

Mandate of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice

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Excellency,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 23/7.

In this connection, I would like to refer to Your Excellency's letter of 25 June 2015 transmitting your Excellency's Government's response to the Working Group's letter of 23 April 2015 in follow-up to its country visit conducted from 12 to 19 December 2013 (See A/HRC/30/27 for details of the communication).

The Working Group wishes to take the opportunity to express once again its appreciation for your Government's cooperation with this mandate. As part of a continued dialogue, the Working Group would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information it has received concerning the closure of the Zhongze Women's Legal Counseling and Service Center (the Center) - a leading women's legal aid center in Beijing. The Working Group learned that the Center closed its operation as of 1 February 2016 upon the receipt of an order from the Government. A notice on the Center's website reads: "Beijing Zhongze Women's Legal Counseling Service Center (formerly the Women's Legal Research and Services Centre of Peking University) ceases its operation as of 1 February 2016. Thanks to all for their attention and constant support for the Center."

The Center was set up in 1995 subsequent to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. It was previously known as the Women's Legal Research and Services Centre of Peking University. It has worked on a large number of cases including some very high profile cases relating to domestic violence, land and property rights, labour rights and family law. It also provided legal training, advocated policy changes and produced research reports on issues of women's rights.

The Working Group appreciates the information contained in Your Excellency's letter of 25 June 2015 "that the Government of China encourages and supports the active

efforts of NGOs, including women's organizations, to promote and protect human rights". The Working Group further welcomes the leadership role played by China in jointly hosting with UN Women a high-level "Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Commitment to Action" on 27 September 2015 in the context of the commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and in conjunction with the UN Summit on the post-2015 development framework. The Chinese President, along with some 80 world leaders, made commitments to ending discrimination against women by 2030. He reaffirmed gender equality as China's basic State policy. The Working Group also takes note of the white paper entitled "Gender Equality and Women's Development in China", which highlighted the importance of "effectively mobilizing social resources" as part of "China's national mechanism for promoting the status of women."

The Working Group is of the view that civil society organizations, such as this Centre, carry out important functions in promoting and protecting women's rights and should be allowed to operate freely. The Working Group has recommended in its country visit report that the Government "provide legal protection for all defenders of women's human rights and autonomous women's groups and coalitions in civil society to allow them to advance implementation of the law and advocate for policy changes affecting gender equality as part of the overall strengthening of the rule of law, democracy and human rights in China" (para. 108). The Working Group would therefore like to enquire from Your Excellency's Government as to the reasons for ordering the closure of the Center and request further information on this. The Group takes the opportunity to reiterate the importance for women's human rights defenders to be able to carry out their legitimate work in a safe and enabling environment without fear or acts of intimidation and harassment of any sort.

Your Excellency's Government's response will be made available in a report to be presented to the Human Rights Council for its consideration.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Eleonora Zielinska
Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against
women in law and in practice