Launch Event on the priority theme: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

On the occasion of the launch of a “Practitioner’s Toolkit on Women’s Access to Justice.”

Thursday, 22 March 2018, 10:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m., Conference Room D United Nations Headquarters

Introduction
Under the priority theme: “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls,” the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 62) will launch a “Practitioner’s Toolkit on Women’s Access to Justice”, produced under the overall coordination of UN Women, and in collaboration with UNDP, OHCHR and UNODC.

Background
Access to justice for all is a critical litmus test of peaceful and inclusive societies and a sine qua non for substantive equality, human rights and sustainable development. Globally, women face barriers to obtaining justice in their capacities as claimants, victims, witnesses or offenders, often driven by institutional, policy and legislative failure to remove discrimination, gender bias, stereotyping, stigma, indifference, corruption and impunity. Women who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination as well as those affected by conflict and in its aftermath, are often at the back-end of justice service delivery.

The Practitioner’s Toolkit on Women’s Access to Justice demonstrates that challenging as they are, these problems are not insurmountable. It provides practical guidance on how they can be addressed across justice systems more broadly, as well as within the key context areas of: marriage, family and property rights; ending violence against women; and women in conflict with the law, with special reference to country level programming. It reaffirms the importance of justice for women through a range of examples of innovative interventions that are grounded on a human rights-based approach, and builds on three mutually reinforcing programming entry points: i) reforming formal and informal legal norms that discriminate against women to create an enabling environment; ii) reforming justice institutions to make them effective, accountable and gender-responsive; and iii) legally empowering women, including by providing women with the means of knowing their rights, reversing harmful customs, attitudes and behaviours and engaging with men and boys. This three-pronged approach provides both women as rights-holders and justice institutions as duty-bearers with the tools for transformative justice.

Designed primarily for staff of the United Nations system, the Toolkit presents a menu of options for responding to current deficits in women’s access to justice programming and the growing demand for technical assistance in this area. It consolidates and complements existing resources and aims at stimulating bolder gender responsive justice interventions for the full realization of women’s and girls’ rights.
Format, topics and proposed questions
The launch will be moderated by a high-level expert on women’s access to justice. It will start with short statements from each partner representative and the Foreign Commonwealth Office (8-10 minutes). These will be followed by an interactive dialogue with Member States, civil society organizations and other stakeholders on ways of addressing women’s multifaceted justice needs.

Questions for consideration:
• **The justice gap for women and girls.** What do women and girls need and want when they seek justice? How is women’s access to justice impeded by gender discriminatory legal frameworks and social norms, and gender bias in the delivery of justice for women?
• **Making the case.** What is the case for action and investment in access to justice for women and girls? What impact will increased access to justice have on violence against women, on women’s access to health, education and other essential services, and on women’s economic empowerment?
• **What works.** What strategies, tools and approaches will increase access to justice for women and girls? How can gender discriminatory laws, policies and budgets be addressed, and gender bias reduced in the formal and informal justice systems?
• **Call to action.** What commitments should national and local actors make to close the justice gap for women and girls? How can international and regional cooperation support access to justice for women and girls at national levels?