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Opening statement
by
Ms. Rachel Mayanja
Assistant Secretary-General
Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on
Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
at the
Thirty-sixth session of the
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Madam Chairperson
Distinguished experts of the Committee
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my honour and privilege to address the thirty-sixth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and to welcome you all once again to the United Nations Headquarters.

Madame Chairperson
Distinguished Members of the Committee

Let me start by extending my heartfelt congratulations to those members of the Committee who have been re-elected at the 14th meeting of States parties to the Convention, on 23 June, to serve a further four-year term, namely: Ms. Meriem Belmihoub-Zerdani, Ms. Dorcas Coker-Appiah, Mr. Cornelis Flinterman, Ms. Naela Gabr, Ms. Pramila Patten, Ms. Fumiko Saiga and Dubravka Simonovic. Your wide-ranging expertise and experience will be a great asset and benefit to the Committee, especially also at a time when it is embarking on new working methods in parallel chambers. Your steadfast contribution to the Committee's work will strengthen progress in the Convention's implementation at the national level and broaden the impact of its provisions at the international level.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank most sincerely the Chairperson, Ms. Rosario Manalo, whose term on the Committee will end on 31 December 2006, especially for her leadership during the last two years as Chairperson, as well as over the eight years of membership on the Committee. I also extend my warmest appreciation to other experts whose terms on the Committee will end, namely Huguette Bokpe-Gnacadjia, Kristina Morvai, Salma Khan and Victoria Popescu. Your contributions to the Committee will be felt for years to come. I would like to put on record my personal gratitude to these members for their commitment to the protection and promotion of women's human rights, and I am certain that they will continue to

support and advocate for the practical realization of the Convention's principle of the equality of women and men. I hope that our paths will cross again, and I wish them well in their future endeavours.

Madam Chairperson

While only a little over two months have passed since the thirty-fifth session of the Committee ended, I have the honour to highlight important developments and events that have taken place since.

The newly established Human Rights Council held its first session from 19 to 30 June 2006. This event, which was opened by the Secretary-General, marked a new beginning for United Nations efforts to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide. The meeting brought together high level representatives from over 100 countries. The Human Rights Council addressed a range of issues, including how to set up the modalities of the universal periodic review mechanism, which would periodically review the human rights situation in all countries. The Council established an open-ended intergovernmental working group to develop modalities of the universal periodic review mechanism. It decided to extend for one year the mandates and the mandate holders of all the Commission's special procedures, of the Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, as well as the so-called 1503 procedure. At the same time, it established an inter-governmental working group to formulate concrete recommendations on the issue of reviewing and, where necessary, improving and rationalizing all mandates, mechanisms, functions and responsibilities which the Council inherited from the former Commission on Human Rights.

The Council adopted the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and recommended their adoption by the General Assembly. The Council held its first special session, on the situation of human rights in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories on 5 July. The Council also agreed that its next session will take place from 18 September to 6 October, when it will take up various reports, and also consider progress made inter-sessionally by its working groups on the universal periodic review and the review of mandates, mechanisms, functions and responsibilities.

I addressed the Human Rights Council on 19 June and stressed in my statement the Council's historic opportunity and responsibility to ensure that promotion of gender equality was indeed an integral part of its work. I called on the Council to address gender-based discrimination and disadvantages women face in order to achieve full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, and address situations of gross and systematic violations of women's human rights. The Council also has the opportunity to preserve the best features of the Commission on Human Rights, including the use of independent rapporteurs and enabling non-governmental organizations to play their essential role in the Organization's human rights work.

Much effort has been devoted over a number of years to strengthen the links between the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women so that these close linkages might be reflected in policy and practice. I called on the Council to establish early interaction with the Commission on the Status of Women so that this important link may be strengthened and expanded for the benefit of women. In this regard, I am happy to note that gender equality was a prominent topic during the time I attended the Council which I believe bodes well for a very positive and forward-looking interaction between these two intergovernmental bodies.

Distinguished experts,

I also attended the 5th Inter Committee meeting and the 18th Meeting of Chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies from 19 to 23 June 2006. Your Chairperson will brief the Committee in detail on these two meetings which tackled in particular the question of the reform of human rights treaty bodies and the proposal for a unified standing treaty body, harmonized reporting guidelines, reservations to the treaties, and different aspects of treaty bodies' working methods.

Also in Geneva, I participated in the 2006 session of the Economic and Social Council where I spoke in a round table during the high-level segment of ECOSOC on "Innovation at work: national strategies to achieve gender equality in employment." The main objective of this roundtable was to engage in a dialogue on innovative national strategies for achieving gender equality in the labour market, and to encourage policy makers and planners at the national, regional and international levels to increase advocacy, raise awareness, build capacity and promote the involvement of employers' organizations, trade unions, private sectors and civil society in support of gender equality.

Women are key contributors to the economy through both remunerated and unremunerated work at home, in the community and at the workplace. Promotion of productive employment and decent work for women requires concerted action among various government ministries. It needs effective coordination between central and local institutions as well as public and private agencies, and partnerships with representatives of civil society, such as parliamentarians, human rights advocates, women's and youth organizations and the private sector. Your Committee takes a consistent interest in these questions and regularly raises issues covered by article 11, as well as 13 with reporting States.

The Economic and Social Council discussed the gender mainstreaming strategy where I had opportunity to underline that a decade of action since Beijing has produced significant results in gender mainstreaming policies, methodologies, tools and activities within the United Nations system, but the systematic practical application of gender mainstreaming by United Nations entities remains a challenge. Insufficient accountability, low capacity for gender mainstreaming, lack of coherence in planning, programming, measuring of progress; monitoring and reporting, particularly at the

national level, impede successful gender mainstreaming, and system-wide resources for gender mainstreaming are woefully insufficient. The aim is now to bring coherence and coordination into the work of the United Nations system and to develop a system-wide action plan for gender mainstreaming.

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished experts,

Since your last meeting, deliberations continued about United Nations reform in different fora and with the participation of a range of actors, who have contributed new, or refined previously presented ideas and suggestions, in particular about the so-called gender architecture. I had the pleasure to brief you at your last session and I understand that your Committee will explore related aspects further at this session. I am at your disposal to contribute in any way you see fit.

I wish you success in your deliberations during the next three weeks and pledge the full support of my Office in facilitating your tasks.

Thank you.
