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Statement
by
Ms. Rachel Mayanja
Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
at the
Thirty-eighth Session of the
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished experts of the Committee
Representatives of the United Nations System and agencies and colleagues

It is my honour and privilege to open the thirty-eighth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and to welcome you all to the United Nations Headquarters. I am delighted to report to you some highlights of the period between the closing of the thirty-seventh session and the opening of this session.

This session of the Committee is taking place just after two major events: namely the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women which took place from 26 February to 9 March 2007 and an informal thematic debate of the General Assembly on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women on 6 to 8 March 2007.

The Commission had very full agenda. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work, it considered “The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child” as its priority theme. The Commission had the benefit of the statement made by the Chairperson of the Committee who was one of three keynote speakers to launch the general debate on the priority theme. She also participated in a panel discussion on violence against girls. The Commission was addressed by the President of the Human Rights Council and held an exchange of views with him.

The Commission adopted agreed conclusions on its priority theme, in which it called on Governments to consider ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, limit the extent of their reservations under the Convention and ensure that no reservation is incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention. The Commission encouraged the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the other human rights treaty bodies to invite States’ parties to ensure that their reports explicitly address the situation of the girl child.

The Commission adopted four resolutions, including, for the first time, a resolution on ending female genital mutilation and on forced marriage of the girl child.

The Commission made reference to the Convention, its Optional Protocol and the work of this Committee

The theme of “The elimination of all forms of violence against women: follow up to the Secretary-General’s in-depth study at national and international levels” was chosen by the Commission as an emerging issue. The Commission also held an interactive expert panel discussion in which Ms. Shanthi Dairiam participated. The panel discussion provided the Commission with an opportunity to highlight emerging issues and trends that the international community faces in addressing violence against women and to identify new approaches for addressing such challenges.

The theme of ending impunity for violence against women and girls was selected by the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality for this year’s commemoration of International Women’s Day on 8 March. A very successful high-level event focusing on effective partnerships with men’s anti-violence organizations, the Day underscored the obligations of States to protect women and girls from violence, to hold perpetrators accountable and to provide justice and remedies to victims.

The critical importance of the issues of elimination of discrimination against women, of full implementation of the Convention and of the work of this Committee were emphasized by Member States during the informal thematic debate of the General Assembly on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women convened by the President of the General Assembly, Her Excellency Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa. The debate provided an opportunity to share views on actions, best practices and lessons learned in the promotion of gender equality; to discuss how to bridge the gap between policy and practice; and to renew political commitments towards full implementation of existing agreements.

Madam Chairperson, distinguished experts,

I would like to take this opportunity to inform members on several of my activities as Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women.

Immediately following the thirty-seventh session of this Committee, I participated in the DPKO Strategy Workshop with Women’s Constituencies from Troop and Police Contributing Countries held in early February, in Pretoria, South Africa. This workshop was hosted by the Government of South Africa and jointly organized by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), with the support of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as a follow-up to the DPKO Policy Dialogue held in March 2006 with Troop and Police Contributing Countries.

The workshop concluded that there was a need for a strengthened global mandate for gender-responsive peacekeeping. The preparation of national action plans for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) should be a priority and that national dialogue on gender and peacekeeping, involving women’s organizations and peacekeeping training and research centres should be initiated under the guidance of

National Women's Mechanisms. Specific steps needed to be taken to increase the recruitment and deployment of women to peacekeeping, to enhance pre-deployment preparation and training for all peacekeepers and to improve the working environment for women in peacekeeping operations.

From 20 to 22 February 2007, I chaired the sixth session of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality which brought together senior gender focal points from all United Nations entities. The Network commenced discussions on the implementation of the system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming, which had been endorsed by the United Nations Chief Executive Board for Coordination in December 2006, and embarked on the development of an action plan to implement the policy and strategy. The Network also discussed how to accelerate the implementation of the Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), especially at the country level, in view of the Security Council Open Debate that took place in October 2006. In discussing issues related to gender balance in the United Nations system, the Network noted that special measures, such as those mandated in November 2006, were fully within the human rights framework and Article 4, paragraph 1 (on temporary special measures) of the CEDAW Convention and should be supported. The Network also discussed more robust systems for tracking progress towards gender equality.

Last week, I attended, at the invitation of the Government of Croatia, a seminar on men's active participation in preventing domestic violence. The seminar, which was hosted by the Government of Croatia, forms part of a series of seminars organized within the framework of the Council of Europe's Campaign to combat violence against women, including domestic violence. May I express my special appreciation to you, Mme. Chairperson, in your capacity as Vice-Chairperson of the Council of Europe Task Force on Domestic Violence, for this excellent event and useful exchange of experiences and good practices. Through this collaboration, a partnership has been launched between the Council of Europe and the United Nations in the campaign to combat violence against women.

Madam Chairperson, distinguished experts,

I am pleased to report that on 16 April 2007, the Secretary-General presented to the General Assembly his report containing comments on the recommendations put forward by the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. The Secretary-General agreed with the Panel's proposal to consolidate and strengthen several current women's units into one dynamic United Nations entity focused on gender equality and women's empowerment, which should mobilize change at the global level and inspire enhanced results at the country level. However, he stressed that gender equality would remain the responsibility of all United Nations entities.

The Secretary-General awaits the outcome of the substantive discussions and consultations by Member States on the new gender architecture. The Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, will oversee the system-wide coherence agenda and

represent the United Nations in intergovernmental consultations on the Panel's recommendations.

In closing, I welcome to New York our four colleagues from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) who will be attending the thirty-eighth session as part of the on-going preparations for the transfer to the OHCHR the responsibility for the servicing of this Committee. I wish to assure the experts of the commitment by both the High Commissioner for Human Rights and myself to a smooth transition.

Madam Chairperson,

It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Ms. Angela King, my predecessor, on 5 February 2007. Angela was a tireless defender of the rights of women world-wide and her legacy will remain an inspiration to all of us.

Madam Chairperson,

Many issues will be vying for your attention and action in the three weeks to come. I believe that in all these discussions, the paramount guiding principle must be the benefit for women in their daily lives, in their families, workplaces, communities and in public life.

May I take this opportunity to wish you every success in your deliberations and pledge the full support of my Office and the Division for the Advancement of Women in facilitating your task in every way possible. Ms. Hannan, the Director of the Division, and I look forward to meeting with you all again, formally and informally, and we would be happy to discuss any proposals you may have regarding your work.

Thank you.
