africa) said that his country's Constitution provided for the promotion, protection and fulfilment of women as a group that had been marginalized as a result of historical inequalities. The Government's actions were based on the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda and the Beijing

Declaration and Platform for Action. Substantive gender equality should be sought by mainstreaming gender and uplifting women and girls throughout society.

58. South Africa was concerned about regression in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 5. A rising backlash against women's sexual and reproductive health and rights further diminished the outlook for gender equality. Violence against women remained high, especially for vulnerable women and girls. Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals depended fundamentally on the empowerment of women in all spheres.

59. Gender-based violence remained one of the chief challenges affecting women and girls, especially in South Africa, which was working hard to address the scourge. Violence against women and girls, including those in politics and public life, was a source of concern for the Government. Three laws on gender-based violence had been passed to help address the problem.

60. Economic empowerment was critical to addressing gender inequalities, which would require proactive policies to bring women into leadership positions as well as adequate financing. Understanding the issue as a question of fostering development rather than redistribution, the Government's policies were designed to support women entrepreneurs through key economic policy interventions. The Government continued to support women in addressing threats to international peacebuilding and security, for women's full, equal and meaningful participation was a crucial component to long-term sustainable peace.

61. **Mr. Bauwens** (Belgium) said that the full realization of women's rights was still far from a reality. Key to reaching that goal was women and girl's full, equal and meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels and in all domains. However, women leaders and decision-makers faced widespread hate speech, misinformation and disinformation. Online and offline gender-based violence stifled women's right to freedom of expression, leading to self-censorship and withdrawal from public spaces. Belgium called on all countries to stop that pattern of misogyny, intimidation and violence.

62. Women and girl's empowerment and equal participation in decision-making required the elimination of structural barriers, discriminatory laws and norms perpetuating gender stereotypes. Non-discrimination laws needed to be enforced, and countries needed to ensure that women and girls worldwide knew their rights and how to enforce them.

63. Sexual and reproductive health, rights and services were an indispensable means for meeting the goals of

gender equality, equal participation and a violence-free life for women and girls. That entailed effective access to information, to sexual and reproductive health services, to modern methods of contraception of women's choice and safe abortion and to comprehensive sexuality education for all.

64. Many other domains required dedicated action to make a positive difference. Addressing those challenges required data disaggregated by sex, gender and other characteristics, in addition to political will, dedication and cooperation. All actors should remain open to dialogue, embracing challenges and overcoming resistance and differences. Belgium thanked civil society organizations, women's organizations and women human rights advocates for the vital role they played.

65. **Ms. Aviel** (Israel), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the world needed to uphold the rights of women and girls, to empower them and to push back against gender stereotypes and negative social norms. Israel attached utmost importance to the advancement of women and girls in all their diversity and stood firmly behind the duty to ensure full, equal and meaningful participation in all levels of society.

66. As a member of the Feminist Foreign Policy Plus Group, Israel had been pleased to take part in an event during the high-level week at which the first global declaration on feminist foreign policy had been adopted. In 2023, Israel had set up a Ministry for the Advancement of the Status of Women, which emphasized the need to promote the advancement of women through personal and professional development. A programme had been implemented to promote female leadership and participation in public life.

67. Israel had also held a side event to showcase the benefits of collaborative work, as exemplified by the "In Her Way" programme, which brought together various actors to empower survivors of domestic violence through rehabilitation and upskilling and then integration into the technology sector, thereby fostering their economic independence.

68. The advancement of women extended beyond their socioeconomic development. Their rights should be ensured, and men and boys should be included as partners and agents of change to push back against stereotypes and negative social norms. Israel was proud to lead alongside other nations the Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment. Her country had found ways to harness entrepreneurship and technology, including an annual hack-a-thon to use technology to prevent femicide and raise awareness. As technology presented both opportunities and challenges, countries

needed to act against online, offline and technology-facilitated threats of violence.

69. **Mr. Akram** (Pakistan) said that Pakistan had introduced a series of legal and policy measures to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5 and its related targets, although efforts had been affected by financial, fuel and food crises as well as large-scale flooding. Rural women in Pakistan faced particular challenges. Overall, 50–80 per cent of women were food producers, and women in rural areas managed 70 per cent of livestock.

70. Pakistan had implemented into law the international norms to promote and ensure gender equality and the rights of women to education, work, political representation and participation in households, communities and national life. Although those norms were also widely accepted at social and personal levels, girls and women – particularly in rural areas – remained disadvantaged and, in many respects, exploited.

71. Despite studies and reports on the subject and the recognition of legal rights and norms, there was no clear strategy on how to address the endemic impediments to achieving women's development rights. He asked how the United Nations system could assist individual developing countries in transforming normative recommendations into actual development and quality-of-life outcomes for women and girls.

72. The chief challenge was the paucity of finance for developing countries to implement their national development strategies and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Greater in-depth study could lead to general and specific recommendations providing a transformative leap in advancing women and girls rights in real life. Such studies should look at the sectoral obstacles to achievement of the SDGs and their targets for women and girls.

73. **Mr. Oddone** (Argentina) said that Argentina was firmly committed to building a society with the same opportunities and rights for all while assuming responsibility for the historical demands of the women's and diversity movement. In foreign policy, Argentina had appointed its first Special Representative on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, thereby lending a voice in the Government and driving forward a foreign policy for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other (LGBTIQ+) persons in the region and the world.

74. In 2023, Argentina commemorated the eleventh anniversary of the gender identity law, which marked a starting point for the transexual and transgender

movement in its march towards further recognition of other rights. Another law stipulated that 1 per cent of the State workforce posts should be held by transexual and transgender persons. A decree provided for the issuance of national identity documents that recognized non-binary identities.

75. However, Argentina was worried about the rise in anti-gender and anti-trans movements across the globe, even within the United Nations. Discriminatory and hateful speech against diversity, equality, political participation, gender parity and feminist and transfeminist movements profoundly damaged democracies and infringed fundamental rights. In 2015, social groups, feminist collectives and society at large launched the *Ni una menos* movement to put an end to gender-based violence. It eventually spread across Latin America and showed that the road towards reducing gender-based violence passed through the State and the promotion of public policies to combat inequalities.

76. Argentina participated in the Generation Equality Forum and led the Action Coalition on Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights as part of its commitment to build greater consensus and share the country's experience in advocating for legal, safe and free abortion and the inclusion of the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons. It had passed a law on the voluntary termination of pregnancy to protect the health and life of women and persons with other gender identities. Another law ensured health care for pregnant women and children in the first years of their life. The unequal distribution of caregiving tasks stood at the core of gender inequality. To address the issue and progress towards equal parental leave, the Government had submitted a draft law setting out a comprehensive care system with gender perspective.

77. **Ms. Shuang** (China) said that the international community should redouble its efforts and accelerate implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in order to realize the goal of gender equality. A human-centred approach should be adopted and women's full development promoted. Alongside socioeconomic development, policymaking should take into account gender differences in women's specific needs, and women's participation in poverty reduction, health and sanitation, digital connectivity and other areas should be enhanced.

78. Innovation and women's empowerment in the technological transformation and digital education were key to realizing gender equality. Holistic policymaking was also key so as to build a harmonious inclusive society capable of shedding outdated mindsets, roles and customs and eliminating gender bias. It was

imperative to improve policies and legislation, boost oversight and adopt measures to tackle human trafficking, sexual violence, sexual harassment and other issues that violated women's human rights.

79. Exchange, mutual learning and greater international cooperation in women's advancement were also necessary to further advancement. China supported increased investments to eradicate violence, discrimination and poverty as well as efforts in emerging challenges such as the gender digital divide. It would continue to boost international cooperation, promote knowledge and results sharing and, in particular, help developing countries deal with women's livelihood challenges and the development gap.

80. With gender equality as a foundational national policy, China had more than 100 laws and regulations in place to comprehensively guarantee women's rights and interests. Recognized by the World Health Organization as one of the top 10 high-performing countries in maternal and child health, it had been implementing a national action plan to facilitate women's development and improve women's health.

81. China guaranteed the right of women and girls to education and had eradicated gender disparity in compulsory education. Further efforts had been made to eliminate all forms of violence against women. In addition, women's participation in decision-making and management was more diverse, jobs were of a higher quality, and social protection and living conditions had improved.

82. China had been implementing all the proposals made by its President at the 2015 Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. It had met its contribution to UN-Women on time and in full, providing developing countries with donations and training for women and girls, and continued to support the education of women and girls across the world.

83. *Mr. Marschik (Austria) resumed the Chair.*

84. **Mr. Peñaranda** (Philippines) said that the Philippine constitution recognized the role of women in nation-building and mandated the equality of women and men under the law. The Philippines had also played a pivotal role in establishing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the committee that monitored its implementation. His delegation called on all Member States to sign the Convention and implement it domestically.

85. In the Philippines, the Convention had been implemented in the form of the Magna Carta of Women,

a comprehensive legal framework to protect and promote gender equality and empower women. Steadfast in its commitment to women and girls, the Congress had passed several laws to uphold the human rights and dignity of women and girls and protect them against harassment. In 2021 it had also passed a law prohibiting child marriage. Three other laws provided for reproductive, maternal and child health care and promoted responsible family planning, extended maternity leave from 60 days to 105 days of paid leave, and promoted access to health services and information, education and communication materials for women.

86. A women-led peace process and inclusive dialogue had led to the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, and the establishment of the Bangsamoro Women Commission reaffirmed the regional government's commitment to women's empowerment.

87. The Philippines had institutionalized the gender and development focal point in all Government agencies, which were also mandated to mainstream gender equality, setting aside at least 5 per cent of their budget for gender and development programmes. The Philippine Commission on Women monitored implementation of gender financing and ensured compliance by all agencies. The Government was taking a whole-of-society approach to combat the trafficking of women and girls.

88. **Mr. Hakobyan** (Armenia) said that policymaking in Armenia especially targeted the protection and promotion of women's rights to achieve gender equality and ensure women's empowerment and full, equal and meaningful participation in all spheres of public life. More than one third of members of the Armenian parliament were women.

89. The Government implemented projects to assist women and girls and, especially in rural areas, to expand their involvement in economic activities. Armenia had a high participation of women – approximately 40 per cent – in the information and communications technology sector. Throughout its four years of membership of the Commission on the Status of Women, Armenia had made its best efforts to contribute, including by chairing the sixty-fourth and sixty-fifth sessions. Armenia reaffirmed its strong support to the commitments set out in the Political Declaration and the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women.

90. A plan was underway to promote the role of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and peacemaking, in line with the priority Armenia gives to the advancement of the women and peace and security agenda. The situation in the region had had a

disproportionate effect on vulnerable groups, including women and children. On 19 September, Azerbaijan had attacked the civilian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, resulting in the deaths of many civilians, including women and children, as part of its policy of ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. Within days, more than 100,000 people had been displaced, the vast majority of whom were women, children and older persons, creating unforeseen humanitarian challenges that would affect efforts to advance and empower women in Armenia. The Government's top priority was to provide the displaced persons with livelihoods, including accommodation, employment, and social, health and educational services.

91. Prior to the attack, the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh had been under a 10-month siege leading to malnutrition and a lack of medicine, electricity and natural gas. Azerbaijan had hampered humanitarian access for United Nations agencies until Nagorno-Karabakh had been fully depopulated. Azerbaijan was since then attempting to manipulate the recent engagement by the United Nations. Armenia called for more substantial and proactive engagement by the United Nations where the rights and security of women and vulnerable groups were at risk so as to save lives rather than mourn victims.

92. **Ms. Velichko** (Belarus) said that women had already achieved significant success in exercising their rights and should not be seen as dependent members of society. While gender stereotypes still existed, women should avoid falling into the fashions of the moment and accept the burden that they wished and were able to shoulder. Men and women enjoyed equal rights and opportunities in Belarus. In the Global Gender Gap Report, Belarus ranked forty-first out of 146 countries, ranking seventh in economic participation and opportunities and 1st in health and survival. Women made up more than 35 per cent of the parliament and more than 70 per cent of the civil service and judiciary workforce.

93. For years women's unemployment rate had been lower than the rate for men as a result of the efforts made to reintegrate women into the labour market. In 2023, a digital service was launched to support employment. In the labour market women had a higher level of education than men and access to assistance to start their own business. However, no career or amount of money could make a woman as happy as motherhood, despite the tendency to the contrary found in Western countries. Not having children was a dangerous trend that led to depopulation and reduced economic potential. Free of any violation of the rights of women, Belarussian policy

promoted the benefits of raising children and protected marriage between a man and a woman as the foundation of the nation so as to ensure that women in Belarus never had to face the difficult choice between career and family.

94. Women with children were able to fulfil themselves professionally in Belarus. State incentives were in place to implement its family policy, including State-funded housing developments and child benefit payments. The labour code included a chapter on remote working, in line with its commitment to develop flexible employment practices, including for women with children.

95. **Mr. Ruslan** (Malaysia) said that national development plans and federal government budgets reflected the efforts Malaysia made to improve women's advancement and development. The Government had introduced a policy requiring 30 per cent of appointments to senior management positions to be women. The target had been met in the public sector and the focus was currently on the private sector. Under the 2022 budget, the securities commission required the target to be met for all publicly listed capital companies; it had also become mandatory for other publicly listed companies in 2023.

96. Malaysia continued to review and enact laws to enhance the safety and protect the rights of women and girls, including an anti-sexual harassment law and related guidelines. A roadshow sought to raise awareness of sexual harassment and of platforms for recourse, such as a specific anti-sexual harassment tribunal created under the law.

97. The Government was expanding access to quality early childhood care, education and affordable care for older persons, thereby contributing to women's participation in the economy and retention in the workforce. The Department of Women's Development undertook efforts to empower women's potential to contribute to the country's development and to support women in vulnerable situations via economic platforms focused on entrepreneurship development.

98. A gender mainstreaming agenda had been introduced in the public sector, which included capacity-building programmes and the appointment of gender focal points. Emphasis would be placed on enhancing institutional capacity and evidence-based policymaking. Believing that every step taken for the advancement of women would eventually contribute to a more inclusive society, Malaysia would continue to make efforts both domestically and internationally.

99. **Mr. Hadjichrysanthou** (Cyprus) said that, despite positive steps, none of the indicators of Sustainable Development Goal 5 were at “target met or almost met”. Cyprus was determined to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls and to provide equal opportunities for their full, equal and meaningful participation. With a view to creating a gender-responsive political, economic and social framework, the gender equality office, which would soon be institutionalized within the Government, was preparing a new gender equality strategy for the period 2024–2026. Gender focal points had been appointed in all relevant ministries and agencies, and civil society took a prominent role in drafting the new national strategy.

100. Preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls was one of his country’s highest priorities. In 2022, the parliament of Cyprus had adopted a law on femicide, which was the first such piece of legislation in Europe; it included femicide in the criminal code, by making gender-related killing an aggravating factor during sentencing.

101. During the fifty-second session of the Human Rights Council, Cyprus had made a joint statement with Israel, co-sponsored by 69 Member States, on femicide and human rights. Together with other actors, it had also organized a side event at the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, an event that had broken the silence on femicide. Cyprus encouraged all States to acknowledge the existence of femicide and gender-related killings in their national legal frameworks and to develop prevention strategies.

102. Human rights were a priority for foreign policy. As a candidate for the Human Rights Council for the 2025–2027 period, Cyprus remained committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of human rights.

103. **Ms. Zalabata Torres** (Colombia) said that her Government was demonstrating a clear commitment to gender equality by devising its first feminist foreign policy, with the aim of recognizing and effectively addressing the structural inequality faced by women and members of the LGBTIQ+ community at the international and institutional levels. The focus on gender would have a transformative effect on every aspect of foreign affairs, whether multilateral, bilateral or consular.

104. Colombia was also working towards its first national action plan on women and peace and security, based on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Forums had been held across the country to hear from over 1,500 women, including women of differing ethnic backgrounds, ages and political views, persons with disabilities and those serving a prison sentence, and

there was a committee comprising representatives of the Government, UN-Women and feminist and women’s organizations and movements. The process represented a revolution in peacebuilding, in that men and women were coming together to devise solutions that would meet women’s needs and have a tangible impact on their lives.

105. A key milestone in the process was finding that the main threats to human safety, in particular for women, continued to arise in peacetime. Restricting the women and peace and security agenda to times of war or armed conflict excluded women’s unique perspectives on leadership with respect to threats to security in the broadest sense, such as inequality, the erosion of democracy, climate change and gender-based violence.

106. Colombia recognized the need to give women genuine power, including through political participation, access to education, equality in the care economy and the prevention of all forms of gender-based violence. Female defenders of human, environmental and territorial rights should not have to fear for their safety, or that of their family or community, since effective democracy required women to be fully represented in all decision-making bodies.

107. **Ms. Brattested** (Norway) said that, in the words of the Secretary-General, achieving gender equality was “the greatest sustainable development challenge of our age”. It was therefore vital for the Summit of the Future in 2024 to have a clear gender perspective. With seven years left before 2030, only 15.4 per cent of indicators with data for Sustainable Development Goal 5 (gender equality) were “on track”. At the current rate, it would take an estimated 300 years to end child marriage and 286 years to ensure legal protection and remove discriminatory laws. Norway appreciated the Secretary-General’s efforts to ensure gender parity at the top level of the United Nations. However, equal representation was still a long way off and more women needed to be nominated and elected as members of United Nations bodies.

108. Protecting people’s rights to make decisions over their own bodies was key to Norway’s international work on gender equality. Unfortunately, democratic backsliding was in evidence around the world, leading to a weakening of rights and norms, as well as discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In light of the situation, stakeholders should be consistent, creative and well-coordinated in their support for the normative work of the United Nations and for civil society and other actors.

109. Thirty years after the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, 2024 was the

right time to conduct a sober review of the status quo, but also to celebrate milestones and inspire further action. Norway was introducing a new action plan on women's rights and gender equality in foreign and development policy to complement the recently launched National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Her delegation looked forward to working with the United Nations, its Member States and civil society on Sustainable Development Goal 5.

110. **Ms. Arab Bafrani** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that her country remained committed to promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls. Iranian women held a variety of decisive positions in politics and public life as a result of the Government's actions over a 40-year period. In particular, measures had been taken to empower women by promoting laws, policies, budgets and institutions to advance their economic, social, political and cultural rights.

111. As confirmed by statistics, such as those on female literacy and the share of female faculty members, the Islamic Republic of Iran ranked among the leading countries in promoting the right to education, including for women and girls living in rural and deprived areas. The country had a whole-of-society approach to achieving female empowerment through education, in order to eliminate poverty and reduce socioeconomic inequality.

112. The Islamic Republic of Iran had invested extensively in improving women's individual capabilities and job skills. Female entrepreneurs and home- and family-based businesses had received additional support, as well as access to information and communications technology to bridge the gender digital gap. There had also been a national campaign to raise the profile of 500 female entrepreneurs who had been negatively affected by sanctions.

113. The Islamic Republic of Iran had a comprehensive plan for empowering female heads of household, including in relation to employment and entrepreneurship, legal, social, and cultural affairs, and health, welfare and social protection. The aims of the plan included promoting self-sufficiency, providing rural micro-funds and improving living conditions for working female heads of household.

114. Despite the country's efforts to meet the needs of Iranian women and girls, it faced challenges that had been exacerbated by the illegal unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States of America. The Islamic Republic of Iran called upon the international community to take immediate action in that regard.

115. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that his country wished to underscore the significance of the provisions set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the outcome documents from the fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

116. Despite the efforts of States in all regions, inequality, gender stereotypes and gender-based violence and discrimination persisted. The Commission on the Status of Women was a unique forum in which all States could engage in a dialogue among equals on the important issues of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Russian Federation actively participated in the Commission's sessions and helped to facilitate its work to achieve collective intergovernmental decisions on the most important agenda items. The general policy stance of the Commission should continue to form the basis for the operational work of UN-Women. In that regard, the Russian Federation wished to underscore the need for UN-Women to strictly comply with its mandate, which was to provide support and assistance. Moreover, UN-Women's activities should be carried out at the request, and with the consent, of the States in question.

117. The Russian Federation remained committed to meeting its obligations with respect to the status of women and in 2022 had approved a national strategy on women for the period 2023–2030. While Russian women were consistently focused on full-time employment and career growth, traditional family values, such as the desire to have and raise children, continued to be an important factor. Enabling women to balance their personal and professional lives was therefore a priority for the State. In addition to programmes designed to protect mothers and children and offer financial incentives to increase the birth rate, the Government was taking measures to ensure women played a more active role in all areas of societal relations and to increase female representation in politics and the economy.

118. **Ms. Lepage** (Luxembourg), speaking as a youth delegate, said that her country was the only State member of the European Union to have made equal pay a reality. On average, men had been paid 10.7 per cent more than women in 2006, whereas the monthly wage gap was now in women's favour. However, when calculated based on annual salary, the wage gap continued to favour men, who were overrepresented in high-level positions and likely to receive a larger end-of-year bonus.

119. In Luxembourg, women in the labour market and women aged between 25 and 35 years had, on average, a higher level of academic achievement than their male counterparts. As a result, women in the 25–35 age bracket had earned 7 per cent more than men in 2018. The fact that many women had been to university was reflected in a high female employment rate. Female graduates should have greater employment potential at every level, yet they remained underrepresented in managerial positions, including in the civil service. Luxembourg was committed to increasing the number of women in management as it sought to fulfil Sustainable Development Goal 5 (gender equality).

120. Another important point to consider was the balance between professional and private life. In Luxembourg, both parents were entitled to paid leave after birth or adoption. Parents could choose a system suited to their needs (full-time leave, part-time leave or fractions thereof) while also benefiting from replacement income. Furthermore, both parents could take leave at the same time if they wished to do so, since having both parents present at an early age was crucial to the child's development.

121. As regards meeting Sustainable Development Goal 5, Luxembourg recommended measures to increase female representation at every level of the labour market, especially in managerial positions, and to ensure an equal entitlement to parental leave.

122. **Ms. Bessadok** (Tunisia) said that gender equality had always been a priority for her country, as demonstrated most recently through the Constitution of 2022, the lifting of reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the unanimous adoption of a law to eliminate gender-based violence. Achieving gender equality and female empowerment through an approach grounded in human rights was not only a national and international obligation, but also a moral imperative in the twenty-first century.

123. Gender equality was one of the strongest pillars of a peaceful and prosperous society, contributing to economic growth and sustainable development. Tunisia had therefore invested in various programmes to support equal opportunities and economic rights for women and girls, for example by extending credit to women in order to create jobs in the fields of agriculture, handicrafts and commerce. Her country also remained steadfast in its efforts to eradicate all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and had introduced initiatives to improve the police response and the assistance provided to survivors.

124. Progress had been made in the 75 years since the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

However, gender inequality remained a persistent challenge to the ideal of universal human rights, since half of humanity still suffered from daily violence, structural inequalities, discriminatory laws, social and economic exclusion and underrepresentation in decision-making roles. The anniversary represented an opportunity to take stock and learn lessons.

125. Tunisia took pride in its contribution to United Nations work on gender equality, having led the first roundtable on the sexual and reproductive health of women with disabilities during its chairmanship of the sixteenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It had also partnered with Bangladesh to facilitate a resolution on mainstreaming a gender perspective across the United Nations system in July 2022.

126. **Ms. Almulla** (Kuwait) said that her country was taking steps to comply with its obligations under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as its own Constitution, which stipulated that men and women were equal before the law. In addition, Kuwait had adopted legislation that affirmed the importance of gender equality and ensured that women had the right to education, employment and economic independence. The law also guaranteed that women enjoyed various personal status protections and the right to equal pay for equal work, while also being entitled to support in the form of family allowances.

127. Women had played an important role in the establishment of the modern State and were a crucial driver of development. The Government of Kuwait aimed to effect a national renaissance that aligned with the sustainable development vision of the United Nations, an ambitious vision that could be achieved only through the genuine economic and political participation of women. Women made up 80 per cent of university students in Kuwait, and 47 per cent of women held graduate degrees. They held posts in the diplomatic service, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, law enforcement and the oil sector. They also held decision-making posts in Government, including at the rank of Minister.

128. Violence against women and girls was a human rights violation that not only adversely affected their lives, but also hindered sustainable development. More robust political will and systematic approaches were needed to combat all forms of discrimination against women and girls around the world.

129. **Ms. Le Thoa Thi Minh** (Viet Nam) said that, as a member of the Human Rights Council for 2023–2025, her country had a number of recommendations to make

regarding the advancement of women. Firstly, it was important to promote cooperation among States, regional and international organizations and development partners in order to help Member States honour their commitments to ensure the equal participation of women and girls in every aspect of life and to protect them from violence and discrimination. Secondly, given that women played a significant role in community building, they should be guaranteed full, equal and meaningful participation in the decision-making process in terms of peace and security and development, especially in conflict prevention and settlement and post-conflict reconstruction. Thirdly, in the context of the digital transformation, States should focus on improving the digital skills of women in the workforce and promote their role in building the digital economy. Women and girls should be enabled to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and their rights should be protected online.

130. Viet Nam had consistently and effectively ensured women's rights and mainstreamed gender equality in the making of laws, policies and development strategies. As a result, the gender gap had decreased considerably over the previous 20 years. In politics, for example, 30.3 per cent of National Assembly Deputies were women and 59 per cent of ministries and ministerial-led agencies had female leaders. Furthermore, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023 showed that Viet Nam had risen by 11 places in the ranking since the previous year. Finally, according to data from the United Nations Children's Fund, Viet Nam was among four countries that had achieved gender parity in digital skills.

131. **Ms. Mousa** (Saudi Arabia) said that her country had adopted many reforms to benefit women that were based on the principle of positive discrimination, in line with its Vision 2030 initiative. Institutions had also been established to foster women's empowerment. In order to promote gender equality, laws dealing with the areas of personal status, travel documents, employment and social security had been issued or amended.

132. Saudi Arabia had also launched an initiative that was aimed at increasing women's participation in public and private sector employment. The Government also provided support to women through training programmes, financial support and business advisory services, which benefited around 6 million women. In the past two years, Saudi Arabia had risen in the Women, Business and the Law rankings of the World Bank and was now first in the region when it came to women's pay. The Government had increasingly focused on increasing women's participation in the agriculture and

food production sectors in an effort to foster the economic empowerment of rural women.

133. Her delegation was proud to announce that the first Arab Muslim astronaut was a young woman biologist from Saudi Arabia, who had spent 10 days at the International Space Station a few months previously. It was hoped that her experience would inspire women and girls throughout the region.

134. The country's achievements with respect to women's empowerment demonstrated the benefit of an approach based on moderate Islam and national pride. In November 2023, Saudi Arabia, working with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, would host a high-level international conference on women's rights and Islamic law.

135. **Ms. Banaken Elél** (Cameroon) said that international human rights law, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, had guaranteed women freedom of choice over many aspects of their lives. Almost everywhere in the world, they were free to choose characteristics such as their residence, profession, religion, spouse and nationality. However, there were a small number of limitations to freedom of choice, especially as regards race and sex, which were not characteristics chosen or assigned at birth, they were observed at birth. The feeling of belonging to a race did not confer the social or legal recognition associated with that race, and the same should apply with regard to sex. Becoming a woman was not a choice, but rather the result of a complex physiological, psychological and social process. Any other definition was a danger to society and a threat to hard-won women's rights.

136. At the current rate, it would take between 132 and 300 years to achieve gender equality. Countries could shorten that timeframe by empowering women and promoting gender equality, through the appropriate allocation of resources. Cameroon had increased the budget allocated to promoting women and the family and was pleased to see that the financial resources available internationally had remained unchanged.

137. Despite those efforts, gender parity was still a long way off. The international community should not be distracted from its work to resolve such problems by allowing the distinction between the sexes to become blurred. Women should not experience unfair competition with respect to quotas, resources or recognition. After a 100-year fight for equality, such unfair competition should not be accepted or legitimated.

138. Gender equality could only be achieved if the international community remained focused on what was essential and immutable: promoting the rights of women while taking their sex-related characteristics into account and prioritizing their economic rights. Cameroon believed that promoting the right to development was the way to empower women and equip them to continue the fight for equality.

139. **Ms. Al-thani** (Qatar) said that her country was following policies that were aimed at ensuring equality of opportunity for women in education and employment. As a result, Qatar was highly ranked when it came to women's labour force participation and university enrolment and public sector pay equity. Women held senior posts in Government and in the fields of education, medicine, diplomacy, law enforcement and aviation, effectively contributing to the country's development renaissance. Women stood for elections to municipal offices and the Shura Council.

140. Qatari women were pioneers in terms of pursuing non-traditional professions. Qatar was the first member of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf to allow women to be judges. Furthermore, Qatar had sponsored a draft resolution in the General Assembly to adopt 10 March as the International Day of Women Judges.

141. Qatar, a country that played the role of mediator in conflict resolution, valued the contribution made by women and girls to peacebuilding. In January 2022, it had hosted a high-level global conference on a youth-inclusive peace process, which had actively engaged young women and had issued a number of important outcomes that would strengthen the agendas on youth and peace and security and women and peace and security. Qatari investment in human resources and infrastructure had led to increased economic participation by women, and national figures showed that women now represented 70 per cent of all graduates from faculties of information systems, computer engineering, medicine, pharmacy and sciences. Women entrepreneurs were responsible for \$25 billion in investments.

142. **Mr. Garrido Melo** (Chile) said that his country was committed to moving towards full and substantive equality in relation to women's rights and eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence. That commitment was not only a priority for the Government, but also a key pillar of the country's new feminist foreign policy, which would affect every aspect of its diplomacy.

143. Chile had introduced domestic measures to empower women economically and allow men and

women to participate in the economy on an equal footing. The Ministry of Women and Gender Equality had identified the following strategic priorities: substantive equality in terms of rights, treatment and participation; a life free from violence; economic empowerment and autonomy; sexual and reproductive rights; the care economy and joint responsibility; and social and cultural change with regard to negative social norms and gender stereotypes.

144. Chile was in the process of establishing a national care system to address the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, which was borne disproportionately by women. According to the International Labour Organization, the value of such services amounted to 9 per cent of global gross domestic product. A failure to address the issue would therefore not only worsen gender inequality by depriving women of choices and an ability to participate in public life, but also waste a major opportunity to make a valuable contribution to the world economy.

145. Chile looked forward to contributing to discussions that would have a tangible impact on the lives of women around the world, especially those in rural regions, on the basis of the work of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences. It called for an ambitious international policy response to address the multiple and interrelated forms of violence and discrimination faced by women every day.

146. *Ms. Banaken Elel (Cameroon) resumed the Chair.*

147. **Ms. Al-mashehari** (Yemen) said that her country had been among the first to accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other related instruments, out of a belief in the inalienability of the rights of women and girls. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour had worked with State agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to deliver programmes that would enable women and girls, including those in rural areas, to recover socially and economically from the war. Priority was given to health and education programmes, which had a positive impact on sustainable development throughout the country.

148. Involving women in decision-making processes would help to bring about the far-reaching changes needed for transitional justice. The Presidential Leadership Council had expressed a commitment to an approach to promoting peace, ending suffering and empowering women and young people to shape their futures. The Council also continued to implement

measures to engage women in public life, including the judiciary.

149. Houthi militias, in violation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, continued to abduct women and girls and detain them in secret prisons, where they were subject to physical and psychological torture and blackmail. The militias continued to impose harsh restrictions on women in the areas under their control, hindering their free movement and depriving them of their most basic rights. They had forbidden them from traveling abroad or between cities without a male guardian and had begun to separate men and women in educational facilities and to prevent women from accessing quality education, working outside of the home or participating in political and social life. Those measures threatened social stability and the principles of tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

150. **Ms. Wagner** (Switzerland) said that the international community should redouble its efforts to establish and defend a robust international framework for women's rights. In that regard, it was essential to publicly condemn the violence and discrimination faced by the women working tirelessly to promote and protect human rights, democracy, the rule of law and development. The Third Committee, along with other United Nations bodies, played a vital role in defending international standards. Switzerland was also working to increase the profile and impact of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

151. Switzerland was part of a trans-regional group of States that had presented a resolution on forced marriage to the Human Rights Council in June 2022, recognising the practice as a form of gender-based violence. The women and peace and security agenda should be at the heart of conflict prevention and resolution. As an elected member of the Security Council, Switzerland would advocate for that agenda to be incorporated into every situation and subject that arose. Lastly, Switzerland supported the Gender Accreditation Programme, which was designed to advance gender equality and the rights of women and girls with respect to the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

152. The international community's response to current and emerging challenges must effectively mainstream gender. Participation, protection, inclusion and non-discrimination, were fundamental principles. Switzerland called upon members of the Third Committee to ensure that those issues were incorporated into its resolutions, and to welcome dialogue and a range of opinions.

153. Switzerland was working to embed gender within its thematic priorities. For example, in accordance with its opposition to the death penalty, it was supporting the Cornell Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide with an innovative project to highlight the gender-based discrimination and violence suffered by women who had received a death sentence. At the national level, it had recently reformed its criminal law to combat sexual violence by broadening the definition of rape.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.