

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL
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**REMARKS ON 25TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ADOPTION OF THE CONVENTION
ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS
OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**
New York, 13 October 2004

Mr. President of the General Assembly

Her Excellency, the Governor-General of New Zealand

Madame Chairperson

Ladies and gentlemen

- Thank you. I am delighted to be with you for this special anniversary.
- From the birth of the United Nations, women have made judicious and skilful use of our Organization as a platform to voice their demands for equality and non-discrimination. The very preamble of the United Nations Charter proclaims the equal rights of men and women.
- From the signing of the Charter and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and through the subsequent instruments that codify human rights and fundamental freedoms, the United Nations has been a constant partner and ally of women in the work for equal rights.
- Among those instruments, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women stands out as a landmark, because it aims to secure these rights for women in practice.
- The General Assembly adopted the Convention in 1979 after many years of heroic efforts by women's rights advocates, within Governments and outside.
- To this day, the Convention remains the most solid global tool in the work for true gender equality in the home, the community and society; and for freedom from discrimination, whether perpetrated by the State or by any person, organization or enterprise.
- To date, 178 States have committed themselves to honouring and implementing the provisions of the Convention.
- The constitutions of many Member States now incorporate clauses providing for gender equality, and many countries have laws prohibiting discrimination against women in areas covered by the Convention.

- Increasingly, equality commissions, ombudspersons and other mechanisms shine a spotlight on the human rights situations of women.
- Policy and programme measures have been put in place to translate the provisions of the Convention into reality.
- And thanks to information and education campaigns, women are more and more aware of the rights the Convention exists to defend.
- We in the United Nations have supported Governments in post-conflict societies in the work to ratify and implement the Convention and other human rights instruments.
- And we have assisted Governments in the creation of national institutions charged with promoting and protecting the rights of women.
- Five years ago, another milestone was achieved in the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. In States which have ratified the Protocol, women whose rights have been violated are able, once they have exhausted national remedies, to seek redress from an international body -- the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.
- And in the year 2000, the Millennium Summit agreed on clear goals to reduce gender inequalities by 2015.
- Clearly, much has been achieved. But we all have a long way to go in achieving compliance with all the Convention's terms.
- Women remain significantly under-represented in public life.
- The scourge of violence afflicts uncounted numbers of women in their daily lives.
- Atrocious acts of violence continue to be committed against women in conflict situations.
- In many societies, the effects of migration flows and economic upheaval threaten to unravel the gains made by women.
- Sexual harassment remains all too common in the workplace.
- Even discriminatory laws remain on the books and are applied in many countries, in all parts of the world.
- I hope this anniversary will provide an incentive for greater public debate at the national level about all these issues, and act as a catalyst for new policy initiatives to increase compliance with the Convention.

- I hope it will inspire parliamentarians to redouble their efforts, and accelerate legislative action to conform with obligations under the Convention.
- I hope it will encourage civil society to support women from all walks of life in claiming their rights.
- And I hope it will give new impetus to the work to achieve universal ratification of the Convention.
- It is the duty of all of us -- individuals, Governments and the international community, men and women alike -- to be vigilant and articulate custodians of this precious instrument. I hope it is a duty which we all take seriously.

Thank you very much for your attention and I wish you a very happy celebration.