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Israel

Delivered by Ms. Mariam Kabaha,
Commissioner of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission

Honorable President, distinguished Member States,

My name is Mariam Kabaha, and I am the Israeli Commissioner of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission.

As Commissioner, I attach great importance to the labor market. One's workplace is not only one's source of income, but a space for personal and professional fulfillment. It is my personal belief that the labor market is the ideal venue for people of different backgrounds to meet and connect and to overcome social barriers. A place where everyone can prove their capabilities and skills, beyond considerations of gender, age, origin, etc .

The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, was established to promote equality and eliminate discrimination in employment.

The Commission draws its authority from the 1988 Equal Employment Opportunities Law, which outlaws discrimination in employment on various grounds.

Throughout the years, the Israeli legislator has expanded the grounds upon which an employee can claim discrimination and be awarded compensation. Currently there are 16 such grounds – including gender, pregnancy, fertility treatments, age, opinion, nationality, religion, sexual orientation race, and color.

Thus, the Israeli legislature has been crystal clear: discrimination is a phenomenon that cannot be tolerated and must be eradicated completely from the Israeli labor market.

The Commission has the authority to file lawsuits on behalf of employees who have been discriminated against; to submit amicus briefs to the courts on relevant employment issues; and to sponsor public service campaigns to raise awareness against discrimination.

For example, the Commission recently filed a successful lawsuit against a local municipality for discriminatory employment practices against women. And in a case involving racial discrimination against an employee of Arab origin, the Commission filed an amicus brief on behalf of the employee, affirming that under Israeli law the burden of proof is on the employer to prove that dismissal is not due to racial discrimination.

Mr. President,

In addition to its more formal legal efforts in court, the Commission goes to great efforts to raise social awareness and encourage employers to embrace diversity in the workplace.

As part of these efforts, the Commission developed the "Diversity Index", which is operated jointly by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics and the Tel Aviv University. The Index is designed to measure the level of diversity in representation, as well as to give indications regarding wage gaps among various groups in the Israeli society, including: the Arab population, people of Ethiopian origin, women, the ultra-Orthodox population, and people above the age 45. The Index covers 20 major industries in the private sector. In 2017, academic and higher education institutions were added to the index.

The data obtained by this Index has pointed to interesting findings that have already prompted Government authorities to take notice and will hopefully shape future policies. For example, the 2017 Index data pointed to the fact that Arab academics are under-represented in the labor market, and experience greater wage inequalities in their fields, as compared to non-academic employees. Moreover, women and members of the Arab population are not equally represented in institutions of higher education, especially at the more senior levels.

The Diversity index has also enabled us to take action on the problem of gender pay gaps, which in Israel stands at 35%.

In light of these results, the Commission launched the – “Equal Pay: Equalizing Wages in Israel’s Workforce campaign.” –In this context, we developed a Gender wage gap calculator, an innovative tool, allowing the user to find out where and to what extent there are differences in wages. We encourage employers to use this calculator on a voluntary basis in order to identify and correct pay gaps in their organizations.

In this vein, I wish to address the questions posed by the Governments of France and Germany and note that in light of the importance of this information, the Commission intends to publish the Diversity Index annually. We believe that publicizing this information will raise awareness and facilitate the development of national plans to increase diversity in the workplace and the employment of excluded groups, and pave the way to a brighter future both economically and socially.

Other Commission public service campaigns include projects sponsored in conjunction with the Government Companies Authority to advance the principles of equal opportunity and diversity among government companies. And we plan to launch similar projects in 2018 in conjunction with other sectors, including academic institutions and private companies.

As part of its public campaign efforts, the Commission also invests resources to integrate populations that are under-represented in the labor market, as well as populations from the periphery in the labor market. In this context, forums have been established in the Arab, Ethiopian and orthodox communities, and an additional one will soon be established in the south of the country, designed to spread awareness about the right to equality and prohibitions against employment discrimination.

We have presented to you many accomplishments of the Commission. We are proud to say that we have already brought about real and meaningful change to Israeli society, but there is still a great deal of work to be done in the years ahead.

Thank you.